

Bistrot Brings French Flair to Seminyak

Nadia Yusuf | January 09, 2013



Seminyak's Bistrot offers a pleasant atmosphere without snobbery. (JG Photo/Nadia Yusuf)

On the busy streets of Kayu Aya by Seminyak Square in Bali, where a dynamic range of eateries await hungry passersby, Bistrot vintage cafe and lounge is a sure standout.

Designed by Moroccan-born interior decorator and co-owner Zohra Boukhari, the French-themed restaurant is beautifully conceptualized, with a dreamy vintage ambience and high

ceilings. The full-panel glass doors open up to an open dining area and a bar on the second floor.

It feels like an old European train station with its exposed brick walls, accented with framed pictures of past travels, antique lamps, 1920s clocks, upholstered French seats, aged Navajo woven carpets and wooden tables with artfully chipped paint and an aged finish. If Harry Potter ever had a French cousin, Bistrot would make the perfect setting for the film.

In reality, both owners — Boukhari and Blaise Samoy — had New York's Soho neighborhood in mind when putting the restaurant together, making for a captivating, meticulously detailed and well-executed concept. Yet the vibe is in keeping with the pace of Bali and is welcoming enough for the casually dressed. It offers a pleasant atmosphere, sans the pretentious snobbery present at other restaurants.

Bistrot opens at breakfast time, offering gourmet breakfast and brunch fare. With a dedication to sustainability, the owners put together a menu featuring organic, locally sourced ingredients from the farms of the Bedugul highlands in northern Bali. Other items, such as the meats and wine, are imported and carefully selected by chef Yehudi Van Meckeren and the restaurant team.

As I arrived a little early for dinner, the restaurant was still nearly empty and the hostess kindly offered me a table near the stairs on the second floor, with an opulent view of the main dining space below. The dinner menu offered various starters, tapas-style meals, salads, seafood, meat and poultry.

Items like foie gras terrine, fresh oysters and lobster bisque highlighted the appetizer section. Tapas options ranged from Spanish ham, goujonettes (deep fried fish fingers with tartar sauce and lemon) and calamari.

The seafood plates consisted of a variety of fresh fish, including fritto misto (an assortment of fried seafood) and black sole meuniere with brown butter, steamed potatoes and a mixed salad.

The waiter recommended the buffalo mozzarella to start and the Australian rib eye entrecote bearnaise with homemade fries and salad, washed down with a "Sweet Manhattan" martini.

The buffalo mozzarella came with slices of tomato on a bed of arugula drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with pepper. The mozzarella was delightfully creamy and the textures of the arugula and tomatoes played off each other nicely, giving the dish a slight bite and tartness.

The steak, although arriving slightly more done than the medium-well request, was still tasty and the buttery bearnaise sauce completed the dish, adding a velvety smooth finish that was savory and satisfying. The martini was concocted with a mix of whiskey, Angostura bitters and sweet vermouth, making for a delightful combination of sweet and tart.

Never one to be too full for sweets, I opted for the strawberry balsamic dessert, which came lightly seasoned with Szechuan pepper, a generous scoop of mascarpone cream cheese and a strawberry macaroon. A surprising touch to it all was that it was interlaced with bits of crushed macaroons hidden in each heaping spoonful, giving the tangy mix of mascarpone and strawberries a heartwarming crunch. The peppery kick at the end of the bite added a whole other dimension to the flavors. It was simultaneously creative and refreshing — a grandiose finale to a great meal.

Factoring in drinks, a full dinner meal at Bistrot will set you back about \$30 to \$40, but is well worth the food, experience and friendly service. Reservations are strongly recommended.

Bistrot

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