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50 cents

AT THE BISTRO, CHEF IS A MAESTRO IN THE KITCHEN

Food just doesn't get much better than this dedicated spot offers.

By PAUL REID
Palm Beach Post Restaurant Critic

Here is our list of negatives about The Bistro: the croutons in the Caesar salad.

For our list of positives, read the following to the end. The menu includes something of a letter of introduction from the owners, the chef, even the bartender, hosts and wait staff. Information imparted includes the fact that The Bistro is associated with the justly renowned Roly's of Dublin, the chef has won many awards, the staff is there for you, the customer. Not until we were halfway through our wonderful meal did I realize that this boilerplate missive was sincere.

In essence, that letter says: We are a neighborhood place, and you need to know who we are in order to feel it's your neighborhood place. Every neighborhood should be so lucky. It's first-class and upscale inside, but not stuffy. If you know The Palm Beach Grill or Mark's at CityPlace, you know the feel - crisp napkins, polished glassware, lively bar. White tablecloths, crescent shaped booths, deeply cushioned and cozy. The murmur of happy diners, but not loud.

Four of us settled into a booth, procured a bottle of Cain Cuvee (\$50), a big yet finessed red wine. We sipped while perusing the menu and sampling the warm fresh sunflower seed-studded rolls served in a napkin-lined basket. A long ceramic dish with chicken liver pate, fresh cool butter, and herb and garlic seasoned olive oil accompanied the rolls. Good beginning.

REVIEW

The Bistro

FOOD: A-
SERVICE: B+

ADDRESS: 2133 S. U.S. Highway 1, Jupiter (Driftwood Plaza)

TELEPHONE: 744-5054

PRICE RANGE: Moderate

HOURS: (Nov. 1-April 30) 5-10 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; 5-10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday; Bar, 4-11 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; 4 p.m.-late Friday and Saturday.

CREDIT CARDS: MC, V, AmEx

RESERVATIONS: Yes

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes

WHAT THE GRADES MEAN:

A - Excellent
B - Good
C - Average
D - Poor
F - Don't bother

The menu is indeed rife with bistro fare and - joy of joys - the prices are more than right. We got things rolling with the appetizer Combo Platter (\$19.95), two shrimp tempura (nice light batter, hot and crisp, fresh

tasting shrimp); a chicken spring roll (soft, almost chewy, with an unusual filling of chicken and brie, served with a little pickled vegetable salad in a thin cracker-like "bowl").

Also, two lollipop lamb chops (tiny broiled chops, tender, pink, served with whole grain mustard sauce), and two mini lump crab cakes (accompanied by a creamy "lobster sauce" and served on top of a fresh, tart potato salad - firm chunks of potato lightly dressed with mayonnaise, vinegar and chives). This was our first indication that every dish is prepared with care, no afterthoughts here.

Next up, the Bistro salad (\$6.95), very fresh mixed greens, (canned) black olives, halved grape tomatoes, julienned cucumber, and red onions, all lightly dressed with a subtle honey mustard dressing. Served in a crisp thin cracker-like shell. The plate was drizzled with an amazingly flavorful pesto sauce - we dipped our bread in it. Excellent salad, thoughtfully prepared for flavor and appearance.

Ditto the Caesar salad (\$7.95), enough to share, cool Romaine lettuce, a robust Caesar dressing, one rolled anchovy, and slivers of good quality Parmesan cheese. Croutons looked to be boxed and were stale. Too bad, the rest was top notch.

Now, on to four fabulous entrees. The grilled veal chop (\$36, special), juicy and tender, was served as the chef recommended, medium, yet still carried a nice blush of pink. Served with a whole, peeled, baked potato, firm with good potato flavor.

Our filet mignon (\$25.95) was a great little steak, tender to the max, full of wonderful beefy flavor, topped with baby artichoke ragout - intensely flavored, seasoned with garlic. This was more than just a decorative topping. Its texture and flavor add another dimension to the texture and flavor of the meat. A red pepper and

basil pesto added yet another flavor, and the "boxty potato" - a thick patty of mashed potatoes lightly fried, added a bit of Irish perfection. This is what you want when you go out to dine: Ingredients you may have at home prepared perfectly in a way you'd never contemplate.

One of our guests, a New Englander, went for the triple lobster tails (\$29.95), three Maine lobster tails, about 4 ounces per, turned inside out, cooked perfectly. Our guest said the chef must have a "gentle touch," for the meat was removed from the broiler at just the first hint of doneness, pearly white, tender and glistening. These darlings were served with drawn butter, mashed potatoes and fresh broccoli florets (This meal is available nightly from 5-6, for \$21.95).

Our delight continued with the roast poussin (\$22.95), a whole baby chicken, beautiful golden brown crisp skin, tender juicy meat. Served with peeled asparagus tips, boxty potato and rosemary jus. Just the right amount of rosemary - the essential aroma of the dish was the roasted chicken complemented by just a whisper of rosemary, not the other way around, which happens too often. Another example of the chef's gentle touch.

We then devoured the following two desserts, where the light airy orange and bold chocolate flavors made ideal companions: Grand Marnier soufflé (\$9.95), perfection. A warm Grand Marnier sauce poured into the soufflé upon presentation. Fresh whipped cream on the side.

And, the chocolate bundt cake (\$7.95), a miniature bundt cake, deep dark chocolate flavor, not too sweet, moist but fine texture, drizzled with a dark chocolate icing and served with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Next time we'll order two scoops of ice cream. And there will surely be a next time.