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Bouche, a Slice of Provence in New Mexico

February 16th, 2017 by Elise Quinio (Translated from French by Alexander Uff)

From appetizers to desserts, the bistro Bouche blends French and American influences. Heading up this Santa Fe restaurant, **American chef Charles Dale** offers a menu showcasing the American southwest while paying homage to his childhood on the French Riviera and his years spent in New York alongside French chef Daniel Boulud. Bouche is also one of the 50 restaurants taking part in the **Santa Fe Restaurant Week** from February 19 to 26.

France-Amérique: You are an American, and were born in Nice. How did your time on the French Riviera influence your career as a chef?

Charles Dale: My father was a diplomat, and was posted in France as a vice-consul in Marseille before moving to work as a consul in Nice. My childhood was defined by the culinary traditions of Southern France. While we were living in Monaco, our Italian cook, Franca, taught me how to make ravioli when I was just four years old. I came back to France in 1972 to finish my studies in a high school in Cannes. I stayed with the Pourrat family, and Madame Pourrat would cook us dinner every evening. Her meals combined her Lyonnais heritage with Provençale cuisine. It was thanks to her that I discovered fusion cuisine!

After working in New York and Aspen, you moved to Santa Fe. How did you decide to open your bistro, Bouche?

Back in September 2012, I had just left my job as an executive chef in a luxury hotel in Santa Fe and was on vacation in Paris with my wife and children. One evening we went for dinner at Chez l'Ami Louis, a bistro in the third *arrondissement*. My children discovered *foie gras* and snails, and they loved them! I had a brainwave: I wanted to open the equivalent of Chez l'Ami Louis in Santa Fe, and serve up rustic, traditional and modern cuisine. I opened Bouche a few months later, in February 2013. We created a chic, welcoming and relaxed setting in the restaurant, and the kitchen is open-plan, just like in French bistros. I divide my time between the dining area and the kitchen; I make sure I find time to welcome the customers and taste the food!



What role does southwest American cuisine play in your essentially French menu?

Santa Fe cuisine has taken a lot from Mexican culture. Beans, corn and squash — known as the “three sisters” in cooking terms — are used all the time, as are red and green chile peppers. Without going as far as fusion cuisine, I do include regional influences in my French bistro-style dishes. I add a pinch of red chile pepper to the mussels in white wine, garlic and thyme. The Arctic char [a north-Canadian fish] is served with chard from my garden, Jerusalem artichoke chips and a butter and red wine sauce. The ham hock — also locally sourced — is accompanied with Le Puy green lentils and an apple sauce made with fruit from Colorado.

For this year’s Santa Fe Restaurant Week, which dishes would you recommend to people looking to discover your cuisine?

I would recommend the *foie gras* for the starter. For the main, I suggest the sea bass served with fennel, tomatoes and a lemon juice and olive oil sauce. This dish is an excellent representation of southern French cuisine, and reminds me of my childhood on the French Riviera. Ending on a sweet note, the lemon pie is both generous and light.

<https://france-amerique.com/en/bouche-a-slice-of-provence-in-new-mexico/>

*Bouche Bistro
451 West Alameda Street
Santa Fe, NM 87501
(505) 982-6297
www.bouchebistro.com*