

Restaurant review: Tableau offers quality in a neighbourhood-style eatery

By Mia Stainsby July 27, 2011



I adore French bistro food when it's done well. It abhors la-di-dah plating and saves the drama for the palate.

And that's what I love about Tableau, the remake of the Voya restaurant at the boutique Loden Hotel — it's French bistro done well enough to make me hungry at the thought of it. I was last at Voya to interview actor Sam Neill last year, who was in town to promote his New Zealand winery at the International Wine Festival. It was all polished stonework, plush leather, and twinkling chandeliers back then.

Well, what a difference a year makes. The room is now smaller, segmented into intimate areas with warm woods, brass railings, and blow-up

photos of Marilyn Monroe. There's a peek-a-boo to the kitchen and parts of the former expansive space are now private dining or meeting rooms.

"We've repositioned into a neighbourhood restaurant," says Marc Andre Choquette. Well, he's certainly exciting his neighbours, but the food and the buzz it brings has a longer reach. I think anyone who tries the Tuesday dinner special — chicken Riesling — becomes a hostage, albeit willingly.

That chicken is part of a regular \$20 special running each day of the week — a vegetarian plate on Mondays, the chicken Riesling on Tuesdays, duck confit on Wednesdays, lamb shank on Thursdays, halibut Cobb salad on Fridays and short ribs on Saturday.

Tableau is yet another restaurant shaped by the recession which slapped high-ends around. Many of the mains at Tableau are priced below a come-hither \$20 benchmark. Choquette's cooking, up until now, was fine dining food and thus, less accessible. I gotta say, that recession has slapped the industry around but it has resulted in so many great-value restaurants.

Choquette was Rob Feenie's right-hand man at Lumiere before moving on to Voya. Before that, he had cooked at West, Sooke Harbour House, and Bishop's.

The native Montrealer (where he worked at Le Mitoyen under Richard Bastien, père to Jeremie Bastien, former chef at Vancouver's Boneta) came to Vancouver in 1998. "I had never tasted Dungeness crab before moving here. It was an epiphany," he says.

The food is, for the most part, excellent bistro fare. The only criticism is of a dish I didn't even try, I only saw it at the next table. It was the broccoli, cheddar and brown rice casserole and it looked like it had time-travelled from a 1970s hippie kitchen.

Much more appealing, however, were these dishes: A goat cheese souffle salad, a special one evening, featured a lovely stand-alone souffle amid a fresh green salad. A \$12 clam bouillabaisse comes with a generous helping of clams, lovely broth and toasted baguettes with aioli. Rabbit terrine is lifted with rhubarb and red currant jam.



You could very well overlook the flatbreads, written into a corner of the menu. I wouldn't. They're like French pizzas.

A delicious and juicy sirloin steak is dangerously teamed with frites. Turns out these frites weren't lethal – my pal and I didn't find a spot of oil on the brown paper it sat in.

Lamb chops (four of them on a plate) were melt-in-the-mouth. Steelhead trout was served atop a mound of quinoa and a splash of lemon brown butter sauce.

No danger of developing dessert addictions (like at Cafe Regalade). I tried a homey rhubarb cake with ice cream and caramel sauce, a mom kind of cake. The pastry for a lemon tart was hard and I worried about flying debris upon plunging my fork into it.

Tableau is casual enough to stop in after work for a drink at the bar, and soon enough, to order something for dinner from the takeout menu.

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At a glance

Tableau

1177 Melville St., 604-639-8692.

Info: www.tableubarbistro.com.

Open: Lunch, Monday to Friday; dinner, Monday to Saturday; brunch, Sunday.

Overall: 4/5 stars

Food: 4/5 stars

Ambience: 4/5 stars

Service: 3.5/5 stars

Price: \$\$

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