

localflavour

PEPPERWOOD BISTRO

■ All foods are created from what's fresh in the market that day and as local as possible.

by **Rebecca Dumais**

photography by Karen Newman

The team at Pepperwood Bistro prides itself on being very much a part of Burlington's community, offering a varied, fresh menu, onsite brewery, select wines, stunning lake-view patio and active philanthropic involvement in the community.

Owners, Bill Leslie and Stephen Bell have been working together for close to 15 years. Eight years ago the pair opened Pepperwood and from there have expanded the business to four other restaurants: Miller's Country Bistro and Bar, Rosewood Bistro, La Costa Nuovo and 2020 Lakeside, as well as catering and special events.

This brewpub is no brew ha-ha; each month there is a new feature beer. Batches of brew are made available on the first Friday of each month and you've got to get them while they last – sometimes a selection will last for perhaps a week or so after it's released. Guests at Pepperwood can enjoy any of brewer Paul Dickey's six house brands: Pale Ale, Dry Hopped Best Bitter, Cream Ale, Red Ale, Monkey Brown, and a Framboise. The Best Bitter is also released seasonally in limited quantities as a cask-conditioned dry hopped ale.

Though well known for its beers, Pepperwood also caters to wine lovers. "It's also very much a wine restaurant," says Leslie, adding that they've received the *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence for the last four years. Music lovers can also enjoy live entertainment on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings and Sunday brunch is accompanied by live jazz.

Pepperwood's food selection offers both variety and popular standards. "We've got a really good food program with our chef, Mike Middlemost," says Bell. The management team builds menus: Leslie, Bell, Middlemost and General Manager Sandy Brodie. "We have a fabulous general »

Pepperwood Bistro Chef Mike Middlemost.





Lamb Osso Buco

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» manager. She's always on the floor and always looking after everybody's service. We all participate as a team, but she's your front line."

Homerun feature menu items, which run on a daily and weekly basis, are the ones that make it onto the more permanent menu. All foods are created from what's fresh in the market that day and as local as possible, such as fresh fish and game.

Must-try standards include the Bistro Steak Frites: "AAA" aged strip loin with Yukon Gold frites, chipotle aioli and Madagascar peppercorn jus; Ahi Tuna: sesame crusted Ahi tuna served rare, with sesame wild rice crepes, tomato salsa and hot mustard wasabi plum glaze; Atlantic Salmon: Parmesan crusted Atlantic salmon with an asparagus risotto, caramelized leeks and moro compound butter, as well as the Mediterranean organic half-chicken and grilled swordfish.

"We tie the beer into our food program especially with our mussels," says Bell. "We use the different types of beer to cook the mussels in." The meal can be topped off with popular desserts such as the Pepperwood Bread Pudding or the seasonal crême brûlée.

Larger celebrations inside the restaurant can choose from the Group Menus, which help keep event budgets in check and reduce the time it can often take larger gatherings to make their choices, allowing guests to enjoy the reason they're there; to celebrate. The menus are only suggestions and the restaurant is more than happy to design a tailor-made version.

Leslie and Bell redesign and recreate some aspect of the bistro's interior each year in an effort to add a new element to the establishment. "We just make a point of it," explains Leslie. The furniture on the patio was recently changed in a Champs Elysées, European bistro style. "We're constantly upgrading, improving and putting something more into the restaurant to continue its interest level," he explains. Original artwork by local artists including Linda Toward and Debbie Scollick are exhibited in all of their restaurants and catering venues.

A substantial amount of Pepperwood's business is catering home events, dinner parties, and tent events as well as catering exclusivity for the Burlington Arts Centre, Royal Botanical Gardens and Beverly Golf and Country Club. Whether it's an event for two to 2,000 (their largest event served 700 people), their goal "is giving people what they want," states Leslie.

Besides giving the community a place for gastronomic respite, a Pepperwood philosophy is to give back to the community through charity work, donating between \$200,000 to \$300,000 worth of various assistance over the last year or so. "We do a lot of charity benefits for everything from cystic fibrosis to the Miriam Group, working with people with AIDS, Oakville-Trafalgar Hospital, Performing Arts Burlington," says Bell. "We really believe you have to give back to the community. The community has been good to us." Pepperwood is also a large supporter of high school and college co-op programs; there are always several young co-op students in the organization working and learning under the chefs.

Foundations of a good business – and enjoying the work you're doing – consist of good staff and a good following. "We have a great staff, it's being able to create opportunities for the people we're working with, our clientele of course – you have to love being with people and we love that part of the game," says Leslie. "It's very rewarding." Leslie stresses that customers should have an experience that includes memorable, quality, service that exceeds expectations and is comfortable. "That's paramount," he says.

- 1455 Lakeshore Road, Burlington; 905.333.6999; pepperwood.on.ca

Bistro Style Tuscan Chicken

See recipe on page 151



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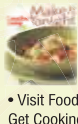


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Lamb Osso Buco

8 (2.5-inch thick) lamb osso buco

1 medium onion

3 cloves garlic

2 tbsp (30 mL) chipotle peppers

2 tsp (10 mL) capers

juice of two limes

2 cups (500 mL) plum tomatoes, crushed
chicken stock

3 tsp (15 mL) fish sauce

salt & pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 500°F. Roast lamb osso buco in oven until brown. Meanwhile, in a blender, pulse onions, chipotle peppers, capers and garlic until it forms a paste. Remove lamb from oven and coat with paste. Return to oven and roast for an additional 20 minutes. Remove from oven and lower temperature to 350°F. Add plum tomatoes, lime juice, fish sauce and stock to pan (enough to cover meat with liquid). Cover with aluminum foil and braise in oven for approximately three hours or until the meat is falling off the bones. Serve with couscous or white bean cassoulet.

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Bistro Style Tuscan Chicken

4 boneless half chickens

Sauce

- 1 cup (250 mL) white wine
- 1 cup (250 mL) chicken stock
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) kalamata olives
- 1 sprig fresh thyme
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 1/2 pint grape tomatoes
- 3 tsp (15 mL) butter
- salt & pepper to taste

Season chicken with salt and pepper. Sear chicken on both sides in a hot skillet until golden brown. Preheat oven to 350°F. Place chicken on baking tray and finish cooking in oven. Meanwhile, in a saucepan combine white wine, chicken stock, thyme and rosemary. Heat and reduce liquid by half. Remove from heat, add butter and grape tomatoes. Serve chicken with mashed potatoes and sauce. 🍴



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