

DINING

La Difference finds roots in classic French cooking

BY ELEANOR & RAY HEALD  
SPECIAL WRITERS

You don't need to know a word of French to catch the basic meaning of La Difference. In English, it's difference. Yet, in French, this difference carries a sense of divergence — to go or move in a different direction. Newly opened La Difference in West Bloomfield, does just that. With respect to cuisine, it's rooted in classic French cooking, displayed with American flare in a warm, comfortable white tablecloth atmosphere with upscale service. For the sake of simplicity, let's call it southern French, Provençal style.

**La Difference**  
Where: 7295 Orchard Lake Road (just north of Northweston Highway), West Bloomfield (248) 932-8935.  
Hours: Lunch 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., beginning in early March. Phone to be advised of date. Dinner Sunday-Thursday 4-10 p.m. Closed Friday. Saturday opening is one hour after sunset until mid-March.  
Menu: Southern French emphasis with California fresh influences adhering to all kosher dietary requirements. Cost: Entrees including choice of soup or salad \$10-28.  
Reservations: Advised.  
Credit cards: All majors accepted.

Southfield.  
Over the past two decades, I became friends with my clients," Kohn said. "They wanted to have kosher dining in other than a catered environment. People with dietary restrictions, whether that be vegetarian or kosher, should not have to compromise. La Difference is an introduction to kosher cooking without all the traditions that back it up."

But you don't have to be Jewish to enjoy La Difference. It's a creative dining experience in the one way. For example, there's always a unique, crunchy plate garnish, such as deep-fried yucca root chips and crispied Michigan beet chips. Why crunchy elements?

Because owner Paul Kohn likes crunch. In addition to divergence (that concept again) they "add form and definition to other foods on the plate," Kohn pointed out.

Fish is delivered three times each week exclusively from M.F. Foley Company in Boston. Kohn believes Foley's seafood is higher in the important Omega-3 than that provided by any local purveyor.

A liquor license has been applied for and when granted, Kohn promises the best selection of mevushal kosher wines available.

Turning ingredients into succulent and savory portions is executive chef John Schmidt, former sous chef for Quality Kosher Catering. He collaborated with Chef Michael Miller of Quality Kosher Catering and was inspired by Schoolcraft Culinary department's Chef Dan Hugeliger in focusing menu selections.

Among notable appetizers is housemade North Atlantic Smoked Salmon that's fruit wood, cold-smoked and presented on a crisp potato latke with caviar and sour cream, garnished with fried capers. House Chowder, a rich tummy of selected fish, potatoes and vegetables and Traditional Mushroom Barley Soup are the regularly-featured. Soup du jour is usually a cream soup such as Roasted Butternut Squash with ginger and red pepper coulis.

Developing as the most-requested entree is Lake Superior Whitefish in various presentations.



Gracious host: Paul Kohn introduces diners to kosher fare, rooted in classic French cooking, displayed with American flare, at La Difference.

It's our ultimate comfort food," Kohn noted. A close second is Macadamia Crusted Chilean Sea Bass, toasted macadamia nuts crusting a fresh fillet served on smashed potatoes with fresh vegetables. Leave room for desserts prepared by Pastry Chef Karen Pearson. A listing on the menu does not tell the whole story. Components offer not only fabulous taste, but extraordinary eye appeal — a perfect ending to an embracing experience.

La Difference has a children's menu, \$6, with four kid appealing items. If you'd like to bring your kids along, but would rather dine without them, My Place is a baby sitting service, located next door at \$4.75 per hour. La Difference offers a \$2 coupon to defray the cost. Backing up fine service and running the front of the house as general manager is John Wood, a veteran of the area restaurant scene, having worked 20 years in the Machus organization.

La Difference and divergence may denote moving in a different direction, but this movement has the intelligent focus of people-centered, inspired dining in a gracious, welcoming atmosphere.

WHAT'S COOKING

Forie — 201 S. Old Woodward Ave. Birmingham will feature a four-course menu prepared by Executive Chef Tim Voss including a choice of appetizer, salad, entree and dessert accompanied by a half bottle of Veuve Chateau Champagne, a glass of Chardonnay or Bordeaux and a glass of dessert wine. The price per couple is \$160, exclusive of tax and tip. Forie's regular menu will be available as well. Call (248) 594-7300 for reservations.

Pike Street — 18 W. Pike St., Pontiac. Celebrate Friday or Saturday. Valentine's Day menu specials, music by pianist Greg Nichols. Call (248) 334-7878.

Tribute — Executive Chef Takashi Yagahashi and Pastry Chef Tanya Fallon will display their culinary brilliance at this 4-star restaurant with dishes that will make any Valentine's Day celebrant open their heart with love. Early reservations are recommended by calling (248) 848-9393. Tribute is at 31425

W. Twelve Mile Road in Farmington Hills, on the southwest corner of Orchard Lake and Twelve Mile Road.

Michigan Culinary Food & Wine Extravaganza — More than 20 of metro Detroit's best restaurants including Andiamo West, 220 Merrill, Big Rock Chop & Brew House, Capital Grille, East Side-Mario's, Beans and Cornbread, Cafe Cortina, Fox & Hounds, Golden Mushroom, Paint Creek Restaurant, Tom's Oyster Bar, Unique Restaurant

Corp., Midtown Cafe, and Ristorante Di Modesta will participate in the fourth annual Michigan Culinary Food & Wine Extravaganza, 6:30-10 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 16 at Mac & Bay's, 30875 North River Road, Harrison Township. Tickets are \$75 per person (general admission), \$125 per person (Gold Salon), call (810) 463-8660, Ext. 438. Event benefits the Michigan Culinary Team and Scholarship Fund. This year's theme is celebrating Mardi Gras.

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**THURS 7p.m.-12a.m. Solist BILL KAHLER**  
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