

Cognoscenti magazine

Because life is short

Bouchon Yountville, California

Superstar wine upstart Napa Valley has always kept one eye on France. After all, France was where the wine came from ...at least, until Napa Valley and a few other areas rose to their current prominence. The valley has certainly forged its own special identity along the way, but the old world still casts its alluring spell.

Bouchon is Thomas Keller's paen to the bistro. Inside the trendy dining venue, a *Belle Époque* décor includes traditional-style gaslights, bamboo chairs, parlor palms, and rows of delightfully garish red velvet seats.

Tasting well-wrought classics like *moules au safran et à la moutarde* (mussels steamed in white wine, mustard and saffron, and served with *frites*), the diner is transported to an authentic Parisian bistro—right in the middle of California wine country. The richness of the food and drink, the sophistication of the buzzing crowd and the extravagance of the style, all operate to lull the guest into a sense of slightly giddy pleasure—*joie de vivre*. (And how else to feel, when you're sitting on red velvet seats sipping champagne?)

Executive Chef Jeff Cerciello has the touch for dressing up the merely commonplace and turning it into something closer to the extraordinary. Cerciello worked with Keller at the French Laundry before taking on the kitchen here. Fresh, outstanding salmon tartare and goose *pâté* were among the appetizers that **Cognoscenti Magazine** editors sampled on a recent visit to Bouchon. Main courses included roasted leg of lamb with flageolets; the thyme *jus* was delicate yet flavorful, with whole cloves of

floating garlic adding to the rusticity. Unfortunately, a mixed salad arrived at table choked with *balsamico*, but the beet salad was far better.



A *Sylvain Cathiard* 1995 Vosne-Romanée “Les Suchots” was poured after an hour's decanting to reveal a fine bouquet. This *premier cru* wine wasn't large, but it proved exceptionally fruity and charming, and its licorice-laced finish was layered, hedonistic and fulsome—there's something of the “animal” about this.

We wrapped the fine dinner with pumpkin custard and *Hine* Antique cognac. The orange/caramel liquor released a flavor complex that leaned towards citrus and honey rather than nut, and despite its age there still hovered about the rim a petrol-like volatility that one would expect to have rather dissipated by now.

Next morning, we seized upon the chance to discover the crispy, crunchy, buttery, jammy delights of the **Bouchon Bakery**, located just next door to the bistro. Recommended!

This article was written by Jeffrey Riggs, Senior Contributing Editor to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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