

TABLE TALK



MARTIN MEURSAULT

Bakery with a homey French touch

According to an article in the December 1998 issue of Restaurants USA, the latest hot concept restaurant is combining a restaurant with a bakery. I guess that means that the rest of the world is catching up with us.

A number of our bakeries have small cafes which serve snacks and sandwiches, and we have some full-service restaurants in which bakeries play a prominent role. Il Fornajo in Carmel — now four years old — is the largest and most prominent example. Fifi's in Pacific Grove is another, a great favorite of locals and one which dates back to the early 1980s.

The longest-lived, however, is the Patisserie Boissierie in Carmel. Founded in 1961 by Elaine and Pierre Boissierie, this small cafe is now one of the oldest restaurants in Carmel.

When the Boissieries were killed in a car accident in 1987, their daughters — who had not previously been involved in the business — had to take over. After a couple of years of struggling, the girls sold the business to a friend, Magdy Ibrahim.

Ibrahim, born in Cairo, moved here in 1980. Though his degree is in international policy (from the Monterey Institute of International Studies), he gained substantial experience in the hospitality industry in various jobs he held while working his way through school. In fact, he managed the Fish House on the Park in Carmel and was director of catering at the Monterey Plaza when it opened.

Ibrahim doesn't really see himself as an owner. His philosophy is that he is a caretaker, entrusted with the task of caring for a business on behalf of the people who established it. Patisserie's co-owner, Lynn Wood — who has been involved in the business for 10 years, but only recently became a partner — feels the same way.

DINING

Patisserie Boissierie Cafe
Mission between Ocean and Seventh, Carmel
624-5008
Open daily for lunch 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.; for dinner Wednesday through Sunday from 5:30-9 p.m.
Credit cards: V, MC, AmEx
Wine and beer
Wheelchair access: yes

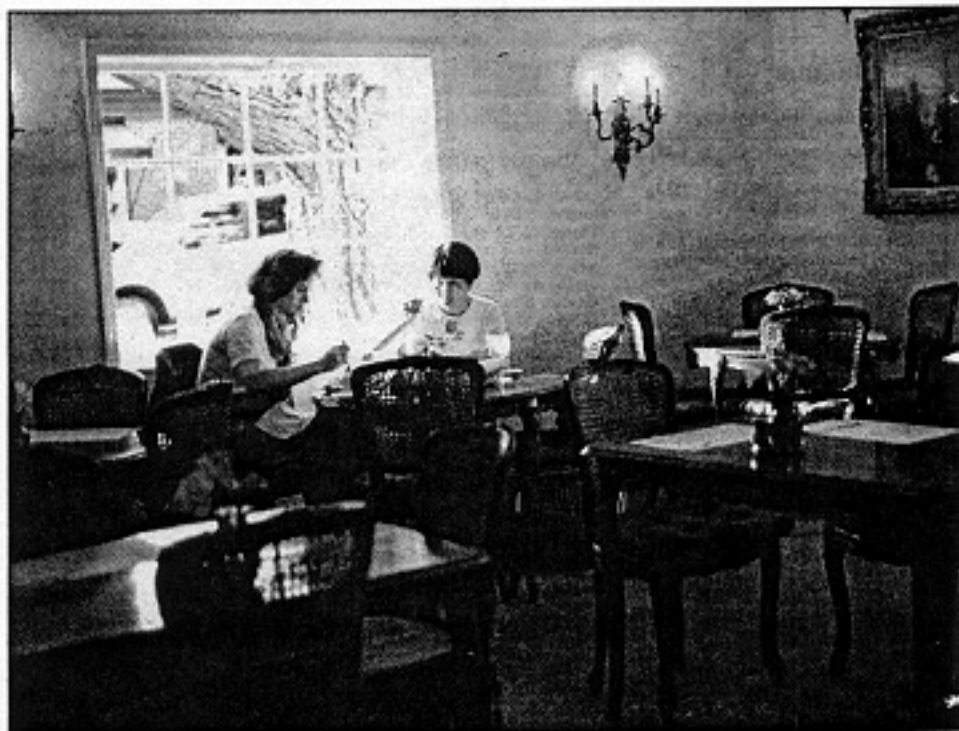
The Bottom Line: This durable bakery and dining house provides a pleasant venue for sampling nicely prepared French-inspired food and wonderful pastries.

Thus, the Patisserie has changed little and slowly over the years, perhaps in the way the Boissieries themselves might have wished the place to evolve.

The interior looks much as it did decades ago. There's a large bakery case to your right as you walk in. The main dining is pale yellow — with beamed ceilings, candelabra chandeliers, a fireplace, and homey French provincial tables. Fresh rosebuds decorate every table. A small, glassed-in terrace room in back offers patio seating at cast-iron and glass tables.

Our group found the atmosphere remarkably pleasing, almost homey — with attentive and professional service by head waiter Dane Williamson. Within moments of sitting down, we were served warm baguettes, with a choice of butter and black olive tapanade — the latter a flavorful paste made with plenty of garlic, capers, anchovies and olive oil.

For an appetizer, the baked brie (\$4.25) made a hit. This is a wedge of brie, battered, baked in the oven, and served with a sweet red onion marmalade — the onions sauteed with honey, balsamic vinegar and herbs. My daughter and I liked the stuffed mushrooms (\$4.95),



THE LONGEST-LIVED bakery/cafe in the area is the Patisserie Boissierie in Carmel. Founded in 1961, this small cafe has an atmosphere that is remarkably pleasing, almost homey, with attentive and professional service, French-inspired food and wonderful pastries.

though my wife thought them a bit salty — the mushroom caps cooked to order, nice and moist, stuffed with a mixture of asiago, spinach and garlic,

and topped with Swiss cheese. The classic French onion soup (\$4.75, with sherry \$5.25) has been a staple here since 1961, and it is very popular. I

frankly preferred the soup de jour (\$3.50) which, on the day of our visit, was a very light

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cream of mushroom — built on a base of homemade chicken stock, with lots of button mushrooms, herbs, a bit of milk and just a touch of cream.

Other starters include artichoke vinaigrette (\$4.75), roasted chicken and spinach salad (\$8.95), harvest salad with caramelized walnuts (\$7.95), and Caesar salad (\$5.95).

The kitchen offers three sandwiches on the dinner menu (\$8.95-\$9.95) and more on the lunch menu (\$6.95-\$8.95). We skipped these and went right to the main event.

My daughter had the sauteed prawns on angel hair pasta (\$14.95). This was served with plenty of prawns, the pasta bathed in a light white wine garlic cream sauce, mixed with a flavorful seafood stock. Like all the pastas, this came with a roasted garlic bulb, the cloves nutty and slightly sweet.

Other pasta choices include penne with spinach, tomatoes and mushrooms (\$9.95), and penne with bolognese sauce (\$10.95).

My wife had the salmon baked in parchment (\$14.95). This is a lovely dish when well-prepared, and the kitchen here does a fine job. The parchment pouch comes to the table, the waiter slices it open, and clouds of aroma tantalize your nostrils.

The salmon filet is combined with a julienne of vegetables, fresh artichoke quarters and lemon-basil butter — all of which combine to produce a wonderful bouquet.

I had the coquille St.

Jacques (\$14.95) — a classic dish, served in a large flat shell. This is a rich creation, the shrimp and scallops bathed in a seafood cream sauce, topped with plenty of Swiss Gruyere and baked in the oven. Other entrees include a vegetarian quiche (\$9.95), shepherd's pie (\$10.95), chicken pot pie (\$11.95), filo pastry stuffed with vegetables and feta cheese (\$11.95), and nightly seafood and meat specials.

The wine list offers a couple of dozen choices, with a nice cross-section of California and French labels, ranging from Lurton French Merlot (\$14) to Scharffenberger Mendocino Brut (\$29). Wine by the glass is also available (\$3.50-\$5.50).

Desserts — pastries cooked in the bakery above the restaurant — continue to be a major part of the bottom line. Choices rotate regularly, but typical selections include such things as chocolate eclair, baba au rhum, chocolate caramel walnut torte, and capuccino cake (each \$4.25 in the restaurant; \$3.25 to go).

Typically, diners find it hard to resist these temptations, and we saw many patrons walking out carrying little white, ribbon-wrapped pastry boxes filled with sweet goodies.

(Martin Meursault (a pen name) is a local dining enthusiast. He invites your comments and suggestions, in care of Table Talk, The Herald, P.O. Box 271, Monterey 93942.)