

## CRITICS

RESTAURANTS **GEISHA**

# Adoring Geisha

Geisha may not offer the most Zen-like space in town. But chef Michael Vernon's menu will definitely leave you blissed out. **BY HAL RUBENSTEIN**

I'M CRAZY ABOUT **Geisha's** FOOD.

Smart, spare, and oh-so-pretty, studded with soothing surprises, chef Michael Vernon's menu is a streamlined roster of near and total knockouts. It not only celebrates his enviable, previously unheralded skills, but also salutes his mentor, Eric Ripert, perhaps the city's most reliably satisfying chef, by offering an opportunity to sit and savor New American, Asian fusion, Pan-Global, or whatever the hell kind of cooking we're calling it this week, at its complex but least complicated best.

There's just one catch: You have to somehow get your ass in a seat.

And the way getting a table works most nights at Geisha, you'd have it a lot easier on *Fear Factor*, locked in chains underwater in a Lucite box. I don't know. Maybe if I were younger, single, and less hungry in several ways, I wouldn't mind the bar crush

**SQUEEZE BOX:** Geisha's dining room may be cramped, but the food is excellent.

that stabs like a stiletto on an instep as soon as you walk in. I would find it amusing that I can't find the hostess (oh, she's there, pretty enough to be hovered around by a pack of dry-clean-jeaned, Fendi-monogram-loafed satyrs). The impasse on the stairs wouldn't aggravate. The narrow walls wouldn't agitate.

Most notably, I'd think nothing of the fact that Geisha doesn't take reservations after 6:30, a practice that works in coffee shops but is as annoying as a Dennis Miller rant when adopted by a house with \$30 entrées. The managers, who own the Serafinas and are used to orchestrating Tod's-toting tumult, quickly spot friends and regulars. But is everyone else so eager to be here that they find jockeying on this D train to nowhere worth the bother?

Oh, they sure do. In fact, no one seems to mind having to dodge paws and elbows and slug sake at the same time. Alumni of Au Bar and Gertrude's,