

DINNER REVIEW

Chef meets high expectations at Mache Bistro

N.L. English [GO Entertainment Weekly 7/29/09]



Tim Greenway/Staff Photographer

The copper-topped tables, key-lime-yellow walls and black floor of Mache Bistro signal ambition from the first moment of arrival, but the proof of the bistro fare is in the eating, and it does not disappoint.

Slices of rare, grilled hanger steak glazed with gorgonzola butter, lobster crab cakes packed with sweet shellfish, and excellent wine lined up one recent night to make a winning argument.

Chef/owner Kyle Yarborough is glimpsed in his kitchen as his 7-month-old baby, one of two daughters, smiled back at him from his wife and partner's arms. He has long held the high opinion of Bar Harbor's restaurant goers.

Beginning as a line cook and daytime supervisor at the Jordan Pond House in Acadia National Park in 1999 and well known during his years at popular Havana, a local Latin and American fine-dining restaurant, Yarborough's cooking has won him local loyalty.

"It was supposed to be a summer job," Yarborough said of his stint at Jordan Pond House. "But I met my wife, and 10 years later, I'm still here."

Yarborough and his wife, Marie, spent two years in Yarborough's home state of South Carolina, but returned to take over Mache Bistro, which opened under his ownership in mid-June. "We love Maine. I think pretty much since the day we left, we'd been looking for a way to get back," he said.

The bar serves cocktails such as a French martini with a touch of Chambord and pineapple juice. But wine is the best seller, with 25 wines sold by the bottle and 12 by the glass. One white wine recently on offer was New York Heron Riesling (\$8).

Ferrari-Carano Fume Blanc 2007 (\$8) from California surprised with its complexity and

Mache Bistro

135 Cottage St. Bar Harbor

www.machebistro.com

HOURS: Open 5:30 p.m. to close Monday to Saturday

CREDIT CARDS: Visa, Mastercard and American Express

PRICE RANGE: \$16 to \$27

VEGETARIAN DISHES: Yes

KIDS: Best for those who like the regular menu items.

RESERVATIONS: Recommended

BAR: Full

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: No

BOTTOM LINE: Chef/owner Kyle Yarborough is devising Mache Bistro's menu this summer, serving American bistro standards with, for example, outstanding lobster crab cakes.

balance. Plume Bleue 2006 (\$7), a grenache-syrah blend from Domaine de Pegau with a dreamy nose, had a simpler range of flavor and less depth.

Thin slices of focaccia with chevre and black olives baked into its top crust made an agreeable interlude before the appetizers, but it was those plates that really made a good impression.

Grilled squid salad with arugula, sun-dried tomatoes and a saffron aioli came accompanied by an excellent relish of cracked green olives. The tender squid was a touch overruled by the dressing, but the dish offered a range of textures and flavors I hadn't encountered elsewhere and an abundance of tiny tentacles from some of the smallest squid around.

The olive relish, made with green and black olives, sundried tomatoes and garlic-and-rosemary-infused olive oil, also sat on the plate of lobster crab cakes (\$10). Its astringency was welcome with the unadulterated flavors of crab and big chunks of lobster, given structure by a delicate golden-brown crust.

The herbal bitterness of a green oil, made with parsley, cilantro and rosemary, and of arugula also pointed up the sweetness of the shellfish.

It was hard to pass up an appetizer of Cabernet-poached pear with blue cheese that seems to stay on the menu. A little lobster roll (\$11) made with lobster, caramelized onions and brie is served in grilled flat bread, and resembles a sushi roll.

The bistro hanger steak (\$19) that followed sustained revved-up expectations. Slices of deep red, tender beef slick with gorgonzola butter were fanned over garlic mashed potatoes, more arugula and zucchini cut into matchsticks.

A vegetarian entree of grilled Portobello mushrooms (\$16), while good, couldn't compare. It's a challenge to devise a meal of mushrooms, chevre and white beans without the passing gear of meat or fish. The white beans cooked "cassoulet style" were mild to bland, and the mushrooms were too mild as well, with only the chevre coming through.

Blackboard specials might be roasted half chicken (\$17 to \$18) or coq au vin with mirepoix or with leeks and bacon, or beef tenderloin crusted with black pepper and spread with truffle butter. Bistro steak jazzed up with blue-cheese butter may replace the hanger steak on the menu.

Seared scallops on rosemary polenta (\$17), lamb chops and chorizo with balsamic, fig and blackberry reduction (\$21) and duck cassoulet (\$23) were on a late July menu, no doubt consoling customers sick of the cold, rainy weather.

Dessert didn't include any fruit or light possibilities, a disappointment in the midst of Maine berry season. But pain perdu (\$7), made with cherry and pecan pound cake, soaked with milk, heavy cream and sweetened condensed milk, and paired with vanilla ice cream, was certainly delicious.

Chocolate torte (\$7) with espresso ganache was a dense fudgy wedge of super-moist chocolate. It came with vanilla ice cream, and not the cinnamon ice cream described on the menu.

The strong and ferocious French roast coffee, even though decaffeinated, was indeed welcome after such a rich conclusion. Sunset Acres Farm cranberry and orange chevre paired with a Cabernet (and balsamic and brown sugar) poached pear and Cabernet sorbet is promised on an upcoming dessert list.

N.L. English is a Portland freelance writer and the author of "Chow Maine: The Best Restaurants, Cafes, Lobster Shacks and Markets on the Coast." Visit English's Web site, www.chowmaineguide.com.