

accent. "It is nice to know where your ingredients are coming from." The couple has passed on the opportunity to grow or expand to sexier locations for the sake of quality and the value of family life, which seems to take top billing. "A smaller place takes less delegating, resulting in less disconnection with the kitchen," explains Marc.

With a four-star rating from the legendary food critic Mike Dunn of the Sacramento Bee, Le Bilig often ranks in lists of the area's top-10 restaurants. "We are touching people's souls, not just their taste buds" Monica says with pride. Unfortunately, at the time of this interview, the Deconincks revealed that they are selling the restaurant to take a much-needed break from their 12-plus years of operation. Their next steps aren't completely certain, but they do plan on traveling to Marc's homeland. With that in mind, perhaps it would be best to set this magazine down and run. not walk, to this wondrous local find before it is gone for good. For now, Le Bilig is open for dinner every Thursday through Saturday. Reservations are recommended.

> **Le Bilig French Café** 11750 Atwood Road, Auburn (530) 888-1491

La Provence

This grandiose brasserie is the brainchild of a local real estate developer's international affair with the south of France. Stephen Des Jardins, the man behind West Roseville's only French eatery, sought a crowning jewel for his Diamond Creek development of sprawling homes and business parks. And what could be better than to create an upscale eatery to serve fine French cuisine amidst breathtaking architecture?

Stephen's vision has added greatly to the cultural landscape of South Placer, and his unmatched business savvy is evident all around, from the talented staff to the stunning design. "We merely operate it for our guests," Stephen remarks. Indeed, the customer experience is the key focus at La Provence.



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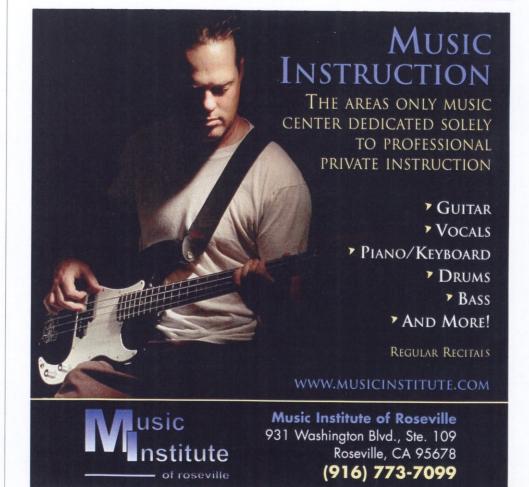
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COVER STORY [DINING GUIDE]



The menu is dripping with southern French style and includes classics like roasted duck and a wonderful bouillabaisse. The mix of French elegance with a hint of Italian influence works to create some eye-opening options. For more on chef Joshua Rabbie's style, see this issue's cooking story, which includes his recipe for lamb stew.

La Provence follows a refreshing, no-frills French bistro philosophy that influences its elegant dishes. To try and win over this steak-and-potatoes town, the menu offers a myriad of choices, ranging from affordable entrées like a half-pound Angus beef hamburger on ciabatta bread (\$11) to classic local staples with international appeal like their all-natural, roasted and pressed half chicken (\$18). The terrific variety ensures that there will be something for all types of palates, from the traditional to the more experimental. And as if the great food weren't enough, La Provence also holds watercolor classes, French film nights and family film nights for the kids. Open for lunch and dinner every week Tuesday through Saturday, as well as for Sunday brunch from 10 to 2:30.

La Provence

130 Diamond Creek Place, Roseville (916) 789-2002 laprovenceroseville.com

Monkey Cat

Like so many locals, Jim Bril sought a better quality of life in the northern California foothills. As the former owner of the highly esteemed San Franciscobased Fior d'Italia, Jim has balanced his big-city drive with small-town charm in the renovated Monkey Cat restaurant in Auburn. Truly a genuine man and a former busboy himself, Jim shows sincere regard for his employees and patrons. Although he does not have the buying power of major chains, he refuses to

is unheard of in mass-market restaurants. Supporting the Placer Grown program is a key part of his philosophy, and he can often be seen shopping at local farmers' markets in search of the freshest of the fresh. He also keeps an eye on the media to distinguish new trends in dining and to find new inspiration. Amazingly, he changes at least 25% of his menu every other month.

Although 90% of Monkey Cat's clientele consists of Auburn locals, Monkey Cat does fantastic repeat business, and for good reason. South Placer isn't exactly San Francisco, but this establishment definitely brings it closer with an expanded outdoor palapa that creates an intimate setting for local musicians to perform. Gorgonzola- and walnut-stuffed veal chops with tomato sage chutney and grilled duck breast with port wine reduction represent just a peek into the culinary delights pouring out of this fantastic local establishment. Monkey Cat is open daily for lunch and dinner.

Monkey Cat

805 Lincoln Way, Auburn (530) 888-8492 www.monkeycat.com

