

Newsday

St. James: A Meal After My Own Heart

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Kitchen a Bistro

404 North Country Road (Route 25A)

St. James

(631) 862-0151

<http://www.kitchenabistro.com>



Photo credit: Danielle Finkelstein

There are very good restaurants, and then there are very good restaurants whose priorities dovetail almost entirely with my own. Like **Kitchen A Bistro** in St. James.

At this second incarnation of Eric Lomando's New American-Mediterranean bistro, (last year it moved down the road into the digs of Mirabelle when that restaurant decamped to Stony Brook's Three Village Inn), everything revolves around the kitchen's desire to put out simple, well-executed food at very reasonable prices.

The room is simple and comfortable but devoid of the pricey elements—e.g. tablecloths, flowers—that drive up costs. You want an even more reasonably priced meal? Bring your own wine: there's no corkage fee. The bread basket is an object lesson in smart-delicious thrift: excellent fresh rustic bread served at room temperature with good butter, also at room temperature for easy spreading.

Two more cost-saving measures: **Kitchen A Bistro** doesn't take credit cards or reservations. This will annoy some diners, but not me: If this is what it takes for Lomando to feed me so well for under \$60, I'm in.

The restaurant's resources are on the plates. (Actually, the fine white plates themselves are very lovely.) Almost everything we had at a recent dinner was top-notch starting with the complimentary corn soup and gougères. The pastas—gnocchi with tomato confit, with a haunting undertone of tarragon, and sweet-corn ravioli with wild mushrooms—were as good as I've had on Long Island. Duck breast with farro and figs, oil-poached halibut with roasted mushrooms and garlic scapes on a bed of salsify, wine-braised short ribs—all masterfully conceived and executed. Desserts evinced a quiet confidence: chocolate-espresso pots de crème and an unimpeachable peach tarte tatin.

The only disappointments were a too-huge pork chop served with a soggy, too-arugulish panzanella salad. Also, it would have suited our foursome if the charcuterie board hadn't consisted of three of everything.

A more serious quibble: Our table had originally been set with thick, squat, unmatched wine glasses while most of the tables boasted taller, finer specimens. I don't really care if my server wears cut-offs, but there's no excuse for substandard stemware. **Kitchen A Bistro is at 404 N. Country Rd., St. James, 631-862-0151.**