



**A unique & delicious
Holiday Gift!**



Broadway Market
950 Broadway, Denver
720.880.4501

TonysMarket.com

Plenty
of free
parking.

At Le Grand Bistro, belly up to the bar for classic French fare

More Photos: [Belly Up to the Bar at Le Grand Bistro](#)

By Laura Shunk

published: November 24, 2011

AT ZINK
KITCHEN + BAR
WE OFFER
EVERY TUESDAY
JAZZ BAND FROM 5PM TO 8 PM
FIRST TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH
ZINK HOSTS A WINE TASTING &
JAZZ AT \$15 PER PERSON

Mark Manger



Beauty and the bistro: Duck confit at Le Grand. See more photos: [Belly Up to the Bar at Le Grand Bistro](#)

Where:

1512 Curtis Street; 303-534-1155
www.legranddenver.com

Hours: 7 a.m.-10 p.m. Monday
through Thursday, 7 a.m.-11 p.m.
Friday, 9 a.m.-11 p.m. Saturday, 9
a.m.-9 p.m. Sunday

Details:

Le Grand Bistro & Oyster Bar

Arugula salad \$9

Escargots \$9

L'ail saucisse \$18

Canard de deux manières \$25

Moules marinières avec des frites
\$16

Subject(s):

[Le Grand Bistro and Oyster Bar](#), [Robert](#)

So I'll be in town for the weekend," Jeff told me. "Pick a restaurant."

It should have been a simple task — there are dozens of joints in this town that would work well for a collegial catch-up — but Jeff is one of my oldest friends. And though food wasn't what initially brought us together, digging into offal, stuffing ourselves with pork and analyzing ice cream flavors as we bounce from restaurant to restaurant — often several in a night — have certainly strengthened our bond. The guy's got a palate. And I didn't want to waste one of his meals in this city.

After eliminating a few places he'd already been to, we'd settled on **Le Grand Bistro and Oyster Bar** — although I qualified the choice with a disclaimer, since I hadn't yet been to Robert Thompson's new restaurant.

As soon as we stepped over the threshold, though, I had the feeling we'd made the right choice. While Le Grand had only been open since late August, it was already buzzing with the energy of a good restaurant. Members of this town's Twitterati were sitting at the bar, pausing to exchange pleasantries with would-be diners who'd just walked in, then turning back to their conversations and dinners. Taking a cue from this crew, we turned left past the entrance and grabbed our own high seats at the counter, where a quiet but good-natured bartender presented us with menus.

[Thompson](#)

We started with aperitifs — including a crisp, floral Rue Rosé made with sparkling rosé, St. Germain and dry vermouth — and a basket of soft white bread served with an addictive, lemon-tinged butter. We'd gone through a loaf when our order of escargots showed up. The supple snails were served in their shells, bathed in butter and parsley (they could have used more garlic) and served with slices of toast.

Next, we cracked a bottle of Alsatian Riesling off the well-edited, mostly French wine list — because there may be no better pairing on the planet than Alsatian Riesling and pork sausage. We were a glass in when the bartender delivered our plate of l'ail saucisse. The sausage was fat, juicy, slightly sweet, and exploding with the anise-like flavor of fennel; the pig was perfectly complemented by earthy Beluga lentils, soft pearl onions and buttery roasted carrots.

While we feasted under the glowing lights, occasionally making satisfied sounds in praise of the food, our conversation seemed a little wittier, our insights a little deeper and our friendship a lot stronger. In short, our night at Le Grand was simply grand.

More Photos: [Belly Up to the Bar at Le Grand Bistro](#)

Thompson opened Le Grand a month after Argyll ended its two-year run in Cherry Creek with plans to open in the Baker neighborhood; in a month or two, he'll also open Punch Bowl Social, a massive bowling alley outfitted with a '60s diner on South Broadway. But his first major effort in town was the long-closed but still revered Brasserie Rouge, and he clearly hasn't lost his love of French restaurants. Although Argyll's setting was more suited to a bistro than this location — according to lore, the first bistros in Paris were shoebox-sized spots located in basements — the fare there was pub food. Le Grand's menu comprises classic French fare, with chef Sergio Romero executing the list, just as he did at Argyll. And despite being on ground level, the setup does a good job of capturing the flavor of a bistro, capitalizing on the white mosaic floors and dark woods of the original Baur's, illuminated by glowing 1920s-era chandeliers. Other decor touches are more subtle, but notable for their good taste: Les Halles scrawled in cursive above a private dining room, a line of Perrier bottles along one wall that lend a punch of glittering green contrast without being ostentatious. Good space partitioning and cleverly draped red velvet curtains lend an air of intimacy to most tables.

As I learned that first night with Jeff, though, the bar is the best place to sit if you really want to recreate the casual atmosphere of a bistro, where you can concentrate on your meal rather than your surroundings. The bar — an old, massive, L-shaped piece — serves as Le Grand's centerpiece, anchoring and lending energy to the rest of the room, but insulating diners from distraction, too. When you're sitting at the bar, it's as if the rest of the space doesn't exist. A good bottle of wine and the anticipation of good food arriving soon is all you need to get lost in the moment.

When I returned to Le Grand, I sat at the bar with a friend and shared oysters, Muscadet white wine and confidences. While talking about everything from dating to the meaning of life, we used tiny forks to pry cold, briny Malpeques, Eagle Rocks and Fire Rivers from their shells, comparing one sweet, fleshy body to another before washing them all down with the bracing acidity of the wine, which worked just as well as a squeeze of lemon juice to complement the oysters. When I went back to meet another friend, we ordered charcuterie — something Romero had done very well at Argyll and does just as well here — and clinked glasses of Duvel beer over salty slices of house-cured duck prosciutto and rich, silky foie gras mousse.

I'm not as enamored of the dining room. When I arranged to meet friends for dinner at Le Grand one night, they arrived first and nabbed a back-corner booth before I could insist on anything else. Sitting there, sipping a glass of red wine from the Côtes du Rhône, I couldn't help but steal a jealous glance at the couples and groups cozied up to the bar. Despite the warm and unobtrusive service, the dining room just wasn't as comfortable.

And it didn't help that my mussels made me downright uncomfortable. Our server had proclaimed that mussels are a staple of French bistros, and since it was a cold night, the prospect of a big, garlicky bowl full of shellfish paired with a pile of fries was an enticing proposition — despite my earlier red wine order. The fries were fine: skinny, crispy, well-salted and perfect for dipping into the hot broth pungent with garlic and white wine. But the mussels in that broth? They'd been cleaned poorly, and at least a quarter of them were past their prime. Even worse, some were undercooked, and so disgustingly gooey.

Fortunately, my friends had made much better decisions. The burger — a massive medium-rare patty stacked simply with tomato, purple onion and lettuce on a soft potato bun — could qualify as one of the best in town. The crepe that day was filled with a smart, satisfying combination of sharp Gruyère, chicken and smoky house-cured bacon, smothered in a blanket of béchamel. My favorite dish of the dinner, though, was the duck: A confit leg, crispy on the outside and braised tender within, came alongside a seared, sliced breast, lined with fat and simply seasoned with salt and pepper. The bed of cabbage, carrots, apples and potatoes lifted the flavor of the duck, as did my Rhône red. To mitigate the heft of our meals, we split a peppery arugula salad, dotted with more of that bacon and torn white bread, laced with the bite of a mustard vinaigrette and topped with a fried egg.

We finished with profiteroles on swipes of salted caramel ganache and blackberry champagne sauce. The profiteroles were as hard and crisp as crackers — I would have preferred them a little lighter — but I could have eaten a vat of the housemade walnut-praline ice cream that came alongside.

Still, I couldn't help thinking back to the dessert I'd ordered my first night at Le Grand. We'd gone for the foie gras crème brûlée, a sugar-crusted vanilla custard infused with fatty duck liver. The offal-laced dessert really tasted no different than a regular crème brûlée (it might have been a little thicker and richer, although that could have been the power of suggestion) — but it was a very good one, with a crispy, golden top and sweet, creamy body. After we'd finished scraping the sides of the dish, Jeff had raised his after-dinner bourbon and clinked my after-dinner Fernet.

"Good choice," he'd said.

More Photos: [Belly Up to the Bar at Le Grand Bistro](#)