

Chef Lynn Wood aids world peace by keeping patrons happy

By MARGOT PETIT NICHOLS

PATRONS OF Patisserie Boissiere are used to the quiet hustle and bustle of the ground floor restaurant and pastry shop, but few are aware that almost all the cooking and baking takes place on the second floor in a large kitchen/bakery.

Executive Chef Lynn Wood, business partner to owner Magdy Ibrahim for some 22 years, is in charge of the menu and new recipes. She and Ibrahim select wines for the wine list; she goes to the farmers' market weekly to buy fresh flowers for the restaurant, which she rearranges daily, maintains the European decor and ambiance, prepares the pastry display case enticingly and greets and seats patrons daily during the luncheon hours of 11:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. Ibrahim takes over as host from 5:30 to 9 p.m. during the dinner hours Wednesday through Sunday.

It all seems to run like clockwork.

Wood and Ibrahim worked together two decades ago at the Monterey Plaza Hotel — she as national sales manager, he as head of catering. Neither attended culinary school. Wood majored in political science at UC Santa Cruz and Ibrahim studied international relations at the Monterey Institute of International Studies.

Ibrahim assumed ownership and management of Patisserie Boissiere in Carmel-by-the-Sea when a tragic roadway accident took the lives of Madam and Monsieur Boissiere. Their deaths shocked many on the Peninsula — so well known and loved were they, not only by patrons of their popular eating establishment, but by local restaurant workers, many of whom had worked at the Patisserie over the 30 years of the Boissier's proprietorship.

At first, Ibrahim owned the restaurant and pastry shop with another partner, but later asked Wood to join the firm.

"No one wanted us to change the restaurant, which was established in 1961, and neither did we," she said. "We've kept the restaurant quite a lot the same as when the Boissiers ran it — just tweaking it a bit here and there. Visitors come into the restaurant, commenting they haven't been here for years, but are happy to find it virtually the same. I hear stories of people whose parents brought them here when they were children. I was one of those kids myself."

Wood thinks of the dining rooms being as comfortable and inviting as a charming living room: The fireplace, Louis XV chairs, original paintings on the walls, the flowers and soft music all contrive to create a relaxing, pleasant mood for a dining experience patrons return to frequently.

Wood astutely kept many dishes that were popular when the Boissiers were alive: The coquilles St. Jacques, French onion soup and croissant Campagnard, a recipe that calls for ham and cheese in a béchamel sauce, for instance. These recipes were 1950s staples, and are still well received today. "But we have many healthy dishes on the menu, too. Two of the most ordered are the salmon in parchment paper and lamb shanks. We have many vegetarian plates, too," she said.

Wood peruses magazines devoted to fine dining, such as Bon Appetite, and formerly, Gourmet Magazine. If she is particularly drawn to a recipe, she alters it a bit, and then has

it made up in the restaurant's kitchen. The tweaking goes on until the recipe pleases her.

"We started roasting turkeys for sandwiches after Thanksgiving one year to satisfy the demand, and now it's on the menu year 'round. We braise turkey legs with herbs and wine as an entree, too," she said.

Wood is from Maine, so she insisted on her own Louis type dressing on the restaurant's crab salad, which sets it apart.

"My father went to Cornell University, majoring in hotel administration, but he was a fantastic cook from the deep south. My mother and brother were very good cooks, too. You might say we were a cooking family. I have a cookbook collection that I read like novels. I watch the Food Network all the time. For me,

cooking is comforting and relaxing."

Of her business partner, she said, "Magdy is my best friend. He's very practical, while I'm creative and imaginative. We have a good partnership."

Unmarried, she lives in Carmel with two beloved cats, Fitzgerald and June Bug, and is a movie buff and Pilates enthusiast.

Keeping patrons happy — even when a long line forms for seating at lunch — is a pleasure for Wood. "On infrequent warm days, I give those waiting a glass of lemonade; on cooler days, a sample of our bread pudding. When Europeans come for luncheon and leave happy, I feel it's my contribution to world peace."

Wood estimates 80 percent of the restaurant's patronage is local; 20 per cent visitors. "I've known visitors who come to the restaurant on their first day here who come back every day thereafter. We have so many visitors from other countries, some days, in summer, I hear a different language at each table. I love my work," she said.

As for her own vacations, three years ago Wood traveled to France with Linda Weston, a girlfriend, visiting Paris and the Loire Valley, checking out restaurant food and ambiance.

"Last year I went to Santa Fe and Taos, and this year I'm going to Portland, Ore., to hear The Pink Martinis at a Portland Zoo benefit," she explained.

Wood plans to buy some of their recordings for the restaurant.

Patisserie Boissiere Restaurant and Bakery is located on Mission Street between Ocean and Seventh. It is open daily for luncheon from 11:30 to 4:30 p.m. and for dinner Wednesday through Sunday from 5:30 to 9 p.m. For information or reservations, call (831) 624-5008.

chef profile



PHOTO/MARGOT PETIT NICHOLS

Executive Chef Lynn Wood is responsible for the menu at Patisserie Boissiere Restaurant and Bakery, and for creating the "whole visual" of the European style dining room.