

TRAVEL

In Montreal, Tastes (and Sips) of Haiti

Bites

By GABRIELLA GERSHENSON APRIL 7, 2017



An alluring drink at Agrikol. Alexi Hobbs

Behind the bar at Agrikol, a bartender pressed sugar cane to make frothy juice for a ti-punch, a French Caribbean staple of rum, sugar and lime juice. The drink — served, D.I.Y.-style, with a quarter, half or whole bottle of Barbancourt rum — is vegetal, sweet and as strong or as weak as you want it.

As you might guess, at Agrikol, named for a [type of rum](#) made from, yes, cane juice, the drinks are as important as the food. The restaurant, which opened in February 2016, is the first in [Montreal](#) for the restaurateur Jen Agg, who is based in Toronto and owns it with her husband, the artist Roland Jean, along with Régine Chassagne and Win Butler, both of the hometown band [Arcade Fire](#).

The inspiration is the native Haiti of Mr. Jean and of Ms. Chassagne's parents, and the vibe is perpetual summer — no small feat in a city of seemingly endless winters. The artist Danielle Worrall painted fronds and flowers onto sunset peach walls, and an expressionist mural by Mr. Jean lends the space a bright, raucous energy, as do his D.J. sets.

A short menu of Haitian classics is courtesy of Marc Villanueva, the chef, and Mr. Jean's sister, Monique Figaro, a consultant. "We want our Haitian clientele to think, 'Yeah, this is amazing,' even if it might not measure up to Mom's or Grandma's food," Ms. Agg said.

The menu stokes your appetite for booze, which at Agrikol is a tight list of excellent rum cocktails. The Kokonut, a curvy showstopper, mixes Jamaican rum, coconut cream, and passion fruit, tangerine and lime juices.



The artist Danielle Worrall painted fronds and flowers onto peach walls at Agrikol. Alexi Hobbs

Accras, fritters made from malanga, a starchy tuber, weren't much to look at, but are a miracle of frying; [pikliz](#), a spicy Haitian pickled cabbage, cuts the richness. Chiktay — salted and smoked cod tossed with red peppers, Scotch bonnets and lime juice — is like an aggressively spiced, acidic whitefish salad. Lambi et riz is a tender conch braise served with white rice and crusty fried plantains, and the deceptively named “legume” is in fact saucy slow-cooked short ribs with vegetables.

To top things off: hot beignets served with a tart-rich guava curd dipping sauce, delicious with the last sips of a spiced old-fashioned (rum laced with saffron, cardamom and clove). By night's end, the waitress might forget about you, but it won't be a big deal. Agrikol lulls you into thinking that it may as well be summer, and you don't have a care in the world.

Agrikol, 1844 Amherst Street; 514-903-6575; agrikol.ca. An average dinner for two, without drinks or tip, is about 60 Canadian dollars (\$45).

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