



Bistro LeRoux

An eclectic eatery on the east side of Lake George

THE DICTIONARY CALLS a bistro a small, affordable, neighborhood-y restaurant that serves unfussy, toothsome home-cooked fare. You want a big, brassy, beery kind of place? Zat zere ees une brasserie. A bistro is more modest. Small staff. Scribbled menu. Big on cassoulets and slow-cooked, garlicky, soul-satisfying stews, a good roast chicken, a couple of bright, snappy reds.

Does Bistro LeRoux at the intersection of Bay Road and State Route 149, outside Lake George, fit the bill?

Let's just say it fits it Adirondack-style, which is to say on its own cheerfully defiant, my-way-or-the-highway terms. I reckon, for example, no self-respecting bistro on the high road to Patee features a big-as-Bigfoot chain-saw-sculpted bear between the front door and parking lot. Or a line of Yankees, Knicks and Giants photos just above the bar. Or a Manhattan as robust and fragrant as a stand of balsam fir. But Bistro LeRoux is not on any rue to gay Patee. It's on a hell-bent-for-leather upstate truck route pointing to, variously, the forgotten hamlets of Hogtown, Furnace Hollow and Kattskill Bay, a road part speedway and part bucolic



southern Adirondack byway, which somehow fits the dual personality of Bistro LeRoux—fine dining destination and affordable, all-comers-welcome roadhouse—to a tee, and suits the young, engaging owner-chefs, Jacob Guay and his wife, Tiffany, just fine.

Regulars call them Jake and Tiff. They'll be Jake and Tiff to you, too, if you nab a high seat near the open kitchen when they're at their stations prepping orders, slicing, flipping, saucing, with the precision speed of tympanists. Jake, a '97 graduate of Fort Ann High and a Culinary Institute of America alum, hails from these very Adirondack borderlands. A skateboard rat, outdoorsy and forthcoming, he grew up knowing something about his Franco-American heritage—the restaurant is named for his French-Canadian grandparents, as well as for the fat-and-flour thickener that is the DNA of classic French cuisine. But fancy cooking? That wake-up call came with his first prep job at the Woodstock Inn in Vermont. More fine restaurant work followed, much of it out West in the great national parks, a grand tour proudly celebrated in the many framed pictures in the bistro's "Park Room" of a besotted Jake and Tiff in front of spouting geysers, looming alpine slopes, etc.

Tiff, a trim, alert, yellow-headed dynamo from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, was flipping pancakes in a breakfast line at Yellowstone when she met the young Adirondack prep chef. Together, they survived the gypsy apprenticeship that seems to be obligatory for chefs-in-training in kitchens great and small, commercial, corporate and private. Then, back home, a restaurant came up for sale, and a good location, too. The Guay family seized the chance. Time for the kids—married now—to gather up their laurels (the CIA degree, the mentions in *Vanity Fair* and *Ski Magazine*, the dinner Jake prepared at the James Beard House in Manhattan), get back to Warren County and let the folks and neighborhood in on the fun.

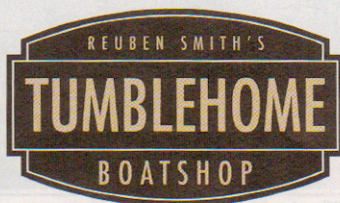
The walls of Bistro LeRoux now glow a sumptuous burgundy. In the "Culture Room," cognac posters, plus prints and paintings of street cafes and the Eiffel Tower, soft Parisian nights and Carib-

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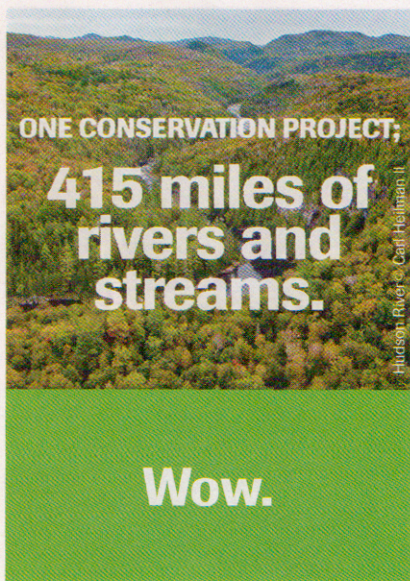
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DINING

bean jump-ups, furnish a jolly touch. Screwed to the wall is a massive roll of butcher paper—the source of your tablecloth. Strands of pin lights twinkle through the wine grapes garlanding the rafters.

But forget the atmospherics. Yes, there's a baked brie, an old-school onion soup au gratin, but most dishes here are about as French as my eighth-grade accent. Stuffed poblano peppers, ahi tuna sushi, a seitan raita, a seasonal pad Thai and a couple of all-American steaks—the fact is what makes this place a bistro has nothing at all to do with the strenuously eclectic menu and the elaborate presentations (which, if anything, err on the side of a fussiness a classic bistro would eschew) and much more to do with the down-home, welcoming spirit of the place and the chef-owners' common-sense insistence on affordability. Here the specials come with prices plainly stated—so no ugly gotcha moment with the bill. Jake told me he and Tiff resolved to offer half-size options on most of the entrees so patrons could enjoy more of a “V. I. P. dining experience.” This is a very good idea. You do feel you've eaten more classily, more richly, when you're not stuck with one big dopey sirloin and a baker—when you can drift around the world a little, chase a tart and snappy shaved beet salad with a half-portion of wild salmon or raita-slathered chicken slices on a mound of bulgur dressed with lime.

Some concessions to the growing numbers of North Country locavores would be politic and welcome—I, for one, would sooner eat my poblano stuffed with cheese from a local dairy farm and save the filling made from “TVP” (textured vegetable protein) for backpacking. But never mind. The Guays got game, and, in a sea of Warren County out-of-the-box pizza, burger and prime rib joints, considerable guts besides. 🌿

Bistro LeRoux (518-798-2982, www.bistroleroux.com), at 688 Route 149, in Lake George, is open Wednesday through Sunday.