

# → TASTE OF THE TOWN

AMERICAN \* CALIFORNIA CUISINE \* CONTINENTAL \* CHINESE \* FRENCH \* FRENCH-MEDITERRANEAN \* FUSION \* GREEK \* INDIAN \* ITALIAN \* JAPANESE \* KOREAN \* MEDITERRANEAN \* MEXICAN \* NEW AMERICAN \* PAN-ASIAN \* POLYNESIAN \* PROVENCAL \* PUB/BREWERY \* SEAFOOD \* SPANISH \* STEAK AND SEAFOOD \* SUSHI \* SWISS \* THAI



KEN SADO

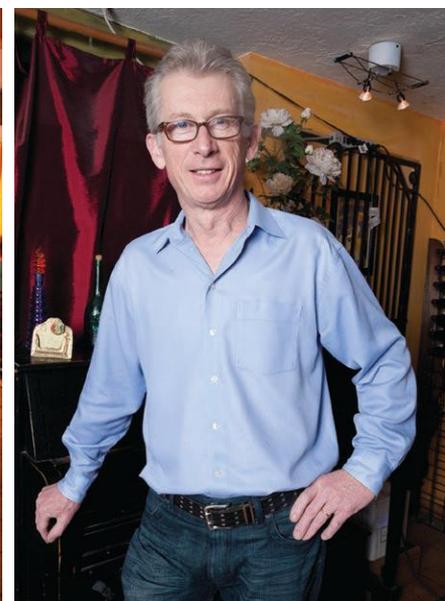
▲ BACK BAY BISTRO



LAMB CHOPS SERVED WITH SAUSAGES AND POMMES FRITES



AN AUTHENTIC TOUCH OF SOUTHERN FRANCE IN AN INVITING BISTRO SETTING



OWNER JACQUES DE QUILLIEN

## French Flair

Pescadou brings the flavors and character of southern France to Southern California.

BY JASON SANFORD | PHOTOS BY JODY TIONGCO

UPON WALKING INTO PESCADOU, PATRONS ARE immediately greeted by two things: a romantic and casual dining room that evokes the warmth and welcome of France's southern region, and the equally warm welcome of the owner's "bonsoir" as you're walked to your choice of table, booth or sidewalk seat.

With Bordeaux bottles atop the tables, customers enjoy their conversations with each other (and Jacques de Quillien, the amiable owner) in French, English and a scrabbled mixture of both, in between bites.

The Newport bistro exhibits all the qualities of its owner: inviting, genuine and full of character—all this before the food even hits the table.

"We try to make it feel comfy and cozy," Jacques explains. "Customers like our French ambiance, which comes from our posters, mirrors, colors and traditional bistro blackboard."

The bistro blackboard is a special menu scrawled in chalk, describing the always-changing prix fixe offerings of fish, chicken and red meats. The tableau harkens to the French bistro tradition of having a flexible, evolving menu with specials that are sold—and that often sell out—as part of a multi-course dining experience.

The opening dish of the evening's meal is Prince Edward Island mussels, prepared with garlic, herbs

de Provence, tomato and a touch of Pernod—the fragrant, anise-flavored liqueur usually reserved for the eponymous cocktail. The outstanding freshness and quality of the mollusks is only enhanced by a light and complex combination of flavors, from the garlic's zing to the tomato's sweetness, and that mysterious little wisp of anise. It is no big surprise that Jacques says the mussels are a crowd-pleaser, and the crisp, French bread is perfect for sopping up the last few Provençal herbs and diced tomatoes.

An endive salad is brought out in anticipation of the main course, topped with blue cheese, beets, walnuts and pear, and decorated with mache, a lettuce native to France. The salad masterfully mixes nutty, sweet and savory with the just-picked-a-minute-ago crunch of the endive.

A plate anchored by a set of hearty New Zealand lamb chops and grilled lamb sausages served over ratatouille with a side of pommes frites (yes, french fries) is brought out with a smattering of red wine reduction and harissa, a piquant chili paste that is perfect for dipping. The outside of the lamb chops is seasoned nicely and crusted, while the inside remains succulent and moist. The sausages have a smoky flavor and grilling them brings that out, in addition to creat-

ing the crunchy snap that makes each bite so satisfying. The ratatouille is a nice assortment of veggies, prepared to perfection. And the fries, more than just a simple namesake side, are of the handmade shoestring-thin variety and cooked thoroughly (crispy but not burnt), which is a treat by itself.

Dessert comes in the form of the day's fresh lemon tart and a martini glass full of silky chocolate mousse. The mousse is light and carries a slight flavor of orange along with it, which puts the velvety chocolate in tasty company. The tart is made in a soft, flaky crust and the fresh flavor of the fruit is immediately apparent, tactfully balancing sweetness with tartness.

Jacques has created a unique French dining experience with remarkable precision and detail, managing to make it a romantic destination and a casual, approachable dinner bistro all at once. From the largely French wine selection to the special regional menu prepared each year during the Tour de France, nothing in Pescadou feels stuffy or saccharine. To the contrary, it is very welcoming, friendly and genuine, which is exactly what the man from Loire Valley was aiming for.

"We do everything from scratch here," he says. "We want (our customers) to enjoy authentic French food. People don't want halfway French." \*

3325 Newport Blvd.; 949-675-6990; pescadoubistro.com

Hours: Tuesday – Sunday, from 5:30 p.m. Price: \$5 to \$29

Tip: Parking is available in a covered lot at the intersection of Finley and Newport Boulevard, which is right before Pescadou. There is also plentiful metered street parking, which is free after 6 p.m.