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## **French twist**

Patisserie Boissiere Restaurant & Bakery a homespun, charming delight

Out of remembrance, honor and a keen sense of business, Magdy Ibrahim spends his life tending to the legacy of Pierre and Elaine Boissiere.

His vigilance involves a tragic story of fate and opportunity, the roots of which reach back 45 years (the beginning of Carmel's French revolution), when places such as L'Escargot and La Boheme began to educate the palate of this Bohemian village.

In 1961, the Boissieres, a French couple, opened a pastry and tea house called Patisserie Boissiere, which eventually expanded into serving lunch and dinner. In a short time it became a Carmel institution, famous for European pastries and soothing ambience, a locals place where patrons could wile away the hours – from a flaky croissant and a spot of espresso all the way through a dinner of Coquille Saint Jaques.

It ended in tragedy in 1987 when the Boissieres died in a car accident. The incident stunned residents, including loyal customer Magdy Ibrahim, who had once found the place a welcome escape while studying international policies at Monterey Institute of International Studies.

Like many students, Ibrahim paid his way through school by working in the restaurant industry, eventually becoming director of catering at the new Monterey Plaza Hotel. The Boissieres left the restaurant to their daughter, but it sat vacant for nearly two years until Ibrahim and friend Lynn Wood bought it – hiring the pastry chef away from the hotel in the process.

Ibrahim and Wood have run the place for the last 17 years, resisting the temptation to unleash modern sensibilities.

“We never wanted to change things,” Ibrahim said, “just polish them a bit.”

That polish included a semi-major renovation two years ago, and the gradual evolution of the menu. Original items such as Coquille Saint Jaques and Croissant Campagnard remain, but the menu is now best described as California/French country with an emphasis on light, fresh ingredients.

Open for lunch, dinner and weekend brunch, Patisserie Boissiere also offers a picnic menu for those on their way to the beach or a seat at the nearby Outdoor Forest Theater.

[HE SAID]

Here's what you won't find at Patisserie Boissiere: store-bought bread; heavy-handed sauces; unpronounceable, overpriced wines; snoot servers; fake flowers; weak American coffee; any hint of pretension.

I loved this place so much I talked Mel into breakfast the next morning. I had eggs Parisienne – a gigantic, warmed croissant filled with eggs, melty Gruyere and crispy bacon. The side fruit salad and my own personal mini coffee pot completed the perfect breakfast.

But back to dinner. I love duck... and I hate duck. It depends. At times it can be a fatty, greasy disaster. So with trepidation I ordered the roasted half duck with orange-apricot brandy sauce (with a slab of au gratin potatoes atop a steamed julienne vegetable medley) for \$19.50. "It better be good," I whispered to my date with a clink of wine glasses (Morgan Sauvignon Blanc priced not far above retail at \$17).

It was perfect. The duck was roasted crisp, until the skin was almost burned. This allowed for a reduction of fat, and peeling away the skin revealed moist, succulent meat. The bird lay on a triangular bed of apricot slices and the rich-yet-light fruit-based sauce (not full of uncooked alcohol) was a perfect complement.

We started the evening with a supremely warm welcome and an escort into a quaint dining room lighted primarily by the crackling fireplace and strategically placed candles. My senses worked on overload – the smell of crusty bread fresh from the oven drawing the first smile.

Seated at the window overlooking Mission, I wondered how much the couple in the adjacent window at Bouchee (one of my favorite places, mind you) was prepared to pay for their Chef Walter "the genius" Manske-inspired dinner. A lot. And that's OK, but I felt as if we had an elegantly prepared meal served with care and kindness – at a great value. And I appreciate that immensely.

[SHE SAID]

Patisserie Boissiere is a quaint little French chateau, situated comfortably just outside the bustle of Paris. Well, OK, it's only Mission Street in Carmel, but the sweet ambience of this cute old place fuels a diner's imagination. Everything from the bistro-style chalkboard announcing dinner specials out front to the showy pastry case just inside the front door; from the quaint collection of blue and white porcelain to the candles and fresh roses on every table and window sill; plays a part in a warm welcome. It's a serene place, and a fireplace flickers in the main dining room (it's worth making a reservation to be seated here). It's like dropping by unannounced and being welcomed into someone's home. And just wait till you hear what's for dinner.

For me, it was one of the three specials – braised turkey (dark meat) on the bone cooked in white wine, garlic, herbs and broth (\$15.95). Satisfying hunks of fresh carrot and shallots bobbed in the oversized white bistro bowl, and a handful of fresh baby spinach, added as a garnish, fell into the broth and cooked as I ate. Understated and elegant, this is the kind of dish you wish you could replicate at home with Thanksgiving leftovers, if only you could.

As I savored every mouthful of this steaming supper (served, thoughtfully, with a soup spoon as well as a knife and fork), I overheard a server at the next table giving the "I regret to inform you we are out of the turkey" speech (lucky me!) I love it when I order just the right thing – it makes for such a memorable experience.

Menu highlights include lamb shank, quiche, shepherd's pie and, of course, French onion soup. Coffee and espresso to go are served just inside the doorway, where you'll be sorely tempted by the frothy, frilly delicacies in the pastry case (all created in the bakery upstairs). We left with an entire box full to share with friends, and the rest of our wine wrapped and tied with ribbon.

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*PATISSERIE BOISSIERE Carmel Plaza on Mission Street, Carmel 624-5008 \* Hours: breakfast/brunch weekends, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.; lunch daily, 11:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.; dinner Wed. – Sun., 5:30-9 p.m. \* Cards: all major \* Wheelchair access: yes \* Bar: wine \* Price range: \$10.50-\$19.50 \* Web site: none \* Pluses: value wine list; homey, yet romantic atmosphere; eclectic menu with a lighter touch; homemade French pastries for dessert \* Minuses: parking woes; few*

*vegetarian options \* The bottom line: charming, atypical French dining experience at a fair price in on of Carmel's oldest establishments.*

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Mike Hale and Melissa Snyder approach their reviews from a couple's perspective. All visits are made anonymously. Comment at [tablefortwo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tablefortwo@sbcglobal.net).GO!

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