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Euro chic meets casual at amazing Bistro

in the bell curve of a restaurant's life, it's the upward sloping side that is most exciting.

That period when a place is growing and working hard to find its stride; when prices are the most reasonable, and when owners and employees are still hugely enthusiastic about their work.

Cape Coral's Bistro In Vivo is climbing that precise portion of the curve right now.

Mother-daughter owners Canelle and Veronique Frelier opened the 7-month-old coffee café for dinner in November. Dinner service, Veronique explained one night, is what the Frelier family knows.

Bistro In Vivo, located in the Sweetbys plaza on Cape Coral Parkway, was the Freliers' attempt to escape the long hours and manic schedules involved with their fine-dining restaurants in Verona, Italy, and the south of France. The day-time café was meant to give 75-year-old Canelle more time on her sailboat and less time behind a stove, but it hasn't quite worked out that way.

Instead Canelle is back in the kitchen each night, fretting over her famous Filet de la Mamma, a dish that involves a complex, wonderful, top-secret, 20-spice sauce (hint: one is mustard seed, now good luck with the other 19) that tops strips of perfectly cooked filet mignon.

And Cape Coral is a better place for it.

Bistro In Vivo is one heck of a French restaurant in a city with a thick Italian accent. It's escargot and pate de foie gras, vol au vent and duck à l'orange, with a list of pastas to please even Caesar himself.

Don't mistake this for fine dining. Bistro In Vivo is more comfortable than that. The dining room, awash in a somehow modern tone of bubble-gum pink, is sort of Euro-chic-meets-teenage girl. And service involves Veronique and Canelle hefting plates of food while regaling you with long, but endlessly entertaining stories of their lives, old and new.



Pink walls and French posters decorate the interior of Bistro In Vivo in southeast Cape Coral. The eatery opened for dinner in November. NANCY OBENSTEIN/NEWS-PRESS

Start with those escargot — tender, garlicky, perfect — and move on to the country's foie gras terrine, a richly mellow masterpiece of goose liver and buttery fat that will turn even the most liver-phobic into believers. There's a gorgeous cheese plate, the bits of brie, gorgonzola and Parmesan accompanied by good honey and toasted walnuts. And real butter (lots of it) to spread onto the restaurant's freshly baked breads.

And it only gets better.

Bring a few friends and force one of them to join you in the Amazing Parmigiana, the restaurant's show-stopping main course. It's a bit of theater with your dinner as Canelle scratches down the inside of a giant Parmesan cheese wheel, adding ribbons of tagliatelle pasta, wild mushrooms, a touch of truffle oil and a hearty helping of flaming grappa.

If your heart isn't yet racing, it will as Canelle shaves thick slices of fresh black truffle. "Dees eers een thousand euro per kilo!" she says. It's a mere \$22 investment that will linger in your memory for the weeks, months and years to come.



RATING SYSTEM

- *** great
- ** good
- * fair
- * poor

AVERAGE COST

- \$55-\$ = \$25 and up
- \$35-\$ = \$20-\$24
- \$15-\$ = \$15-\$19
- \$5-\$ = \$10-\$14
- \$ = \$10 or less

BISTRO IN VIVO

4825 MILTON ST., CAPE CORAL

- **Food:** ****
- **Atmosphere:** ****
- **Service:** ****
- **Price:** \$\$\$
- **Hours:** 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday to Saturday (dinner from 5-9 p.m.), 9 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Sunday.
- **Call:** 471-0855
- **Noise level:** Low to moderate
- **Etc.:** Limited selection of house wines (chardonnay, merlot and cabernet) and beer (Budweiser, Bud Light), outdoor seating, takeout and catering available.

• **Web:** bistroinvo.com

SAMPLE OF THE MENU

APPETIZERS

- Petals of smoked salmon and blinis, \$8.95
- Cheese plate, \$12.95
- Escargot, \$7.95
- Salad Nicoise, \$11.95
- Lobster bisque, \$7.95
- Pate de foie gras, \$14.95

ENTREES

- Beef Bourguignon, \$17.95
- Canard à l'orange, \$24.95
- Filet de la Mamma, \$25.95
- Gnocchi in gorgonzola sauce, \$11.50
- Linguine with seafood, \$16
- Lobster ravioli, \$14

There is lobster ravioli in a decadent blush sauce and gnocchi lavished in piquant gorgonzola cream. Veal osso bucco falls off the bone, while sides of carrot mousse — imagine a cloud of intense, carrot-goodness — and scalloped potatoes keep your fork darting back for more.

There are custard-y quiches and simple salads for lunch, whippers-thin crepes and homemade croissants for breakfast and three varieties of house wine for whatever time of day

strikes your fancy. Finish your meal with a rustic tart, tiramisù or a just-as-airy mousse of the more traditional chocolate variety.

It's tough to go wrong at Bistro In Vivo.

And if you go now, you can one day say you ate here way back when.

Jean Le Bouef is the *nom de plume* of a local food lover who dines at The News-Press' expense. Send email to jleboeuf@news-press.com.