

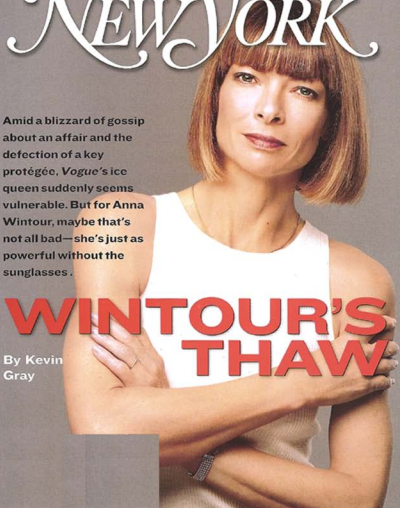
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# NEW YORK

Amid a blizzard of gossip about an affair and the defection of a key protégée, *Vogue's* ice queen suddenly seems vulnerable. But for Anna Wintour, maybe that's not all bad—she's just as powerful without the sunglasses.

## WINTOUR'S THAW

By Kevin Gray



### RESTAURANTS HAL RUBENSTEIN

## The Boîte Pack

Way west, Fressen spiffs up the moonscape of a neighborhood with an idiosyncratic menu and a well-lit crowd of hip young things.

IT WAS A KNOCKOUT OF A NIGHT IN JUNE. Not yet summer, but close enough that women were finally able to reveal freshly sun-kissed shoulders in freshly bought sleeveless cashmere boat necks. Even strolling down the Sweeney Todd-friendly streets of the meatpacking district toward Fressen, the first restaurant from juice bar jefe Ronnie Teitelbaum, didn't alter the fact that life felt like it was about to be soothed by a season full of lilting breezes (who knew, but that's what it felt like in June).

However, inside Fressen you could have brained a pot roost on Magy Le Coze's forehead and served it alongside splash obtained solely by the fierce gaze of Amy Sacco. Ms. Le Coze owns Le Bernardin—and normally her eyes and spirit gleam with a radiance to rival sunrise over Sacré Coeur. Her restaurant is to food what Jerusalem is to Western religion. Her friend, Mr. Sacco, owns Le 61, a shamefully seductive latter-day El Muecco, where the staff is so engaging and the stuff they set down so appealing that this child of the sixties can almost forgive the woman for creating a hotspot mainly to mature the mating habits of 26-year-olds. These two restaurants could teach more about their craft over a bottle of St. Julien than could be learned in a semester of courses at the French Culinary Institute. Since neither leaves her home base very often, expectations run high when they head out together. But after dining at Fressen, their mood had sunk lower than Orrin Hatch's presidential aspirations.

It didn't start out this way. Forty-five minutes earlier, the pair were lounging on a sofa near the bar, raving about their surroundings, which—once you get past the coyly nameless show-walrus-glass-door facade—is an unerring example of modern swank; a septa-toned Mondrian painting in 3-D, three rooms that are spacious, spare, and sleeker than an Audi TT. Every surface is hard and urban, every detail as dramatic as a third-act soliloquy. Yet the combined effect of Fressen's beautifully integrated elements is unexpectedly restful and more comfortable than cruising in a stretch limousine. In fact, once you note that almost anyone sitting in a booth or against a wall is framed like a lasciviously high-contrast George Hurrell photograph of Gary Cooper or Hedy Lamarr, you may want to buy all the lighting fixtures. Fressen goes one better than just being hip: It actually makes you look hip.

So, who could blame the young and the stressed less for showing up here faster than Patricia Duff can change



lawyers? Unfortunately, expecting a restaurant—especially one assembled by owners experienced with operating one of this scale—to match its quality to its popularity within a few weeks is as foolish as handing a Lamborghini over to a student driver.

Sure enough, Fressen's clutch kept slipping. On this night, the kitchen was out of two thirds of the menu, waiters kept dropping out of sight, and then the air conditioner went out of commission. Some dishes clicked. Others just clattered. And the kitchen sent them out with the rhythm of a marathon dancer into her fourth day. As both women tore into gristly steaks using sheer will more than the sharpness of their cutlery, Le Coze admitted she should have known better. "It was too soon, I mean, does this plate look right? Does that one?" No, but the women did look fabulous. "You let me know when they are ready," she said.

Okay, ladies. You can come back now. The staff is more alert and better cued, far more eager to be helpful ensembles than reformed chums. More important, the house has opted not to get away with merely a post-two-Cosmopolitan menu that might do 147 or Torch prosed. (We once had a salad at the latter that tempted us to check [annow.com](http://www.annow.com) to see if Laurenboy had put out a cookbook.) Instead, chef Louis McNeely has pulled an "Odeon," taking the heat and not getting out of the kitchen this summer until his food could stand up to the originality of its setting.

The kitchen's preference for organic produce (noted on the menu) is encouraging. But more important is the

Swank for the memories: From left, pan-raised diver scallops; the 3-D Mondrian dining experience.