

ELAINE'S

FROM PAGE B1

Detroit Tunnel. Drive right out of the tunnel. At the first traffic light, turn right again. At the next traffic light, turn left onto Wyandotte Street and drive about four miles and look for Elaine's on your left. The understated store front with the name Elaine's in red, white and blue and simple wooden bench out front are spotted easily.

On a recent Saturday, Suzanne and Lynn Webb of Fenton reserved a table that also included their granddaughter, Taylor Webb, and friends Nancy and Wayne Knecht of Grand Blanc. This was not a first time.

"Everything about this place is wonderful," Suzanne echoed the comment with any Paris bistro we've been to," Wayne added.

Lynn judged "equal to or better than a Paris bistro."

"My duck had a wonderful sauce and I'll score it nine out of 10," Suzanne echoed the comment with "My Pork Tenderloin was perfect with a Plum and Armagnac Sauce."

Amid these glowing remarks, if there's a flaw at Elaine Bistro, it's the bread. There must be a bakery source in Windsor for crispy French-style baguettes to soak up garlicky butter and on which to spread the delicious olive tapenade.

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

The Devins, natives of a suburb north of Paris, met in culinary school and were married in Notre Dame de Lorette in Paris. Finding their way from France in 1993 via London and Toronto, they opened their 30-seat bistro in Windsor, appropriately enough on Bastille Day, July 14, 1999.

Origin of the name Elaine Bistro stems from the previous owner who ran an upscale take-out in the location for six months prior to the Devins' purchase. Framed menus from French restaurants and other memorabilia decorate textured buttercream-colored walls. Simplicity is underscored by soft lights and crisp white linen covered tables. It's comfortable, forward, comfortable, intimate and the kind of restaurant where



Laurent and Valerie Devin, owners of Elaine Bistro in Windsor.

Before opening Elaine Bistro, Laurent was the food and beverage director for the Windsor Casino.

you instantly recognize that the big show comes on the plates.

Before opening Elaine Bistro, Laurent was the food and beverage director for the Windsor Casino, so he knows his wines. A short wine list is printed on the menu, but if you like wine, you need to browse the shelf. As might be expected, they are French, hand-chosen by the Devins to accompany their food. Even if you're a wine connoisseur, when Laurent recommends one with a dish, order it. You'll declare it a perfect match.

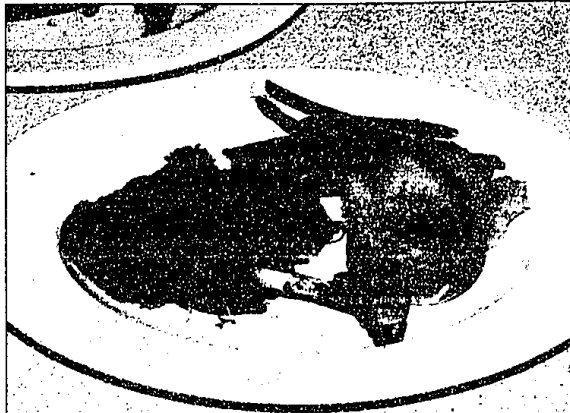
By Detroit area restaurant wine price standards, Bistro Elaine selections are reasonable

at \$29-\$59 CAN per bottle (\$19.50-\$39.50 U.S.) for selections from quality Burgundy and Bordeaux producers.

SETTLING IN

Valerie dotes on you. She cares whether you like Laurent's food. If you do and say so enthusiastically, even more doting! And maybe a special dish that you did not order is sent to your table from Laurent as his thank you.

The kitchen is so close to most of the tables, he probably overheard your complimentary remarks.



Confit of Duck Leg.

Unless you decide to order the multicourse degustation menu, start with an hors d'oeuvre, or if you're in a group, several. In this category, don't miss the Escargots, where it's proper French etiquette to use bread pieces to soak up any extra garlicky butter.

"Rack of lamb and the duck dishes," Valerie said, "are the most popular. But the four-course Degustation Menu has become the most popular way to sample Laurent's food."

Portions are small and you won't groan from overeating. Typical of the plates included are appetizers of Carpaccio of Smoked Salmon, Assiette de Charcuterie which includes dried sausage, prosciutto, rilletes and a duck pate with pistachios, all accompanied by a spicy, coarse-grained mustard and cornichons.

On to Salade du Perigord with a galantine of foie gras (pured goose liver with truffles), dried duck magret and a toast of goat cheese on a bed of crisp greens. This is followed by a small taste of Foie Gras Poêle (pan-seared foie gras) and a Tourn Normand, the interlude palate cleanser of Mango Sorbet with Remy Red liqueur.

For principal plates accompanied by vegetables, small portions of quail with dried fruit compote, confit de canard, venison with red fruit sauce and wine reduction, or sliced rack of lamb in a honey and lavender sauce may be served. For vegetarians, Swordfish with Sesame Paste make the meat substitute.

Sweet endings don't get much better. There's Poirée Belle Helene, Creme Brulee, Creme Caramel, Mousse au Chocolat, Tarte Tatin and the house specialty Crepes Suzettes flamed tableside, homemade mango and lime sorbets and cheeses from France.

When the exchange rate is factored in at \$1.00 U.S. to \$1.52 CAN, dinner at Elaine Bistro is a bargain, even with the \$5.25 U.S. roundtrip tunnel toll tacked on. If you go, don't forget two pieces of government issued IDs with your photo. Bon Appetit!

Eleanor Heald is a Troy resident who writes about dining, food, wine and spirits for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. To leave her a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864R.

ELAINE BISTRO FRANCAIS

Where: 5880 Wyandotte St. East, Windsor, Ontario, Canada, (519) 948-0693.

Open: Lunch 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and dinner 5:30 p.m. onward, Tuesday-Saturday.

Menu: Authentic French bistro foods served in an intimate atmosphere where French hospitality abounds.

Cost: Principal plates \$15.50-\$23.50 CAN (\$10.50-\$15.75 U.S.). Degustation menu for three or more \$35.50-\$60 CAN (\$24-\$40 U.S.) per person.

Reservations: Advised.

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