



Engaging service and attractive specials make West Plains Bistro worth a visit.

JOHN RENNISON, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Satisfying high expectations

BY JOHN KERNAGHAN

We have yet to discover the perfect restaurant, but some just get it — which is why a solo visit to West Plains Bistro is all that is needed to fairly review it.

Visits in the restaurant's rookie year produced some small disappointments but staff aced all the tests on a visit this week.

First, the footprint is manageable, creating a generally busy and warm setting with four dark banquettes, seven tables and one large elevated table near the bar.

Management also observes what should be rule No. 1 of all worthy establishments, good fresh bread. In this case, soft mini-baguettes in white paper bags are served with butter.

from the oven and served with balls of soft butter and olive tapenade.

The evening's specials were attractive on a raw night, starting with roasted red pepper soup. The \$7 starter scored an immediate impression with the trick of feeling thick and lush but so light it was just shy of foam. To achieve that and keep the dense flavour is no small feat.

That set up high expectations for the special of scallops and sweet pea risotto (\$26). Three huge scallops were masters of the species and given due respect in the kitchen.

The biggest, which was about five centimetres thick, could have been mishandled, undercooked on the inside or scorched on the outside. But the result for all three of various sizes was a fine, light-brown exterior

and almost opaque centre.

The trio was taken to another level via a silky bierre blanc tarragon sauce that was slightly sweet.

The main element sat on sweet pea risotto that was excellent, with slightly nutty and fat grains from long simmering in a combination of stock, white wine and thyme.

The vegetable component rang up true notes, too, with a collection of carefully picked and delicate green beans, a chunk of white heirloom beet and some cherry tomatoes, a crispy, tart and lush triumvirate.

Dutch apple torte (\$9) was heavy on thin-sliced apple and blessedly shy of gluey sauce and a thick, buttery pastry.

West Plains Bistro also impressed with informed and engaging service.

In some spots across southern Ontario this \$75 meal with wine and tip would have nudged close to \$100.

BRIEFLY: Michael Maddison, executive chef of Latitude in Oakville, closed out 2010 in fine form as part of a Golden Horseshoe culinary team that won bronze at the Villeroy & Boch Culinary World Cup in Luxembourg. He was one of three chefs who spent four days preparing a series of meals.

Team members paid their own way with Maddison getting help from a Latitude fundraiser. He hopes to be part of Canada's team at the next Culinary Olympics.

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West Plains Bistro

133 Plains Rd.
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The look: Small and stylish
The feel: Warm, relaxed

What you'll pay: Lunch items run from French toast for \$10 and Eggs Benedict at \$12 to sandwiches such as grilled vegetarian wrap for \$12 and bistro steak baguette for \$14 as well as entrees such as mushroom crepes for \$12 and halibut and frites for \$18. An early-bird menu from 4 to 5:30 p.m. offers a dinner such as soup or salad and Atlantic salmon filet or pan-seared tenderloin with dessert for \$30. Appetizers include beef croquettes for \$8, Moroccan shrimp for \$13 and crab cakes for \$15 and are half-price between 3 and 5 p.m. Dinner plates start at \$14 for house sirloin sliders, chicken supreme is \$23 and Merlot-braised lamb shanks are \$25. Prices top out at \$34 for the six-ounce, bacon-wrapped filet mignon with pepper sauce. Desserts including sticky caramel pudding and tropical lime pie are \$9.
Hours: 10:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 10:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Wheelchair accessible.

Time to get personal with your decor

Ready for your home to look oh-so 2011? It shouldn't be too hard because trends are all about making it more optimistic, functional and personal.

To help us discover what's new on the home front, we talked to a few internationally recognized tastemakers.

New York interior designer Vicente Wolf travels the world, linking the places he explores with the spaces he creates.

"People aren't redoing rooms every four years anymore," says Wolf, who wrote and photographed the instructive new book *Lifting the Curtain on Design* (Monacelli Press, \$60). "People care about their personal point of view and what comforts them."

Sarah Richardson is a Toronto designer who details home renovations room by room in Sarah's House on HGTV. She bounces ideas off sidekick Tommy Smythe, who accompanies her on jaunts to antique stores and salvage shops. "Going for vintage ups the ante on what you can achieve," Richardson says. "If you don't mind the challenge of never knowing what you might find, the quality is typically better, and prices are lower than what you'd get new."

Roni Jaco of Kansas City travels the globe looking for ethically made handicrafts and textiles for her online store, the Loaded Trunk (loadedtrunk.com).

"Although we're connected technologically, we've become so disconnected from where things for our home come from," Jaco says. "Just as we've become more engaged in where our food comes from, we're starting again to wonder about the people who make things for our home. We want to know their stories."

Sizing up salon style
We're referring to a method of hanging art, not hair salon art. "Salon" is the French term for drawing room.

Instead of restraining yourself to a gallery wall with co-ordinating frames, there's something delightful about a confident floor-to-ceiling mishmash. It makes a room feel lived in and personal.

Lightening up the kitchen

A streamlined kitchen will never go out of style. "A kitchen is like an operating room: You want it to be clear and bright so you can see all the details," Wolf says. In addition to good task lighting, Wolf prefers white cabinets or lighter woods.

Toning down hardwoods

Although espresso and dark hardwood floors have been the norm for years, we're noticing a lighter look. "You're starting to see two-tone and grey finishes," Wolf says. "Like driftwood."

Go in' country

No, we're not talking 1980s geese in bonnets. We're seeing casual, toned-down finishes on furniture. "White wash instead of pure white," Richardson says, and well-worn woods versus exotic ones create a rustic elegance.

Thinking pink

The colour of 2011 is an optimistic pinkish red called Honeysuckle, according to Pantone, which provides colour services for design professionals in interiors, fashion and graphics.

Digging gold

We'll be seeing more golden upholstery fabrics and furniture finishes, even a little brass.

Reimagining materials

The "who knew?" factor of up-cycled house goods will be even bigger in 2011, according to those at Etsy, the online marketplace for handicrafts. Look for plastic bags turned into bowls and bike parts into clocks. Richardson is seeing more recycled-content counters.

Let it slide

Sliding doors have had a stylish makeover, thanks to offices and hip urban lofts. More barn-style wooden doors will make their way to basements, closets and bedrooms. They can save space or conceal a large area for privacy. L

Canadian company KNC makes the wall-mounted Crowder Round Track with exposed wheels and hardware (kncrowder.com).

Healthy mixup

Confidently pair Grandma's chairs with a modern chandelier to create our own personal style.

McClatchy-Tribune Newspapers

The perfect trim job

How to make mitre joints like a pro



STEVE MAXWELL

If you're in the middle of a do-it-yourself home renovation, it probably involves your basement. Finishing basements is the No. 1 winter DIY project and every basement reno from St. John's to Victoria involves window and door trim of one kind or another.

Mitre joints create the 90 degree corner connections between pieces of trim, and cutting tight mitres is a key DIY skill because the results are on view.

Tip 1: The chop saw or mitre saw is the power tool of choice but as useful as they are, they're only the start. You also need good mitering technique, including how you mark your trim.

Tip 2: Forget the pencil because a pencil line is too thick. A little nick in the wood from a utility knife is better. But depending on your situation, marking trim probably isn't your first step.

Tip 3: Postpone the second mitre cut. Typical mitres are made in pairs, each half cut to 45 degree and together forming a corner. As you cut 45 degrees on mating pieces, leave at least one piece of trim an inch or so longer than needed. This allows additional wood for cutting again if the joint doesn't fit right the first time. You'll cut that piece of trim to final length when you do the last 45 degree cut on the other end.

How does your first mitre joint look as you hold it up to a door or window frame? If there's a gap along one side, tweak your chop saw angle a tiny bit from 45 degrees, then cut the end of at least one piece of trim again before bringing the wood together for another try.

A shim of wood or cardboard behind one edge of the trim to angle it outward as it sits on the



STEVE MAXWELL, SPECIAL TO THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

A chop saw or mitresaw is the best tool for cutting trim, moulding and some kinds of flooring. Follow Steve Maxwell's tips to ease the job.

saw is an accurate way to tweak mitres rather than swivelling the chop saw table a degree or two.

Tip 4: Check with a test cut. As you place trim on the saw, take the smallest of initial cuts on the waste side of your knife mark, to show exactly where the blade is cutting. Raise the blade, move the wood over slightly, then take another little nibble cut. Continue to nibble and move your way up to the mark.

Only when the edge of the cut lands in the middle of your knife mark do you chop down all the way.

I recommend a simple mitre saw spinning a 10-inch diameter blade for small to medium-sized trim

work. My favourite small model is the DeWalt DW713 fitted with an accessory LED lighting system. This light casts a shadow off the spinning blade that shows exactly where teeth will touch.

The light also illuminates the cut area to see and mitre accurately. Don't pass judgment on your mitre cutting skills until you've tackled at least 50.

Even with the right techniques, it takes experience to master the skill. Check out my video at steve-maxwell.ca/mitre on mitering.

Steve Maxwell is a syndicated home improvement and woodworking columnist. SteveMaxwell.ca