ROSEVILLE
THE PRESS-TRIBUNE

Dec 22, 2004 50 cents
Midweek Edition Serving the Greater Roseville Area Since 1906

Bon Appétit

La Provence serves up seasonal dishes from south of France

By Tim Menicutch
The Press Tribune

Stephen Des Jardins moved briskly through La Provence, stopping only briefly for a quick explanation of some eye-catching trusses stretched across the soaring ceiling in the main dining room. The farmhouse-style French restaurant in West Roseville's Diamond Creek development skirts 51 acres of undisturbed open land. Thriving oaks standing atop grassy knolls are the lone sentinels of the property.

"It's the only restaurant in Roseville to have that kind of adjacency," Des Jardins said. The complexity of La Provence lies in its simplicity. The same could be said about Des Jardins, a Roseville land developer since 1987. His naïveté, or unaffected naturalness, permeates every inch of this cozy and comfortable restaurant.

Des Jardins explained the dining room trusses are reclaimed Douglas fir from a 1930s Chicago warehouse, typifying his tasteful style. He pauses longer in front of a paned-window at the far end of the restaurant. Des Jardins rolls open the window. "Imagine that," he said with a childish smile. "A window in a restaurant that actually opens. Of course, it's already been done. I'm just going back to it. My goal is to be the master of the obvious." Seemingly every nook and cranny of the spacious restaurant – featuring six separate and distinct dining areas – holds a new charm, from the zinc-top bar – a truly French tradition – to the cherry wood tables and chairs.

On the far side of the building is a shining, stainless steel kitchen, designed personally by La Provence partner chefs Joshua Rabbie and Bernard Brun. Even the cook's headquarters – surrounded by four walls and bordering on claustrophobic at most establishments – is open, airy and windowed. Rabbie, previously a chef at Marche Aux Fleurs in San Francisco, seemed surprised when somebody asked him if he had ever worked in a kitchen with windows before.

"Are you kidding me?" said Rabbie, obviously amused by the question. Maybe the windowed kitchen is to blame, but Rabbie and Brun have fashioned a free-spirited menu with entrees and side dishes mirroring the flavors of South France. "Roseville has a lot of corporate restaurants and not many original restaurants," Rabbie said. "We change the menu four to five times a year. We don't have corporate telling us what to do."

Brun, imported by Des Jardins from overseas and who talks with a heavy French accent, owned a restaurant called Lou Fanau in Fontaine de Vaucluse – a small town in southern France – for almost 30 years.

Reclaimed Douglas Fir trusses form an eye-catching arch over the LA Provence dining room in West Roseville

Before La Provence opened last Valentine's Day, Des Jardins footed the bill for Rabbie to visit France for an extended stay and some on-the-job training at Brun's restaurant.

"It was a great experience," said Rabbie, 32, a Roseville resident. "I got to learn firsthand the trend of the food; what they eat and why they eat the way they do. The food is very seasonal. The people go to the market, pick up what is available and that is what they cook."

According to Des Jardins, the climate in Roseville is almost identical to the south of France, and La Provence's menu is greatly influenced by the same seasonal trends.

"We use the best, freshest ingredients – almost all of which are grown locally – and keep it simple," Des Jardins said.

For his stylish design of La Provence and neighboring Capital Cellars, a wine shop operated by Marcus Graziano, Des Jardins has been named a finalist for Sacramento Business Journal's 2004 Developer of the Year.

"It's not that I'm that smart," Des Jardins said. "All of the things I've done here have already been done. I just find the things that are appropriate and do them again."

La Provence includes a spacious outdoor terrace for spring and summer dining and three beers produced in the restaurant's own micro-brewery. Other top cooks at the restaurant include pastry chef Chrissy Gierek of Sacramento and soup specialist Shane McMahon of Roseville.

Tim Menicutch can be reached at timm@goldcountrymedia.com.

La Provence

Location:
110 Diamond Creek Place
Lunch:
11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
Tuesday through Saturday
Dinner:
5:30-9 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday
5-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday
Brunch:
10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday
Closed: Monday
Information and reservations: 789-2002

INSIDE

Business A9
Classified B4
Days Gone By A6
Obituaries A13
Opinion A4
Sports B1

Volume 95, Number 104