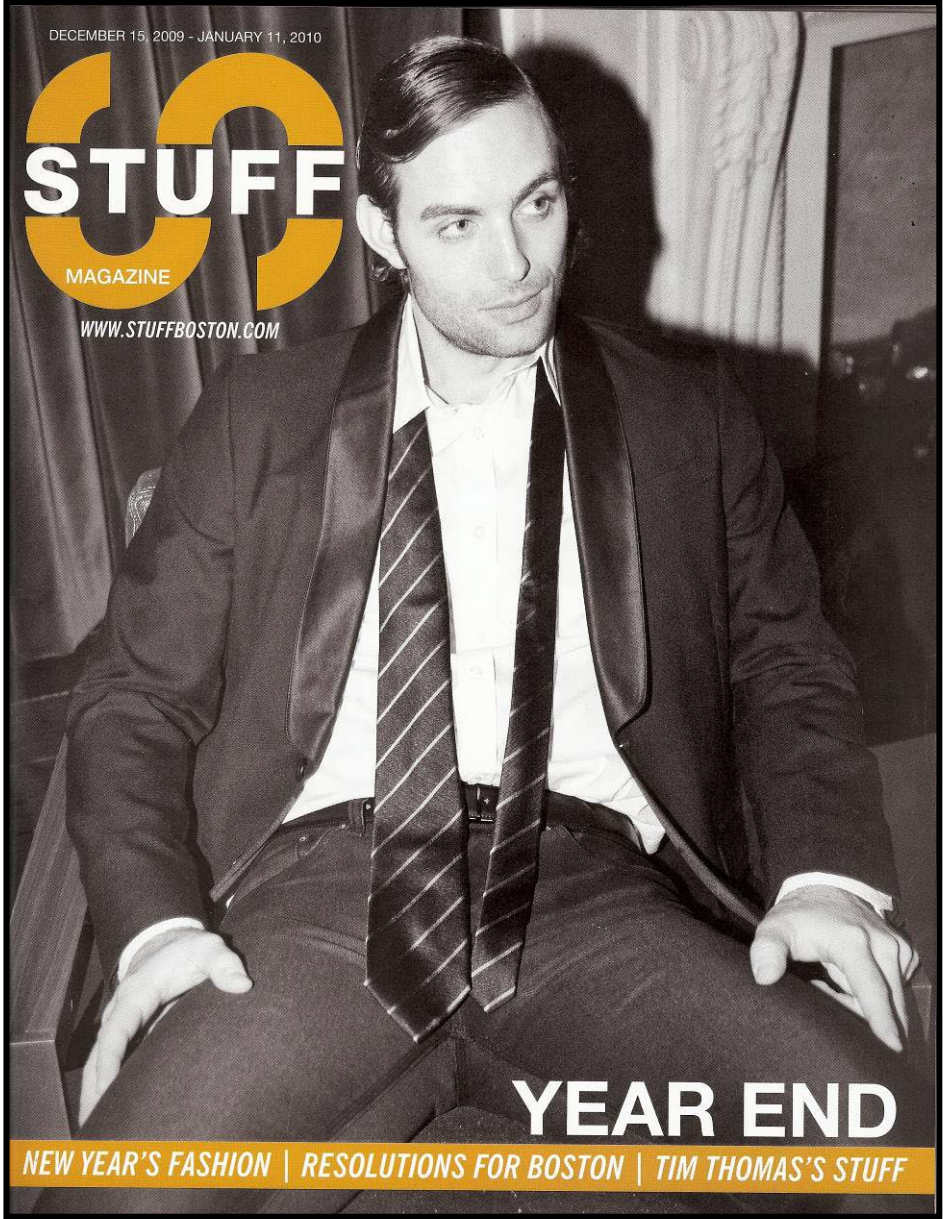


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VEAL SCALLOPINI AT METROPOLIS CAFE

Amidst the slew of exciting restaurant openings over the last few months, it's been tempting to follow every bright new light in Boston. As diners, we're thrilled by the chase, the possibility of finding something ravishing. Sometimes the hot new fling turns out to be sensational, but more often we're let down — another pricey, disappointing meal makes our trip home a sort of walk of shame. Smart diners know to cultivate an Old Reliable, a restaurant they trust to deliver the goods because it's been keeping its promises for years. (Put another way: it's easy to fill your closet with H&M, but you really should have a Brooks Brothers piece or two in there.) This is how I view **Metropolis Cafe** (584 Tremont Street, Boston, 617.247.2931), a romantic South End bistro that has outlasted its competition by treating its customers right for nearly 15 years.

When it opened, Metropolis was the pioneering member of The Aquitaine Group, which now consists of four unique, successful South End restaurants and two suburban outposts. While nearby venues have changed hands and concepts five and six times, Metropolis has barely modified its menu, which rotates seasonally but varies little from year to year. Nor has the space changed a hair: it's still intimate, best suited to groups of two or four, with a handful of counter seats for walk-ins. In this claret-toned, flatteringly lit, closely packed room, every other party seems to be on a date. In these cozy environs, I know I'll find hearty, straightforward French and Mediterranean dishes at very appealing prices: apps under \$10, entrees under \$20.

One such offering is the free-range veal scallopini (\$19.95). Northern Italian in provenance, it centers on a few thin-pounded cutlets gently sautéed and served with a sauce of lemon, brown butter, and capers, the veal darker, more flavorful, and chewier than its less humanely raised cousins. As important to me is its side dish, a brick of thinly layered potato, meltingly tender leeks, cauliflower, and creamy Asiago: effectively the most gorgeous, delicate, and delicious scalloped potatoes in town. It's a tandem I look forward to every year's end, like autumnal foliage and Frog Pond ice skating — as familiar and luxurious as a beloved old cashmere sweater. The new "it" place we tried the other night may not survive to next December, but I'm certain Metropolis will, and that I'll be returning as I do every season to reacquire myself with its perennial comforts.

— MC Slim JB



PHOTO BY JOEL VEAK

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