



Bistro L'Hermitage

French Cuisine



Reservations are encouraged.

Brunch:

Saturday & Sunday 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Lunch:

Thursday & Friday 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Dinner:

Tuesday - Thursday & Sunday 5 to 10 p.m.

Friday & Saturday 5 to 11 p.m.

Bistro L'Hermitage

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Woodbridge, VA 22192

Phone: 703-499-9550

Web: www.bistolhermitage.com

In his novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, Ernest Hemingway reveals his perspective on good food: "I have discovered that there is romance in food when romance has disappeared from everywhere else."

Restaurants that cultivate a strong connection between romance and food are rare and indeed special. Bistro L'Hermitage in Woodbridge, Virginia, is one of those exemplary places and is worthy of hosting your special moments or celebrations.

Bistro L'Hermitage is the passion of Youssef Essakl. Youssef was born in Morocco and came to the Washington area as a student at the tender age of 18. He crafted his restaurant skills at several pedigreed locations such as 21 Federal, Marcel's, and Jeffrey's At The Watergate.

"Learning from the best," says Youssef, "gave me a deep appreciation for details that add up to an outstanding dining experience."

During my visit, I noticed that each table was beautifully presented with fresh flowers and had its own china pattern. This is one of many, many special touches that fill the restaurant and elevate the dining experience. Your eyes continually roam the room that evokes a strong feeling

of hospitality and intimate warmth.

Youssef's creed, engraved on his calling card, is "Hospitality is the art of making others feel comfortable, welcome, and at home. It is the talent for spreading warmth and kindness that will be remembered always."

Comfort and kindness emanate not just from Youssef, but from his staff, as well. Youssef says he would not open a restaurant any place in the world other than here in America. He feels our culture appreciates and respects the hard work of restaurant employees more than anywhere in the world.

Having received a number of emails from *Cooperative Living* readers encouraging me to try Bistro L'Hermitage, I decided it was time to shrug off the winter doldrums and make a fact-finding trip to Northern Virginia. I was also informed that Bistro L'Hermitage was selected by the popular app, OpenTable, as one of the Top 10 Romantic Restaurants in the country. I am always curious about why people label a restaurant "romantic."

My first visit to the restaurant was to sample the lunch menu. I ordered the trout served in a light lemon sauce with champagne risotto. The presentation was

At Bistro L'Hermitage, each table is beautifully presented with fresh flowers and has its own china pattern. This is one of many, many special touches that fill the restaurant and elevate the dining experience. Pictured are, from left, owner Youssef Essakl and Dawn Burkart, head chef.

exciting and the taste outstanding. At this point, there is no question, I must return and try the dinner menu. While I know I could enjoy L'Hermitage as a single, a restaurant this good needs to be shared, so on my return visit, we have a table of four of my favorite dinner companions.

We start with selections of lobster bisque, French onion soup, and fried crispy oysters. As soon as those dishes are removed, we're served sautéed large scallops in a soy and honey reduction sauce on a bed of roasted miniature Brussels sprouts. With appetizers this good, you're tempted to "reorder" and just call it quits. But, we are here to do serious work, so we venture on.

As a main course, we order entrées of hanger-cut steak, filet mignon, both cooked with a red wine sauce, sautéed almond trout, and, believe it or not, veal calf's liver cooked in a rich sauce and caramelized onions. The liver is so tender



I cut it with my fork! You guessed it, having read other of my reviews ... I try each of the entrées and conclude I could have been happy with any entrée ordered by my table companions.

At this point, we are all pleased and content.

However, it's very difficult to visit an authentic French restaurant and not try dessert. Omitting this course would be an act of gastronomic misbehavior I could not justify. Youssef understands this dilemma and brings us his sampling of a heavenly crème brûlée, chocolate mousse, lemon tart, and various fruit sorbets with delightful coconut! This is what Hemingway meant about finding *romance* in food.

Youssef is very fortunate to have Dawn Burkart as his head chef. Dawn came with Youssef from the Watergate and he describes

her as an extremely talented, artistic chef. Based on our excellent selections, no one at our table would disagree. After all, as my grandmother would say, "the proof is in the pudding." A word of advice, do not go alone to L'Hermitage just to enjoy a fine meal. More importantly, go with someone where you can share a rare, fantastic dining experience you will never forget.

The best part of this job is that I learn something new and exciting with each restaurant visit. However, with this visit, I feel I earned my Ph.D.! Youssef offers his guests an appreciation through having the epitome of hospitality with such efficient, well-mannered employees. Thank you, *Cooperative Living* readers, for encouraging me to visit Bistro L'Hermitage.

Bon appétit, and always, be of good cheer! ■



Clockwise, from bottom left: Sautéed large scallops in honey and soy reduction; lobster bisque; raspberry, coconut, orange sorbet; filet mignon with red wine sauce; and trout with champagne risotto.