

Bistro Moulin consistently a top dining choice

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A hot new restaurant opens, the local buzz helps fill the seats and everyone gushes over the "fresh, innovative menu" and "expert, attentive service." Six months later the place seems different, off its game. The soup is cold, the salad greens wilted and you spend the evening waving down wait staff who seem oddly disinterested.

What happened?

Often times the owner has run out of seed money, corners have been cut, staff reduced and standards lowered. While chain restaurants and deep-pocket owners can avoid the six-month dive and create consistency at every turn, the mom-and-pop shops often have trouble after the honeymoon period.

One exception has been Bistro Moulin in Monterey, the quaint European bistro run by French-born chef Didier Dutertre (25 years at Casanova in Carmel) and his girlfriend/partner Colleen Manni, who runs the front of the house with style and grace.

After a stellar first year serving French and Belgian classic dishes (moules frites, osso buco, confit de canard etc.) to a small audience (about 25 seats), the relentless couple did not rest on their laurels, expanding into the tiny shop next store, opening up the wine list, hiring more staff and tweaking the concept to near perfection.

The bistro remains charming, not too big to allow for service lapses or a lack of intimacy. And the

food? Simple yet perfectly executed by Dutertre, giving the diner quality food with a rare depth of flavor.

Manni helps round out the experience with her customer service and attention to detail. Her Moulin Rouge Wednesdays have been a big hit, and today marks the first La Fete du Beaujolais Nouveau (through Saturday), celebrating the first wine of the harvest (a tradition celebrated in France and around the world on the third Thursday in November).

This red wine is made from Gamay grapes grown and handpicked in the Beaujolais region of France. In just eight

short weeks from vine to table, it's an easy-drinking, light, young, fruity wine.

"It's a festive wine to be swigged rather than sipped, and enjoyed in high spirits rather than critiqued," Manni says. "This race from grape to glass may seem silly, but half the fun is knowing that on the same night in little villages and bistros around the world the same celebration is taking place."

Bistro Moulin will pour Beaujolais Nouveau of Louis Tete 2008 (\$9 glass; \$34 bottle). In addition to the regular menu, the chef plans a three-course, prix fixe Beaujolais pairing menu featuring roasted beet salad with m che, goat cheese and candied walnuts, pistou soup and an entree choice between medallions of pork tenderloin flamed with Calvados, along with braised red cabbage and potato au gratin; or Alaskan halibut with spinach leaves,

caramelized fennel and tangerine beurre blanc. Cost is \$35 per person.

Information: 333-1200. Bistro Moulin is at 867 Wave St., Monterey.

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