

## **Diane and Beni Himmich pay tribute to Paris in their cafe and new bistro**

By J. Gwendolynne Berry | French, Restaurant reviews | July 13, 2011



Diane Boehm Himmich and her husband Beni Himmich at their new restaurant Paris in Town Le Cafe in Downtown at the Gardens.

Paris. It's her favorite city in the world. It's where she met her husband, where they fell in love. Now 15 years later, life has come full circle for Diane and Beni Himmich. The owners of Paris in Town Le Café have made a home in Palm Beach Gardens and this is the grand opening week of their second restaurant, Paris in Town Le Bistro, in Downtown at the Gardens.

It's a light, airy space modeled after a 1920s French bistro with copper tin ceilings and a zinc-topped wooden bar. A long red leather banquette runs along the dining room wall, looking out large windows to an outdoor patio. There are décor elements tied to the café, but with a decidedly more upscale feel.

To understand the heart and soul of this new bistro – and the hospitality philosophy of its owners – one must first visit the café, which anchors the southeast corner of U.S. 1 and PGA Boulevard. The café is like a little European vacation in the Florida sun. Wooden wine racks line the dining room wall behind a comfy red velvet banquette. A mix of French and English float through the space from the multilingual patrons and staff. Magazines and newspapers abound, beckoning diners to take an extra moment to sip on a warm, frothy cappuccino before heading back out to the trials of the day. The food is rustic, homey, delicious.

“There's a coziness and charm to it that envelops you,” says Diane Himmich. “It has an energy and people respond to it. That's what we hire and what we encourage. When you walk in the door, the palm trees disappear, the concrete disappears and you are in Paris. It's an escape in the middle of the day.”

How the couple arrived at this “Paris” in town is a story that started in 1996 at the Hollywood Canteen in Paris' Latin Quarter. Diane Boehm was a young American student at the Sorbonne. Beni Himmich, originally from Morocco, graduated from a French culinary school and then moved into restaurant management. He was the director of the Canteen when she walked in for a job.



The Soupe A L'Oignon Gratin at Paris in Town Le Cafe. \$6.95

They dated for a few months in France before she returned to the United States. He followed her to New York a year later. In 2000, the couple moved to Los Angeles and pursued different careers. Beni was a systems engineer for the U.S. branch of the French company Danone. Diane owned a charity auction house. They married in 2001.

“For a good seven years we were doing something totally different,” says Beni, “but always in the back of my mind I wanted to get back into the restaurant industry.”

The opportunity to return to their roots came in 2007. Diane’s parents, who live in Juno Beach, called to tell her about a cozy French bakery for sale in Palm Beach Gardens.

“It was the place. It was the right fit,” says Diane. “It was EFrench. That’s my husband’s culinary background, that’s the first language in our home. It was kismet.”

The couple took over Paris in Town (later adding ‘Le Café’) in 2007 but didn’t change much at first.

“The first year was discovery mode – we did a lot of on-the-job learning,” says Beni.

They worked every position in the restaurant and really got to know the business. The second year was focused on streamlining the kitchen and making it their own.

They expanded the menu from mostly baked goods to include sandwiches, salads, soups and crêpes. They introduced table service and focused on creating a warm and relaxing environment.

But just like the city they love, she and her husband are constantly moving forward. “[Paris] has such a wonderful history but it continues to put an emphasis on the exploration of all things new,” says Diane.

By the third year, they too were ready for something new. They wanted a place to complement the café, a place with a larger kitchen to accommodate lunch and dinner service. After shopping a variety of locations, the couple settled on a 2,500-square-foot storefront in Downtown at the Gardens, just next to the carousel.

Paris in Town Le Bistro will feature some popular café menu items plus a lot more. The dinner menu is a list of Beni’s favorite foods, French classics like steak au poivre, boeuf bourguignon and moules marinières.

“The idea of the bistro was born in the 1920s,” he says. “It was a small café on the corner where people would go to grab a bite to eat in their neighborhood. Something good, fun and homey.”

Beni says he particularly enjoys the hospitality part of the restaurant business, ” to be able to interact with people and bring them into a place where they can escape daily life.

“When you feel stressed and want to see us, the door will be open for you.”



### **CLASSIC MOULES MARINIERS**

As prepared at Paris in Town Le Bistro  
(Serves 4)

Prep and cook time: 15 minutes

3 pounds fresh Prince Edward Island mussels  
3 tablespoons butter  
4 shallots, sliced thin  
1/2 bunch flat leaf parsley, chopped  
1 cup dry white wine  
2 pinches ground black pepper  
1 teaspoon Pernod, pastis or other anise-flavored liqueur, optional  
Clean the mussels and rinse them in cold water.

Melt the butter in a large stock pot over low heat. Increase to high heat and add shallots, mussels and parsley. Add the white wine, pepper and Pernod and cook at high heat with the lid on. The steam will open up the mussels within 5 to 7 minutes. Once the mussels have opened, remove the pot from the heat.

Divide the mussels and remaining liquid between four shallow bowls. Remove any mussels that did not open. Garnish with more parsley, if desired. Serve with crusty French bread for dipping.



## **GOAT CHEESE AND RED PEPPER QUICHE**

*As prepared at Paris in Town Le Café and Le Bistro*

(Makes 1 quiche)

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 25 minutes

1 pte brisée or feuilletée (puff pastry dough), or 1 premade uncooked shell

7 ounces roasted red pepper (jarred is fine)

6 eggs

1 1/4 cup whole milk

1 cup half and half

4 pinches salt

2 pinches black pepper

1 pinch nutmeg

7 ounces goat cheese

4 1/4 ounces shredded Swiss cheese

Preheat the oven to 300°. Using a fork, poke holes all over the uncooked quiche shell.

Cook the quiche shell for 3 minutes and remove from oven. Set aside until needed.

Increase oven heat to 375°. If roasting your own red peppers, cut each pepper in half and removed inner seeds and veins. Brush the peppers with olive oil. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes or on a medium-high grill for 5 to 8 minutes until the skins are blackened and the insides soft. Remove from oven or grill and place in a paper bag to cool for 10 to 15 minutes. Peel outer skins of the peppers and dice.

Reduce oven heat to 320°. In a mixing bowl, mix eggs and add the milk and half and half. Add the salt, pepper and nutmeg.

Crumble goat cheese and place on the quiche shell along with the diced red pepper.

Pour the egg and milk mixture into the shell and sprinkle the Swiss cheese. Bake for 25 minutes at 320°. Remove from oven and let cool for 10 minutes before serving.

## **BASTILLE DAY MENU**

Paris in Town Le Bistro is serving a special prix fixe menu of French classics to celebrate Bastille Day Thursday night, July 14. The \$39.50 three-course dinner offers a glimpse of the bistro's Parisian inspirations.

Appetizers include Bisque de Homard au Cognac, lobster bisque, a charcuterie trio and terrine de foie gras au porto.

Entrees include Coquille Saint Jacques et Crevettes, Confit de Canard with pommes Landaises and grilled filet mignon

with or butter parsley sauce and frites. And for dessert, there's flourless Belgium chocolate fondant with crème anglaise, a mixed berries tart and other sweets.

**PARIS IN TOWN LE CAFE:**

Open daily for breakfast and lunch from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. (to 4 p.m. Sundays) at 11460 U.S. 1, North Palm Beach, on the corner of PGA Boulevard and U.S. 1.

Phone: (561) 626-6017 | [Directions, invite friends, more](#)

**PARIS IN TOWN LE BISTRO:**

Open for lunch and dinner Monday to Thursday from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m., to midnight on Friday and Saturday and to 10 p.m. on Sunday, at 11701 Lake Victoria Gardens (in Downtown at the Gardens) in Palm Beach Gardens.

Phone: (561) 622-1616 | [Directions, invite friends, more](#)