

CUISINE

BAYSIDE

Visiting old friends over dinner at the Atlantic Hotel

Sometimes I feel like a health inspector when I visit kitchens, popping in during the middle of service to say hi to friends and colleagues, interrupting them whilst they sweat over boiling pots. In a strange way, just being back in a kitchen is like revisiting an old friend; the aromas, the noise, the hustle.



By Paul Suplee,
CCC, PC III

I miss the frenetic nature of the work. It just doesn't seem the same without it after so many years, but observing from afar is still a fun pastime. I will just have to make do, and I know that those of you still working in kitchens are curling your lips at this point and thinking, "how dare he complain, that lazy bastard?"

Reflecting on this recently with Leo D'Aleo, the newly hired chef at John Fager's historic Atlantic Hotel in Berlin, we had a chuckle over some grub and grape. Leo and I go back a bit, so I have tried to stop by and chat, and of course eat, whenever the chance arises.

Given the opportunity to see what Fager has done to the hotel portion of the business, I walked through, amazed at the antiquity, which has been restored, with the grand piano back in the Drummer's Café, antique pictures hung on the walls once again, and the rooms all individually and painstakingly restored to former days of glory.

It was impressive to see the amount of work that was done in a relatively short period of time. Now poised for the busy season, I don't think that there will be much problem in filling the place.

But I did not go to the Atlantic to see the hotel rooms, or to see the refurbishing of frames, photos and tidbits. I went to hang out with Leo, and before I knew it, we were talking about things over a bar full of food and wine.

Overall, business has been good. John, Robin (the hotel's general manager) and Leo were all similarly grateful that the community support and frequenting of the café have been even higher



PAUL SUPLEE/BAYSIDE GAZETTE

than anticipated.

Leo quipped, "We came out the gates running, and once we got past the hurdles of opening the restaurant, we were almost grateful that the monsoon hit, which let us catch our breath a little!"

We sat at one of the wooden slab-bars that are now frequently used in the ballroom, adjacent to the kitchen, a six-inch thick tabletop that sits atop two vintage barrels. A couple of barstools, some vino, and some plates of food from the kitchen, and we were ready to

get down to business.

I like food, which definitely explains the extra pounds this year. Leo, knowing this, did not hold back as he brought some dishes out of the kitchen, starting with shrimp salad with crackers. It was flavored perfectly, with huge shrimp, peeled and whole and tossed in a lightly Old-Bay infused mayonnaise.

When pressed on whether I should laughingly write "piles of Old Bay," Leo laughed and said "no, just the right touch," using his hands to simulate, in

that inimitable Italian fashion, the classic and delicate Julia Child/Graham Kerr way of spicing a dish. I'm French for the most part and we speak with our hands too, so I guess I can't pick on Leo too much for that.

Next, we ate seared scallops on grits cakes with fruit salsa and fried shoestring sweet potatoes. As though this were not enough, Leo then brought me out his quiche to sample. Deep dish by nature, this is a serious quiche aficionado's pleasure, rich and eggy custard in a homemade savory crust with broccoli and cheddar.

The barkeep pulled out a pleasant Sauvignon Blanc as well as a Sainsbury Pinot Noir, the former serving the shrimp salad and quiche well, and the latter doing a fair job at matching the grill on the scallops.

Fat and happy, I went on my merry way, and on the way home all I could think about is the never-ending cycle of restaurants. Out with the old, and in with the new. It's the circle of restaurant life.

I am glad to see some new friends moving in to the Atlantic, especially ones who have done such a good job at bringing the hotel back to its heyday. I think that it is safe to say that they have, since the locals' response indicates that they are pleased to the gills at what John and Robin have done with the hotel, and for what Leo is doing in the kitchen.

And with Leo at the helm of the kitchen, it gives me one

more friend to visit on my way home from work. Actually two, if you count the kitchen itself.

Paul Suplee CEC, PC-III is the culinary instructor at Worcester Technical High School, and is an ACF recognized Certified Executive Chef. He can be reached at ChefPaul@mchsi.com. His website is www.HeartofaKitchen.com.