

A Treasure Hunt for Quiet Spots to Dine and Talk

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Good news, restaurant patrons: you do not have to resort to texting to have a conversation with your dining companions. With a bit of research and planning, you can find a table where you will not be assaulted by loud music and shouting diners.

Some restaurants have bucked the trend toward loud noise. Spice Finch, a modern Middle Eastern restaurant, at the Warwick Hotel on 17th Street near Locust, has a quieter back room. When we were seated under a speaker, restaurant manager Jen Enright thoughtfully turned it off for us. Still, it's best to dine early because it will get loud later in the evening if a large party is seated nearby.

Estia, a Greek seafood restaurant at Broad and Locust, is quieter than most for both lunch and dinner, with a cheerful ambience, large windows, lots of space, and just-right background music. At Seafood Unlimited (270 S. 20th), owners David and Judy Einhorn have installed special sound-absorbing ceilings.

An elegant restaurant with a Fifties-retro ambience is Prime Rib, also at the Warwick. Drapes, carpeting, and

tablecloths absorb sound; tables are spaced at a comfortable distance from each other, and loud music is absent. A piano player performs American songbook favorites starting at 6 p.m. and is not offended when people continue their conversations. If you are not a meat-eater, other options are available for you to enjoy.

My favorite French restaurant in Philadelphia is Bistrot La Minette (6th and Bainbridge). Offering excellent food and service and a real Paris bistro ambience, the restaurant never plays loud music, allowing for a consistently delightful dining experience. There is a back room available for large parties. Zinc, a small French restaurant (246 S. 11th), also has very good food and usually plays background music like Frank Sinatra. The place is quietest on weeknights but a large party in such a small place will ramp up the decibel level.

In general, traditional Asian restaurants like Shiroi Hana (222 S. 15th) and Square on Square (1905 Chestnut) do not blast loud music, and are calm, quiet places to dine. Although Modern Asian restaurants have gone trendy, Suga (1720 Sansom),

offers semi-private dining rooms which tend to be quieter.

Some tips for getting the quietest table in noisy restaurants: Request a table near a window and dine early. These tricks have worked well for me at Melograno (2012 Sansom); Caffe Casta Diva (227 S. 20th); Audrey Claire (20th and Spruce); 20 Manning Grille (261 S. 20th); Gran Caffe L'Acquila (1716 Chestnut); Marathon on the Square (19th and Spruce); Farmicia (15 S. 3rd); Charlie Was a Sinner (131 S. 13th); and the bar at Zama (128 S. 19th). At minimum, you will get noise only from one side, and in nice weather when the windows are open, the noise is dissipated. It is even possible to dine in semi-quiet at Parc near an open window.

Speaking of lunchtime, XIX at the Bellevue (Broad and Walnut); Chops, at the Comcast Center; and the Garden Restaurant at the Barnes are delightfully quiet, spacious, and bright.

Now that you know some tricks to finding a quiet place to talk and dine, only one thing remains to do: have something interesting to talk about!

City Lit

Philadelphia City Institute Library Annual Book Sale To Be Held in May

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Friends of Philadelphia City Institute Library on Rittenhouse Square, 1905 Locust Street, will hold their annual book sale to raise funds for the library over two days: Friday, May 17, from 2 to 4 p.m. and Saturday, May 18, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Prior to the sale, you are invited to donate used books, DVDs, and CDs on these specific collection days: All Fridays in March; Saturday, March 30; Friday, April 5 and 12; Saturday, April 13 and 27; and Friday, May 3 and 10. Hours of collection each day are 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Books must be in excellent condition; DVDs and CDs must not be scratched. Please do not bring the following types of books because they do not sell: textbooks; medical, computer science and information technology; finance; travel guidebooks; outdated topics; foreign language; worn, tattered, or discolored books, or books with writing on them. Please separate books into bags marked Fiction and Non-Fiction. Thank you from the Friends of PCI!

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