

# New York Times

## Long Island Dining St. James

### French-Mediterranean, in Roomier Quarters

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Kitchen a Bistro  
404 North Country Road (Route 25A)  
St. James  
(631) 862-0151  
<http://www.kitchenabistro.com>

THE original [Kitchen a Bistro](#), which opened in 1998 in a small strip mall in St. James, was a quirky place. It was so tiny that some diners had to sit in their cars while waiting for tables. Cooking smells and smoke from the open kitchen often permeated the dining room. The restaurant accepted no credit cards and had no liquor license.

Fast-forward to 2009. In February, the bistro took over more spacious quarters down the road, a place that had been home for 25 years to Mirabelle (which moved to Stony Brook). The new Kitchen a Bistro is now only semi-quirky. It still doesn't accept credit cards, but it does serve wine and beer. (Diners may bring their own wine, and most do.)

The décor is simple: Pale walls are dotted with a few framed color photographs of food. What counts here is the cooking, and while the kitchen made a few missteps on our visits, most dishes hit the mark.

Eric Lomando, the owner and chef, describes the cuisine as French-Mediterranean; an entree of juicy roast organic chicken breast paired with broccoli rabe and polenta dotted with feta is typical of the restaurant's style.



The menu changes daily. On two visits we received a demitasse of creamy soup accompanied by an airy cheese puff as an amuse-bouche. One night, the brew was a not-at-all-sweet butternut squash; the second time, it was rutabaga-apple. Both were great. An appetizer of moules marinières, however, was strangely bland despite a broth with slices of garlic and flecks of red pepper.

Other starters made a stronger showing, especially a flavor-packed curried chicken soup loaded with meat and a field salad with abundant cubes of roasted beets and crumbled goat cheese. A thick, quichelike tart of caramelized onion and goat cheese was airy and tasty.

Two pasta dishes among the first courses were winners. Our favorite opener was bucatini with a ragù of fork-tender wild boar and broccoli rabe. Another success was slightly sweet butternut squash ravioli teamed with savory sautéed wild mushrooms.

The best entree sampled was roast cod perched on a bed of sautéed leeks with a foamy lemongrass sauce and a thatch of frizzled leeks on top. Also satisfying were a grilled Berkshire pork chop with Tuscan kale and panisse (chickpea French fries stacked Lincoln-log style), and a seared rare hanger steak in a red wine sauce, accompanied by memorable mashed potatoes.

The service staff was not in the same league as the kitchen's. The casual servers, dressed mainly in jeans and T-shirts, were very amiable but not polished. They brought the bill before we asked for it, even on a slow night.

One evening, our server assured a diner with a nut allergy that the tarte Tatin was nut free. It was, until the kitchen put a scoop of butter pecan ice cream on top. The errant ice cream aside, that tarte Tatin, made with puff pastry, was among the top desserts (which change as often as the rest of the menu); another was a tangy lemon tart.

Two also-rans were a somewhat dry flourless chocolate cake laced with ground almonds and a chocolate pot de crème. The night I sampled the latter, the dense mousse was topped with a thin, unannounced layer of crème brûlée. I would have preferred a dollop of cream.

But quibbles and service glitches aside, the food at Kitchen a Bistro is ample reason to visit this justly popular restaurant.



*NEW SPACE* At Kitchen a Bistro, diners may bring their own wine.

## **WORTH IT**

**THE SPACE:** Simple dining room in a converted house. Not wheelchair accessible.

**THE CROWD:** Good-natured couples and equally pleasant servers. Few children.

**THE BAR:** Small bar (four stools) in a foyer. List of 15 wines by the bottle, \$20 to \$52, with most in the \$20s. Ten beers, \$6 to \$13. (No hard liquor is served.) Diners may bring their own wine, and most do.

**THE BILL:** Lunch entrees, \$13. Dinner entrees on the à la carte menu, all \$25. On Friday and Saturday nights, only a three-course prix fixe menu is served for \$42. No credit cards. Good value considering the quality of the food and the fact that patrons can bring their own wine.

**WHAT WE LIKED:** Curried chicken soup, field salad with beets and goat cheese, onion cheese tart, butternut squash ravioli, bucatini with wild boar ragù, Berkshire pork chop, chicken breast, roast cod, hanger steak, lemon tart, apple tarte Tatin.

**IF YOU GO:** Lunch Monday to Friday, noon to 2 p.m. Dinner nightly, 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. Reservations are taken only for six or more on weeknights, but for parties of any size Friday through Sunday. Call at least a week in advance for weekend reservations.

**RATINGS:** Don't Miss, Worth It, In a Pinch, Don't Bother.