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FOOD & DRINK

Ferryland

Across the Water at Restaurant Marché

by [BETHANY JEAN CLEMENT](#)

Restaurant Marché

150 Madrone Lane
Bainbridge Island 98110

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Reader Rating



Based on 3 reviews

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Getting to and from Restaurant Marché is at least half the fun. If you haven't taken the Bainbridge ferry lately (and unless you're a tourist, for whom a ferry trip is required by law, you probably haven't), you are not fully recalling the absurd level of charm. And now—before the city recedes into a perfect toy town, complete with the obviously fake Space Needle looking especially great with its orange crown—you may view the new Ferris wheel from starboard. Last week, it didn't yet have its cars hung around its perimeter, so it was just white bones, an abstract idea ready to roll into the Sound, or maybe a spool to haul in the enormous fishing net that will finally catch our mythical sea-beast, resulting in predictable horror-movie chaos, tiny people held aloft in tentacled arms.

The ferry is about as magical as it gets—even its old linoleum floors, its not-quite-shipshape railings, its announcements of will-the-owner-of-the-silver-Lexus-please-return-to-the-car-deck-and-secure-your-car-alarm (always a richie-rich car, and always intoned with the most patient scorn). Adolescent boys, trying pitifully to show off, fall down its steep stairs. You'll want to walk on; the ride is short, and you should not waste any time that could be spent working up an appetite in the sea air. Watch the glinting water carefully, and you might see sea lions or porpoises, but you will probably get distracted by a gull, the clouds, the shuddering motion.

On the other side, there is the terribly cute town of Winslow, where elves eat Blackbird Bakery cookies while sewing the wind socks that form the basis of the local economy. It's the kind of place that makes you want to do something very mildly lawless, like go into the Town & Country Market and buy a miniature bottle of sparkling wine and drink it walking down the street, undisguised. Nothing bad will happen here, it's clear.

While Restaurant Marché, just off the main street via an adorable pedestrian byway, is new, it falls fully into Winslow's time warp. The building itself is in the Northwest island mid-century style, all angular stained wood. Inside, there are high-backed banquettes the color of a never-used crayon (burnt sienna?), prints of vegetables and botanicals, big sprays of rhododendron, blue-green accents. It looks, to be frank, like a fancy restaurant from a 1980s sitcom, with plinkingly unobtrusive music to match. It's comfortable, if not at all contemporary: no taxidermy, no communal table, no blackboard of specials, no rusty weather vane, nothing obviously reclaimed. An older patron admires the upholstery—"It's cozy!" she says—while her companion looks admirably natty in a sport coat and off-white suede bucks. "Happy anniversary!" is heard from nearby.

Greg Atkinson is a former head chef of Canlis. He's the author of a half-dozen cookbooks and one of the authors of our region's local food movement, championing it for decades now. He's the recipient of a James Beard award for his food writing, and he continues to write his food-nerd's dream of a column in the *Seattle Times* (most recent headline: "A Sure Sign of Summer: Rose Petal Jelly"). He's also a regular on KUOW. Greg Atkinson is a local food hero.

Atkinson lives on Bainbridge Island with his wife and kids on "a peaceful acre with a small orchard of century-old apple trees, fig trees, grape

vines, and an organic flower and vegetable garden" (according to his bio). Restaurant Marché is his place, and you can bet those rhododendrons—and, a couple weeks later, branches pruned from a fig tree—came from his awfully sweet-sounding peaceful acre. (The view out the side window of the lounge—which serves as cramped but less formal seating for a handful of people who failed to make reservations sufficiently far in advance—is directly onto a white truck, which is a little less incongruous when you notice the fig branches in the back.)

Restaurant Marché's menu includes pâté, salade niçoise, moules frites, a few traditional entrées, a plat du jour. It's all seasonal and market fresh, as the name implies. (Campagne, across the water in the Pike Place Market, was renamed Marché at the end of last year; why no one finally veered away in this game of nomenclature chicken is a mystery.) If it seems surprisingly, straightforwardly French, Atkinson explains on his blog: "That's how I want food at Restaurant Marché to be; not complicated, not necessarily unheard of, but revelatory. I want people to reexperience onion soup, reconsider steak frites, rediscover what it is to taste something familiar that tastes better than it ever has before."

To taste Restaurant Marché's trout meunière (\$18) is to understand. It's a superlative version of a classic—the fish's soft, white flesh is almost fluffy; it's browned beautifully on top. The lemon is more pointed than usual, a real spark of tart, but never too sharp. Same with the roast duckling (\$24), which is deeper in flavor, firmer of flesh than your average duck, remarkably so—it tastes like it was well cared for, possibly on a lush and lovely island. The skin glows; the brandy sauce shimmers.

One night's market salad (\$9)—a very pedestrian-sounding one—amounted to a grand reexperience: the tenderest, deepest-ruby beets with the freshest greens and loveliest goat cheese, with even the candied walnuts somehow a billion times better than ever. A green-pea flan (\$9) was as light as a cloud, both vegetal and eggy, and the prettiest pale green.

Other things I ate at Restaurant Marché fell short of provoking revelation, being merely good. A mixed shellfish platter (\$24, \$38 large) had three delicious shigoku oysters, half of a fresh if not all-time-great crab, and some borderline dry prawns. (The prawns had their roe still attached, which seemed exciting but tasted flavorless, and made for awkward shell-peeling.) The salade Lyonnaise (\$10) was a fine one, but some of the frisée was on the far side of young and tender. A buckwheat crêpe (\$9) was spilling over with caramelized onions, overpowering the mushrooms and cheese. And the steak frites (\$21, \$26 large), while absolutely tasty, did not cause reconsideration of anything. All three desserts sampled—crème brûlée (\$9), lemon and (separately) pine-nut tart (\$9, \$10)—rose to their occasion without thrilling anybody.

As for service, it was winning—they're trying hard and really nice. Sitting in the bar, I had my French 75 repossessed just before my first sip, as it was missing its champagne. It returned immediately, filled to the brim: "There it is, as it should be." Another server came to confess that entrées were on the way when we were still cracking crab, which is a great problem to have; he was candid, and we all moved plates around together, and nobody cared, and it all worked out in the end.

And if you end up having to leave in a rush—beware the weekday later-night gap in the ferry schedule—they will pack up your dessert and get you on your way, maybe with your choice of a Town & Country or "Happy Birthday" bag.

The boat back is quieter, and if it's dark you can't see much through the windows, and the rumbling is highly conducive to a half-hour nap. No one will be mad if you put your feet on the seat. ★

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