

Bistro 107: A Family Affair

by Mary Ann Hester

When you are the executive chef at one of the top ten bistros in the country, leaving to start your own restaurant must feel a bit a bit like jumping off a cliff. Chef Polo Mojarro tried to leave Palm Beach's legendary bar and bistro Ta-boó once, but they lured him back with a virtually blank check. Luckily, he eventually took a leap of faith and landed firmly in Greer.

Chef Polo is the American dream realized. At sixteen, he came from Mexico – where his family was in the restaurant business – to work in the fields of the California wine country. Then he learned more about culinary arts in restaurants and country clubs in Chicago, New Jersey, Texas and Florida. After being at Ta-boó on Worth Avenue for fourteen years, Chef Polo says, “From there you have to have your own restaurant.”

With friends in Landrum, Chef Polo and his family were familiar with the Greer area and after looking at hundreds of buildings, they settled on one at 107 South Main in downtown. Knowing what a difficult time he had leaving Ta-boó the first time, Chef Polo kept his day job, bought the building in Greer and then drove between Greer and Palm Beach for months while he was setting up Bistro 107. “I like the simple life,” he says, “and I was looking for an area that I could be with my family. Greer is a good place to raise kids with its small-town feel and friendly atmosphere.”

Bistro 107 is a family affair – Polo's wife Debra is the general manager. She has been the manager of some very well-known country clubs, and he used to work for her. One of his best stories (that she likes to tell!) is how they met and got married. They had a fight and he left her one morning with the accented phrase, “Will you be mad at me tonight?” which she interpreted as, “Will you marry me tonight?” So she spent the entire day making all the arrangements, and when he showed up at her apartment, everyone from friends to the minister was there. The ceremony took place, and the Italian and the Mexican have developed a personal and professional relationship that works for both of them. Division of labor seems to help, as she rules all the wooden floors (the dining portion of the restaurant) and he rules the tile ones (the kitchen).

Being in a small town does not mean that Chef Polo underestimates the palates of his customers. With dishes from Asia, Italy, France and the Caribbean, he offers what he calls “fine dining for families at affordable prices...you get a great value here...no one buys more ‘to go’ boxes than I do!” He wanted to establish a comfortable atmosphere, and he has done that: the bar is warm and inviting with seats that encourage lingering. The tables are cozy and suitable for dates or families. Soft music from the grand piano wafts through the entire place Thursday through Saturday evenings. It is truly one of those places where you can have an intimate dinner for two or adults in the family can have an elegant meal while the kids have a great pizza.

The menu for lunch is extensive, but locals have made the Steak Salad a favorite. Other popular dishes include the Crispy Duck Spring Rolls and the Linguine Margherita. With wi-fi and outstanding food, Bistro 107 is a popular place for business meetings. For dinner, the Foie Gras

or Tropical Crabcakes are popular starters, and the Veal Osso Bucco or Sautéed Chicken Piccata are favorites. If you make it to dessert, then try the Tropical Cheesecake or the Chocolate Decadence. Bistro 107 has an extensive wine list with many selections by the glass and Polo's own labeled bottles.

Chef Polo is adamant about the freshness of his food and the cleanliness of his restaurant. He does not have a freezer since he does not offer customers meat or fish that has been frozen. He cuts and preps a lot of the food himself and is a self-proclaimed hands-on overseer when he deigns to let someone else do it. As owner and chef, you would expect him to oversee the cleaning, but he does it himself in order to guarantee his restaurant is spotless. He does not go home till everything is the way it should be "even if that means 3:00 in the morning."

This "family" business acumen has also passed down to the next generation – daughter Alexa and son Sebastian also have duties. Sebastian is truly a chef-in-training. Chef Polo says, "He sometimes teaches our new staff about sauces and is very creative himself with ideas for new dishes."

Greer is definitely becoming a destination dining spot, and Bistro 107 has added to its allure. If you want to take the family or a date or just friends to a unique and comfortable place with great food, then try Bistro 107. SCM

Getting There

Bistro 107 is located at 107 South Main Street in downtown Greer. The number for reservations (suggested on the weekend) or directions is 864-879-1107. The restaurant is open for lunch Monday through Thursday and for dinner Monday-Saturday. For more information, visit www.bistro107.com.

Sample Menu

Appetizer Foie Gras

Whitetogue Goose liver Foie Gras, Grade A sautéed with roasted shallots and Madeira demi-glace served with risotto and goat cheese poached pear brulee.

Entrée Coconut Chicken

Coconut and Panko crusted breast of chicken topped with walnuts and apples in maple citrus glaze, served with basmati rice and julienne vegetables.

Dessert Chocolate Decadence

A rich chocolate cake with a soft truffle center, served with vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce.

Exclusive Web Content: Recipes from Bistro 107

Shrimp and Scallops

with fresh herb risotto grilled asparagus and a lemon caper tarragon cream sauce

Serving size: 6

Shrimp and Scallops:

18- U-10 Shrimp

18- U-10 Scallops
6 Skewers (soked in water)

Instructions:

Take 3 shrimp and 3 scallops and assemble them in alternating order. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Then grill until lightly cooked.

Asparigus:

36- Asparagus spears (lightly grilled)

Risotto:

2 cups- risotto
1 quart- chicken or veg. stock
1 tbsp- garlic
1/4- white onion
1/2 cups- mushroom
1 tbsp- fresh herb
1 tbsp- extra virgin olive oil
1 tbsp- butter

Instructions:

Sautee garlic and onions in olive oil and butter. Then add mushrooms, fresh herbs and risotto. Lightly brown risotto. Divide stock into three parts, add first part to mixture and cover, then reduce. And repeat until all liquid is gone.

Sauce:

2 cups- heavy cream
1 tsp- shallots
4 oz- white wine
1 tbsp- lemon juice
1 tbsp- capers
1 tsp- fresh tarragon
1 tsp- butter

Instructions:

Sautee shallots in butter. Add white wine, lemon juice, capers and heavy cream, then reduce. Add tarragon at very end.