

Restaurant Marché Brings French Classics to Bainbridge

Greg Atkinson brings the French classics to Bainbridge.

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Walking into Restaurant Marché, I saw three high-end boutiques, a gourmet bakery, a tony yarn shop, an “Iced Creamery,” a kiosk for charging electric cars, and a solar garbage can. I don’t know when Bainbridge Island went from being Mayberry to Marin County, but with the opening of Restaurant Marché in March the transformation was complete.

Reservations aren’t accepted for lunch, so on my first visit, a polite lineup had formed at the door: a Bainbridge traffic jam. I waited among the matrons of Winslow taking in the classy understatement of the room—the receding neutrals, the intimate corners for dining, the glass walls—and breathing in the fragrance of resort vacations, namely perfume and woodsmoke. The place feels like someone’s sophisticated home. The ladies room is the most aromatically fabulous place you’ve ever been.

This surprise is not really so surprising, Marché being the enterprise of former Canlis chef Greg Atkinson. (Canlis’s ladies room, after all, looks like a boutique and smells like a perfumerie.) Though this is the first restaurant he has owned, Atkinson is a revered figure in regional culinary circles. He began his career in the ’80s at San Juan Island’s casual French masterpiece, Cafe Bissett, then traced an arc with stops as top toque at Friday Harbor House and Canlis, food and beverage director at Bainbridge’s outdoor learning center IslandWood, then consultant and culinary

instructor and food writer (including two decades' worth of lyrical food essays in *The Seattle Times*). I remember my first meal at Bissett, which stood out for its French culinary precision and masterful attention to every crumb. Atkinson is, above all, a maestro of detail.

As we were being shown to our seats at Marché, he stood in the open kitchen looking more like a maestro of onion jam. Carefully ladling the purple accompaniment for his housemade chicken pate into containers for that night's dinner, brow knit in concentration, he was every inch the poster chef of locavorism. His kitchen indeed held the first of the season's Island strawberries; filets of Lummi Island Wild reefnet-fished salmon, the region's most sustainably harvested seafood; crepe batter made with organic buckwheat from farmer Nash Huber's Sequim farm. *Marché* is the French term for eating what's fresh at market that nanosecond, and that's what Atkinson is going for here.

Image: [Olivia Brent](#)



With last century's recipes, that is. Sure, there's a sous vide thermal immersion circulator on premise, because who wants to poach-to-order every egg for the *salade Lyonnaise*. But the point is, *there's a salade Lyonnaise*. In an era where food sophisticates worship at the altar of culinary novelty and chef individuality — Atkinson's *Marché* enshrines the French bistro canon, almost entirely unreconstructed.

This, of course, will put many of those sophisticates to sleep.

Trout Meuniere will arrive buttery and crusted just like in the old cookbooks, with sauteed local greens and a wedge of potatoes gratin whose sole flight of fancy is a big French kiss of nutmeg. French onion soup will be a polite affair with a fine-dice of onion and no surfeit of cheese, with more potency than most owing to a generous plug of Port, just the way Julia did it. *Moules frites* presents the mussels in a creamy broth classically piqued with fresh fennel and Pernod. Vanilla creme brulee — no balsamic blackberry nonsense in this house — is, well, vanilla.

And it's flawless — rich, dreamy-creamy, thickly crackling. The kind of dessert that makes you think all restaurants should be owned by perfectionist culinary school professors.

Image: [Olivia Brent](#)

French Bistro Classics *Moules frites* in creamy broth emerges from the open kitchen.



Atkinson's seasoned instincts are dead-on, as when he presents a grilled hunk of crusted Lummi Island salmon with smears of tart rhubarb compote and chunks of braised leek, with chartreuse leek oil dribbled about for sparkle. It's pretty, seasonally of the moment, skillfully executed, and conceived by a pro who knows flavor pairings. Or when he crafts a rugged country pate of duck and pork meats and fat pistachios, then plates it with crunchy cornichons and grainy mustard. Delectable — eat-with-a-spoonable — and too salty. (Oversalted as well were the warm house-baked dinner rolls, the Plugrà butter, and the exquisite *fines herbes* French fries.

Crowd pleasingly so.)

It's your call whether a classy place featuring the classics done carefully will thrill you or bore you. Restaurant critics, jaded as we are by thrill-seeking amateurs, tend to go weak at the knees before this level of gastronomic gravitas. Yet even this critic yawned once, at a market salad of snap pea strips, carrots, radishes, and violas in a bloodless yogurt vinaigrette, beautifully composed on a pink vintage plate. When asked about it by phone, Atkinson cheerfully sang out the local farm that produced each vegetable — as if perfect provenance were enough. The pitfall of farm-to-table dining, of course, is that fresh sourcing is *never* enough, absent culinary interest.

Service is a problem common to restaurants whose owners specialize in the back of the house; even more common among restaurateurs who freely admit to sometimes wanting to “strangle the waiters.” “Having my own place is thrilling, but I have to say that all my inner monsters have emerged,” chuckles Atkinson, who cooks every shift and who, along with his wife, co-owner Betsy, regularly logs 15-hour days. “There's a moment when the food is just

plated, and it's perfect, and I want the guest to experience that crispness or whatever—*and I just want to carry it to the table myself.*”

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