

WINE

A TASTE OF GOOD LIVING

MARCH 2008

WIN

A BUBBLY MAGNUM

See inside
for details

Winston Churchill

Politician, soldier,
raconteur, drinker

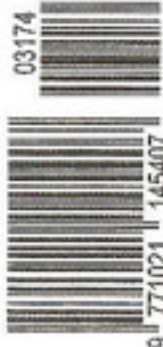
**Sadie
Palladius
2006
rated**

**Merlot
2005:**
the best vintage
in ages

**Is BYO on
its way out?**

**Make a
great salad
Niçoise**

RESTAURANTS REVIEWED: Bizerca, Fabulous, Haute Cabrière, Le Soufflé, Soulsa





Above: Smoked Loch Duart salmon.

with the chicken and the Springfield Special Cuvée Sauvignon Blanc with the salmon.

The menu also offers interesting vegetarian offerings like vegetable roulade and organic quinoa (not normally found on restaurant menus) which would make optimum nutrition expert Patrick Holford a happy man...

We ended up sharing a home-made ice-cream selection of coffee, chocolate and nut. Delicious.

Average three-course meal: R185.

BIZERCA BISTRO

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BY JOHN MAYTHAM

Let me tell you a van der Merwe story. 17 years ago, a starry-eyed young South African Cyrillia v.d. Merwe left these shores for the bright lights and wide boulevards of Paris. There she met and fell in love with a dashing Gallic chef, Laurent Deslandes. Ten years ago, they uprooted and headed for the Antipodes. For five years they ran a bistro on Victoria Street in Sydney, and then

the birth of their first child prompted a move to the bucolic tranquility of the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney where they ran the very highly-rated Collitt's Inn Guesthouse and Restaurant. (Deslandes was awarded Two Chefs Hats for his work in the kitchen.)

Late in 2007, they came to South Africa and decided to stay and open a restaurant on Cape Town's foreshore. The plan caused much consternation amongst friends and family – the most asked question was 'Are you crazy?' – which gave them name for their restaurant – Bizerca Bistro.

It's a modern-looking place – concrete-screed floor, exposed air-conditioning ducts, an entrance door akin to the roller door of a suburban garage – but there are splashes of colour and stylish touches that make for an open, airy and welcoming space. There's a bar at one end at which you can enjoy an aperitif and look through glass windows into the kitchen.

And from that kitchen emerges bistro food that is disarmingly simple and palate-friendly, food that Cyrillia describes as coming from a gentle and down-to-earth approach.

More than 2000 years ago, Ovid wrote 'true art is to conceal art', by which he meant that the true artist doesn't show off technique. Deslandes' 'simple' food conceals the great ability and experience needed to make it appear so effortless. Take the mushroom a la Greque starter for example. Button mushrooms poached in white wine and lemon juice and served with rosa tomatoes, marinated olives, goat's cheese and wild rocket and chives. It's a dish that only works if all the ingredients are top class, if the



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mushrooms are poached just long enough to pick up flavours without losing texture, and if the vinaigrette binds all the separate tastes together. This worked sublimely well. As did the other starter, homemade free-range duck sausage with Asian salad. The richness of the sausage is wonderfully counterbalanced by the tartness of the finely-julienned vegetables and dressing that made up the salad. This is perhaps the most obvious example of how a decade in Australia grafted Pacific Rim sensibilities onto the rootstock of French country cooking with which Deslandes grew up.

Our mains were equally good. De-boned braised farm pig trotter served with a mixed mushroom and pig ear salad (a newer version of the constantly-changing menu has replaced the salad accompaniment with seared scallops and truffle oil) and a perfectly simple, and simply perfect, roasted Karoo leg of lamb – two large slices of lamb, served rarer than is normally the case, and accompanied by mashed potato and roasted vegetables. This is traditional Sunday lunch fare raised to the level of art.

How does chicken & pistachio ballotine with white polenta (pap by a posher name) asparagus, tomato and mango salad sound? Or braised beef shin with gremolata, carrots, green bean and mash potato?



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Above: Chicken pistachio ballotine with white polenta, asparagus, tomato and mango salad

It's a rare experience for me in a Cape Town restaurant to enjoy three courses equally much, so it felt like a bonus that the vanilla and lemon panacotta with fresh berries and lime macaroon, and the Belgian chocolate tart with homemade vanilla bean ice cream finished off the meal on such a high note. And next time we'll have the Granny Smith apple sorbet with Calvados and apple tart tatin with crème fraîche ice cream.

For the moment, while stocks last, there are some intriguing Australian and French wines on the list alongside the smart selection of locals. How about a

Mount Canabolas Riesling (R185) with the first course, 2006 Bouchard Finlayson Pinot Noir (R220) with the main course and, if there is a designated driver, the Elliot Rocke Estate Ice Wine with dessert?

Cyrellia and Laurent's friends might well have thought they were 'bizerca' to give up achieved success in Australia for uncertain prospects in South Africa. My view is that we Capetonians would be crazy not to make sure they stay here by packing the bistro to its steel-beamed rafters.

Average cost of three-course meal without wine: R140

CLASSIC CONTEMPORARY	
FOOD:	Consistently accessible and delicious
AMBIENCE:	Cool, fresh, modern
SERVICE:	Top marks to Cyrellia and her FOH team
WINELIST:	Internationally eclectic, generally well-priced
VALUE:	No better food at this price in the city