



Black, White, Blue and Belgian

The vintage cool of Brasserie Beck

The stylish interior of Robert Wiedmaier's Brasserie Beck *steam rolled* into DC with a comprehensive use of the space. It wonderfully consumes you with its tribute to the great Belgian train stations of the late nineteenth century, when travel was glamorous and comfort was expected and a little elegance wasn't too much to ask of one's surroundings in transit.

CORE Architecture + Design is the mastermind behind the lively European interior. The most overt railway reference is the platoon of big black station clocks that punctuate the soaring air space of Brasserie Beck. They conveniently keep the time of cities with some meaning to the German-born, half-Belgian Wiedmaier: places he's been, and places he intends to visit. Way overhead, the ceiling is a vast network of industrial ductwork, giving the space a thoroughly modern edge. The floors are a cool grey marble, and everywhere you look, the interior space is visually organized by various attractive grids: in the ebonized oak wainscoting and framing of the dining area; the rectangular insets of transparent blue topping the monumental windows; the metal shelving for glassware in the bar area; the wood framing of the mirrored, marble-topped bar itself; even the rectangular pattern formed by the vintage schoolhouse pendant lights.

A particularly grand vintage touch is the series of smoked-glass mirrors slanting down from overhead, reminding guests of the establishment's principal fare: over the bar, they are inscribed with *Les Vins* and *Les Apéritifs*; elsewhere in the dining rooms you will find *Fruits de Mer*, *Spécialités*, and *Le Fromage*.

A clear and cheerful blue is the starring color against the natural materials of marble and dark wood on the walls, chairs, and tabletops. The comfortable banquettes are upholstered in blue; the open 'expo-kitchen' is lined with deep blue subway tiles, nearly matching the bright yet battered enameled pots stored in the open stainless steel shelving, awaiting the next mussel order. Some of the utilitarian chairs echoing the familiar vintage aesthetic are dark bentwood, others are in another classic bistro style with blue and white webbing. Sheer white panels in a meandering floral print reminiscent of Belgian lace soften the windows as café curtains, and a similarly organic pattern dances across the blue banquette backs in a delicate white line. Belgium's renowned lace is given a modern twist as a surface pattern on the custom light-box sconces.

The bar, serving a record range of Belgian beers, is an impressive area – and entertaining, too, since this is where you can watch the crepes being made and all the raw bar action; just beyond is the dedicated barista bar. Ample sidewalk seating is shaded by large signature blue umbrellas, and features its own bar with ten draft beers. The two private dining rooms with floor-to-ceiling glass walls are handsome areas, too, with full A/V capacity and more formal white tablecloths. But the expo-kitchen is surely the heart of Brasserie Beck. Gleaming copper pots hang neatly overhead. They are polished daily, but don't be mistaken: they're actually used for all the cooking. A heavy oak table inset with charming Delft tiles serves as the chef's table from October-April. Surrounded by Medieval style chairs in the bustling space right in front of the kitchen, it's the best seat in the house for festive – and instructive – coursed meals for 10.

Playful touches in the brasserie's entrance like the bright yellow bentwood coat rack and an overhead replica of Brussels' famous seventeenth-century *Manneken Pis* [or "Pissing Boy"] ensure that nothing about the crisp and bustling interior is at all stuffy. Far from it. The deep blue corridor leading to the 'toilettes'

is hung salon-style with colorful tin beer advertising plaques. The ladies' room explodes in a riot of swirling black-and-white Art Nouveau wallpaper, while the gents' features a discreetly bawdy grid-pattern of shapely legs in fishnet stockings.

Between the enticing cuisine and the enchanting interior at Brasserie Beck, you'll be wanting to stay awhile – so it's just as well your train isn't leaving the station any time soon.

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