

Madeleine Bistro



By Matt Flanzer

AT MADELEINE'S HELM ARE DAVID AND Molly Anderson, former executive chef and general manager, respectively, at Real Food Daily, another first-rate, though casual Los Angeles vegan restaurant. Driving off the Real Food reservation, however, the Andersons have made a culinary left-turn towards a star-speckled, high desert of creativity and elegance. Where else could one find an appetizer described as a "Study in Corn"? This edible work of art consists of four amuse-bouches made entirely of, you guessed it, corn: Corn Cappuccino, Corn Foam, Corn French Fries and Corn Ice Cream. The particularly enjoyable cappuccino went down like smooth, buttery chowder. The French fries, made of polenta, were entirely palate-pleasing with the exact crunchy, salty goodness of your perfect crinkly fry.

The oaky Healdsburg Ranch Belvedere Chardonnay we selected from the all-organic wine list paired well with the Mediterranean Chopped Salad and the Red Beet Tartare. The former—a delectable pile of fresh olive tapenade atop shredded romaine—was splendid with that salty bite of sun-ripened fruit and herb, but somehow pedestrian when compared to the imaginatively presented Study in Corn and Red Beet Tartare. The latter is a harmonious presentation of tangy, shredded beets over a lightly fried tofu cheese. It complemented the beets such that even a professed beet-hater at our table—okay, that would be me—really enjoyed this dish.

Next, we tasted a *mélange* of Asian-inspired dishes: Asian Tacos, Shiitake Mushroom Skewers and Japanese Hot Pot, a sweet and subtle stew of Asian vegetables, soba noodles and silken tofu. The savory mushroom skewers are accompanied by a julienne vegetable stir-fry that accentuates the wonderful sweetness of fresh, organic veggies. The Asian Tacos are a twist on the south-of-the-border favorite, with a spicy, meaty blend of shredded seitan stuffed inside crispy rice tortillas. Looking around the bistro, it was evident that this savory dish is an extremely popular one.

Not to be missed is the rich and creamy Tomato Risotto. This dish had our table stumped trying to determine its "secret" ingredient; some surmised a tofu cream, others a generous lump of margarine. Our server, Myra, informed us that we were all way off. No added oil. No tofu cream. The secret is in David Anderson's slow cooking, which releases starches to create a risotto that would make Mama weep for Napoli. Bravo!

Ventura Boulevard in Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley is endlessly redundant: Take Ralph's, Starbucks and Jamba Juice. Add Bank of America. Rinse. Repeat. This is what makes Madeleine Bistro in Tarzana something of an oasis: Organic, vegan cuisine, elegant dining... in the San Fernando Valley. Like, oh-my-God! Despite its close proximity to a sexy lingerie shop with anatomically improbable mannequins voguing in window displays, once inside the restaurant's glassed-in exterior, it's all class. No jackets or ties required—this is still L.A.—but it's definitely upscale, complete with linen tablecloths under soft candlelight. The dim mood lighting and cozy wine bar make Madeleine Bistro an ideal date destination.



For dessert, the Bananas Foster Split and Flourless Chocolate Cake indulged my confectionery craving. How flourless cake is made without animal ingredients is mystifying, but Madeleine's creates magic with this delicately crusted, truffle-like choco-bomb. Perhaps a bit of culinary creativity rubbed off on us; we mixed the two desserts, adding the homemade, rum-hinted ice "cream" from the Bananas Foster Split to make the cake à la mode. The combination was simply sublime.

Everyday fare this is not; the portions at Madeleine Bistro are ample, rich and filling. The French-inspired menu is testament to a talented chef with a lively imagination, so don't expect to find fat-free granola wrapped in kale here. Madeleine's is a destination restaurant made for truly special occasions—or a really great vegan date.

Did I mention they have a brunch? We'll be back. **VN**

Matt Flanzer is a writer for print and screen in Los Angeles. Look for him riding his bike around Venice or online at flanzer.com/matt

DestinationDetails

Madeleine Bistro

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