

Dining under the bridge has its ups and downs

By LORI MCKEAN
Coast Weekend

Photos by ALEX PAJUNAS

“Location, location, location” is any realtor’s mantra, and from that standpoint, Astoria’s recently restored Red Building that houses the new Bridgewater Bistro couldn’t get much better.

Located just under the Astoria-Meglar Bridge, the restaurant overlooks the Cannery Pier Hotel, with views extending up and down the Columbia River and across to the Long Beach Peninsula.

Knowing that the Bridgewater is in the hands of two of the country’s top restaurateurs and an equally talented chef, it is definitely a place I will visit again.

The spacious restaurant is casual and sophisticated at the same time. The building’s original planked wooden floors and exposed beams are juxtaposed with sleek high-backed chairs, creative stools made from oak wine barrels and other sophisticated furnishings. Tall windows open to the deck and the river. Tableware is all white porcelain, with interesting shapes, including boat-shaped chowder bowls and square coffee cups. Wine is served in Riedel crystal glasses.

Owners Tony and Ann Kischner, who also own the highly acclaimed Shoalwater Restaurant in Seaview, Wash., brought in the Shoalwater’s executive chef, “Red” Pelletier, to oversee the new kitchen. She also acts as director of kitchen operations at the Shoalwater with new chef Walter Fowler. The new Bridgewater kitchen features state-of-the-art equipment. On a busy day, it is bustling with chefs baking freshly made breads and turning out an impressive array of dishes.

Tony Kischner is a maestro when it comes to pairing food and wine. For years, “The Wine Spectator” has recognized Tony for having one of the top wine lists in the country. Though not as extensive, the wine list at the Bridgewater Bistro is impressive. A special menu selection called “Pairings” features flights of three wines or beers paired with complementary foods. One evening, a “white



Diners sit down to a drink on the sunny back deck overlooking the Astoria Bridge and Columbia River at the Bridgewater Bistro.

wines & bites flight” featured a Montes sauvignon blanc (Chile) with kumamoto oysters on the half-shell and a delicious Iris Hill pinot gris (Oregon) with roasted garlic and eggplant caviar.

Inspired by Spanish tapas, the “Small Bites” menu includes “nibbles,” such as Dungeness crab savory cheesecake on a pecan crust with exotic mushroom meunier sauce (one of Pelletier’s specialties). Under meats, you might find Swedish meatballs, steak-on-a stick with blue cheese and horseradish dip or five-spice grilled pork tenderloin with orange-chipotle glaze. Vegetarian options include roasted garlic and eggplant caviar and roasted beet and blood orange salad, among others. Entrees such as wild king salmon or fresh Dungeness crab come with house-baked bread and seasonal accom-

paniments.

Since it opened, I have dined at Bridgewater three times with friends, so I’ve had an opportunity to sample many dishes. So far, my experience has been hit and miss. I realize that the staff is new and the menu is perhaps overly complicated (even the waitstaff seemed confused), so I will review it again in the future — once the kitchen has had time to fine-tune their efforts.

The french fries, one of the bistro’s signature items, were very good. As an appetizer, they serve the fries upright in a glass with a variety of dipping sauces. A grilled black forest ham and Gruyere cheese sandwich was quite tasty.

Roasted prosciutto-wrapped quail with balsamic essence came on bamboo skewers. While tasty, it was full of bones and we couldn’t quite figure out how to eat it. The warm grilled figs on the side were very good. Tataki smoked sockeye salmon with ponzu sauce was very fresh, barely smoked and very rare. The hajiki salad on the side was overly fishy. Roasted garlic and eggplant caviar on crostini sounded good, but there was very little “caviar” and it lacked the flavor of eggplant. A basket full of house-made “seed” bread was very good and could have

Bridgewater Bistro

★★½

20 Basin St., Astoria
(503) 325-6777
bridgewaterbistro.com

Hours: Lunch 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. Dinner 5 to 9 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays, 5 to 10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays (with live music).

Prices: Moderate to expensive.

Service: Friendly, but not attentive

Kid-friendly: Yes, with a children’s menu featuring small tyke bites, small menus and sandwiches.

Vegetarian options: A number are available, including a grilled portabella burger, linguine pesto Alfredo, and French mushroom soup.

Reservations: Recommended for formal dining upstairs and during the summer months.



The Bridgewater Bistro, serving regional Northwest foods, beer and wine, is open for lunch and dinner Tuesdays through Saturdays.

been great if it was served warm. Ask for extra butter.

Halibut cakes were dry and fishy and the side of quinoa was also very dry. Seafood chowder was packed with celery seed and what tasted like tomato soup, without much seafood. A leek and mushroom chowder was so overwhelmed by smoked pork that I could not taste the clams or mushrooms. A tomato-based curried clam and mussel chowder was better.

A trio of desserts included chocolate bouchon served warm with wild blackberry-red wine sauce, a hazelnut cheesecake with chocolate ganache and rum-and-currant ice cream. The chocolate dessert was warm but very dry. The cheesecake was quite good, but the ice cream was more like a milkshake studded with highly alcoholic currants. The shortbread cookie that came with it was one of the restaurant’s best creations. Organic free-trade coffee brewed by Long Beach Coffee Roasters was rich and flavorful.

Knowing that the Bridgewater is in the hands of two of the country’s top restaurateurs and an equally talented chef, it is definitely a place I will visit again. The lively atmosphere is great, the view is spectacular and live music on the weekends adds a nice touch.

Pardon our gaffe

Yummy Wine Bar and Bistro owner Corey Albert called Coast Weekend to thank us for a positive review in the Nov. 1 issue, but also to point out a couple of errors. The correct phone number for the wine bar is (503) 738-3100, and readers should not consider Yummy “kid-friendly,” as it is a wine bar and not open to minors.