BRANDON TARTIKOFF'S LAST WORDS · THE BEST NEW RESTAURANTS OF 1997

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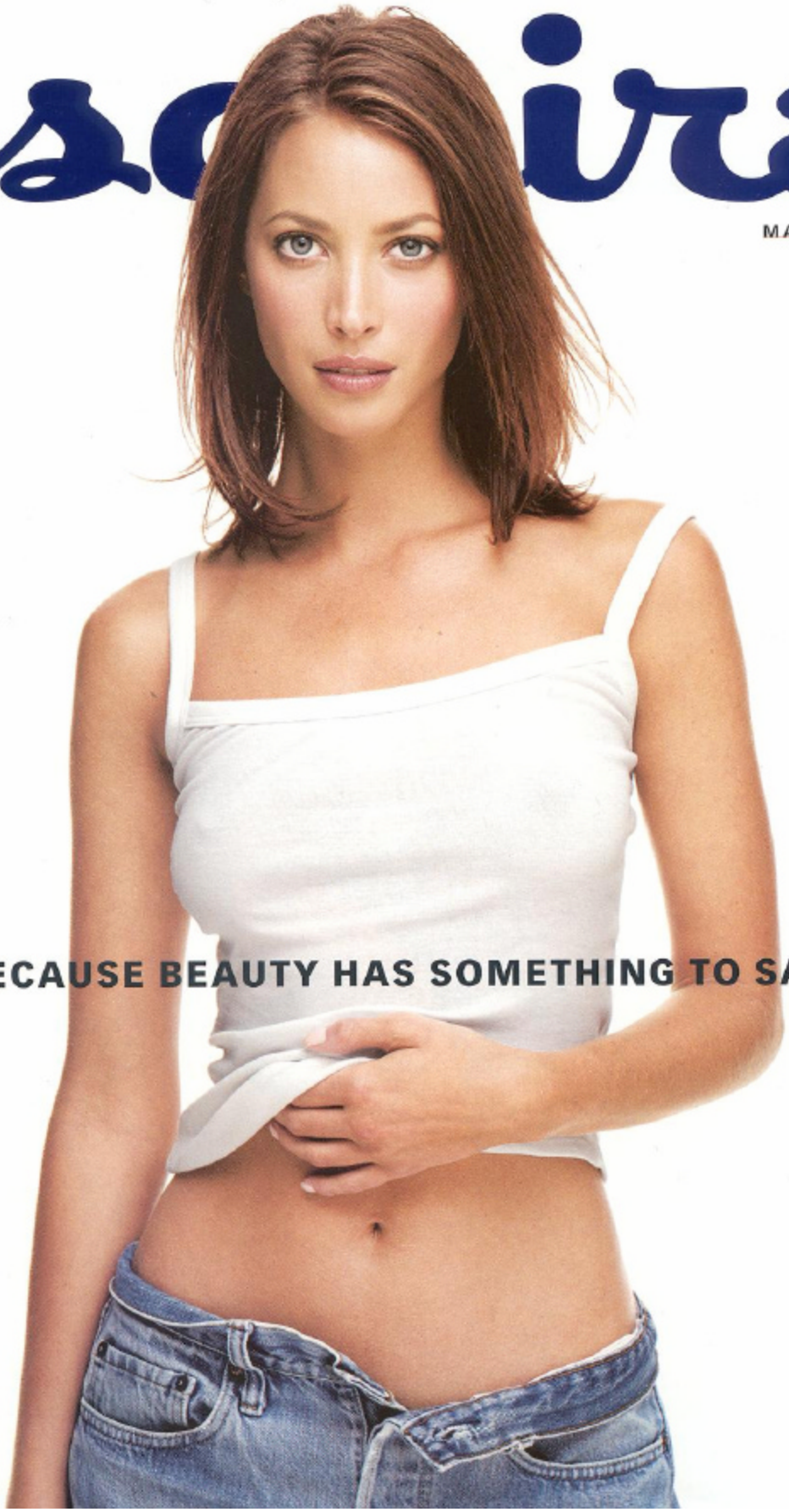
MAN AT HIS BEST



BECAUSE BEAUTY HAS SOMETHING TO SAY

BEST REASON TO SELL SOME STOCKS

VERY OLD SINGLE-MALT SCOTCHES, such as Bowmore 40 Year Old, of which only 294 bottles were made (60 came to the U. S. A. this fall) and which go for $7,000 a bottle. If you gotta go down-market, Bowmore also makes a fine 30 Year Old for a mere $210—and there's a lot more to go around.

BEST NEW ITALIAN IMPORT

PROSCIUTTO DI SAN DANIELE. Rich and buttery—even finer than the vaunted Prosciutto di Parma. Made in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region by just twenty-seven producers, it's about $20 a pound and worth every penny. Look for "SD" stamped on the ham.

BEST THING TO DRINK WITH FUSION CUISINE

ALSATIAN PINOT BLANC. The perfect white wine, with a nice balance of fruit, minerals, and acid, it shines with dishes in which sweet and hot flavors mingle. Look for Hugel, Trimbach, and Gustave Lorentz in the most recent vintages.

A hostess beckons you into the vast and vibrant Mistral.

MINH + WASS

BOSTON'S BIGGEST BLAST

MISTRAL

223 Columbus Avenue, Boston; 617 867 9300

WALK THROUGH THE DOORS AT MISTRAL and—bang!—you know you're at the epicenter of a boom. Mistral, on the landmark premises of the first bicycle factory in America, is so big and so vibrant that it sums up how far Beantown dining has come in the past couple of years. Though it's named for the warm wind that sweeps through the South of France, Mistral, with its sixteen-foot ceilings, arched windows, stately pillars, and wrought-iron chandeliers, looks like nothing I've ever seen in Provence.

A lie-about bistro up front with a simple menu of sandwiches and pizzas opens into a laid-back dining area where you can appreciate the full force of chef Jamie Mammano's cuisine. He gives Mediterranean dishes canny twists—Andalusian gazpacho gets a dollop of cucumber granita, pepper-crusted tuna chills out with a summer-melon salad, roasted breast of duck jams with grilled apricots, and peach melba is zinged with ginger ice cream.

The best restaurants in Boston have always been rather small and cozy. Since Mistral opened its doors this summer, that tradition has gone with the wind.

Price: $40.

GET PAST THE GUMBO, FOR GOD'S SAKE

DOMINIQUE'S

1001 Rue Toulouse, New Orleans; 504 522 8800

I SUPPOSE THE LOCALS WILL NEVER tire of another bowl of gumbo or another platter of oysters Rockefeller, but you can get your fill of them in New Orleans, which one wag called a town with five hundred restaurants and five recipes. But now and then, a fresh culinary breeze blows through the city. Shakes things up a bit.

That's what Dominique Macquet has done in the French Quarter. Macquet made his reputation at the tiny Bistro at Maison de Ville, where last year we picked him as a chef to keep your eye on. Someone did: The owners of the renovated Maison Dupuy asked him to come aboard and make people really talk about the place. Gave him a first-class, modern dining room. Even put his name on the awning. Macquet accepted, and Macquet delivered.

Raised on Mauritius with cumin and cardamom flowing through his veins, and steeled behind the stoves of Michelin-starred French kitchens, Macquet has a range few in the Crescent City can match. The French Quarter has never reckoned with the likes of roasted-eggplant-and-coconut-milk soup with a lemongrass infusion, sweetbreads on a brochette of sugarcane on truffled mashed potatoes, or grilled pork chops with Creole mustard and a root-vegetable flan. The smart chefs in town have taken notice. The rest still make a good gumbo.

Price: $35; *five-course tasting menu,* $45.