

EAST BAY | **express**

JULY 24, 2002 | VOLUME 24, NO. 41 | THE EAST BAY'S FREE WEEKLY

Bringin' It on Home

DELICACY*

1576 Hopkins Street, Berkeley. 510-524-7552

Hours: 9-7:30 Mon-Sat; Sun 11-6

Payment: Cash, all credit cards

GRÉGOIRE

2109 Cedar Street (at Shattuck), Berkeley.

510-883-1893

Lunch: 11:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Mon.-Sat. Dinner:

4:30-9:00 p.m. Mon.-Sat.

Payment: Cash, V, MC

My nights of club-going are coming to an end and my fashion sense may have frozen somewhere in the last decade, but sometimes I have to tell myself, *Jon Kauffman, you've still got your finger*

BY

JONATHAN
KAUFFMAN

ger on America's pulse.

Back in January I wrote a column announcing

chichi takeout as the post-9/11 food trend. I don't claim exceptional prescience, but I seem to have been attuned to the gastronomic vibrations emanating out of the ectosphere above North Berkeley. The past months brought notice of two new upscale takeout joints in the Gourmet Ghetto.

The theory is that in hard times, we choose to stay home. Enter gourmet takeout, a couple steps up from Trader Joe's, where you can have restaurant-quality food without paying restaurant prices or tipping servers.

Having taken over the space that much-beloved Made to Order once occupied on Hopkins Street, Delicacy* is well positioned to attract the Monterey Market crowd. The new gourmet products store and catering company has taken its aesthetic, as well as its asterisk, straight from the pages of *Wallpaper** magazine. Rows of slim chrome shelves are stacked high with exotic, whimsical, and pricey treats for the larder: French honeys, obscure Asian rices, organic biscotti from local microproducers. In short, exactly the stuff I love browsing.

In the freezer case, clear plastic tubs of housemade chicken stock and veal demiglace abut foil-wrapped frozen dinners. And in the long deli cases can be seen Italian meats for the slicing, stinky cheese for the spreading, and housemade pickles for the crunching.

The deli cases also hold the kinds of food that bring customers in regularly: innovative sandwiches, prepared salads, and cakes. Kathy Clark, the owner, has hired Cafe Rouge and Betelnut veteran Todd Butler to be executive chef for the catering and retail sides of the business. Butler responded by

designing a wide array of takeaway foods and sauces for home cooks and home never-cooks. On a balmy evening several weeks ago, two friends and I sampled his wares for a paper-plate dinner party.

Popping the main courses in the oven to heat up, we cut up a loaf of Delicacy*'s cracked-wheat country bread and spooned a trio of salads onto our plates. The chewy but dull *farro* salad with English peas, arugula, dried cranberries, and golden raisins needed brighter, more assertive seasonings. Long roasting had all but melted a duo of red and chiogga beets and concentrated their sugars, which a splash of citrus perked up. And grilled asparagus, charred but not mushy, was coated in a seductively earthy Spanish salsa of roasted piquillo peppers, green olives, and capers.

After twenty minutes I brought the first round of hot dishes out of the oven. Spanish ingredients again showed up in a calzone.

Baking brought back the crust's light, crisp edges; inside thin slices of chorizo, tasting of salt and paprika, anchored a creamy mélange of ricotta, tomato sauce, and whole parsley and basil leaves. A decadent gratin layered thinly sliced potatoes with Gruyère and cream.

Finally we got to the frozen TV dinners, all in the

\$7 to \$8 range. I kept the lid on the foil trays and baked them in a preheated 350-degree oven for forty minutes. Both trays were divided into three sections. The first, and more successful, contained a roasted chicken breast moistened with a salty but

PRICES Delicacy*

Chicken dinner \$7.49

Sausage calzone . . . \$5.95

Grilled asparagus \$9.95/lb

Grégoire

Lamb sandwich \$7.50

Potato puffs \$4.00

Chicken wings \$12.00

The Kitchen Sink

Aging Gracefully

Summer is well on its way, and you'll be at a bistro in the region that doesn't have heirloom tomatoes on the menu. You'll find slices of chartreuse, a white, and brown tomatoes with knobs on the inside. But what exactly makes a tomato special?

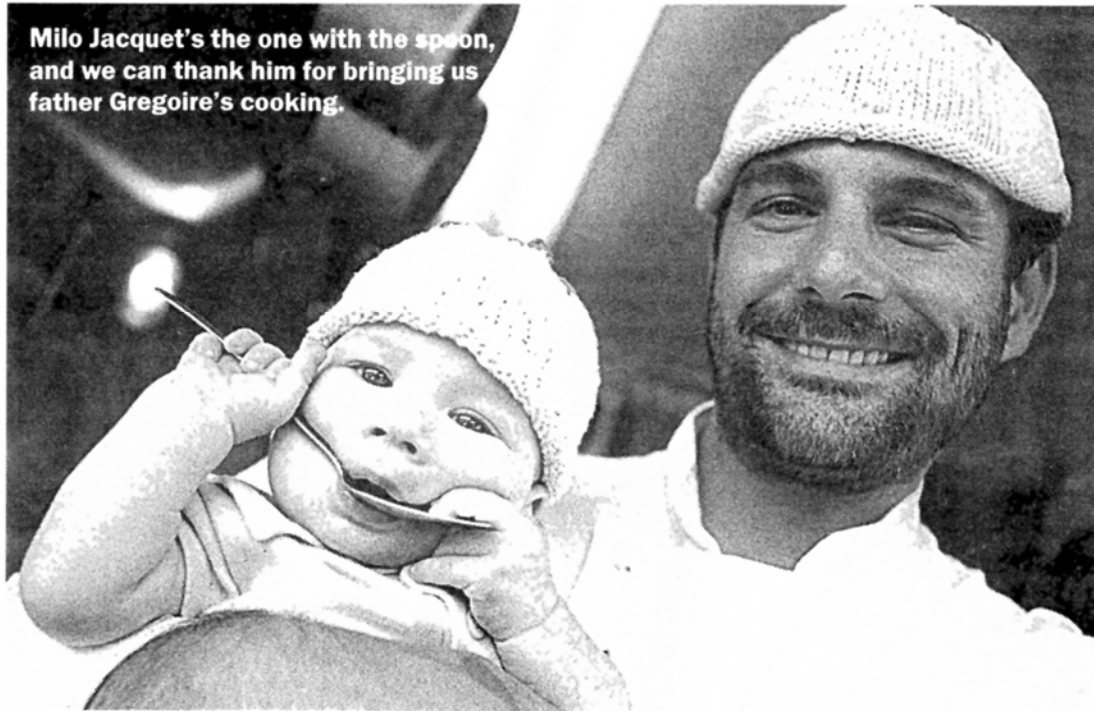
According to food writer and farmer Greg Gault's website (www.tomatofest.com), heirloom tomatoes are varieties whose seeds were saved from one generation to the next or were sold commercially before they were replaced in the 1940s and '50s. A few of the market come from more recent intentional cross-pollination of older varieties.

When you spend \$3 to \$4 for a pound of heirloom tomatoes, you're not necessarily buying a deal. Heirloom varieties were passed down from generation to generation because they grew well and tasted great. The reason for their ripeness and freshness. Most heirloom tomatoes are grown for uniform appearance and are often picked while green and are later ripened in a dark room, which is why they're colorless and flavorless.

Last week I swung through the Berk

Milo Jacquet's the one with the spoon, and we can thank him for bringing us father Grégoire's cooking.

CHRIS DUFFEY



flavorful chicken jus, alongside a scoop of fluffy truffled mashed potatoes and tender baby carrots in a little chicken stock. The second tray held five or six undercooked pork spare ribs, fat layer unmelted, in a sweet but oddly bitter barbecue sauce. Garlic-lemon mashed potatoes, butter oozing out of every bite, and soft but still green blue lake beans accompanied the ribs.

For dessert, we split a slightly dry chocolate marbled cheesecake and a “death by chocolate” cake with a smear of marzipan at its core. Without wine, we spent about \$20 per person. We also consumed a French bistro’s worth of butter and olive oil.

The next day, an e-mail tip sent me to Grégoire, on Cedar Street at Shat-

tuck, for lunch. I expected to find a few shelves of to-go sandwiches and salads, but there wasn’t any food in sight – in fact, there wasn’t room for any food. The tiny, cheery space can’t fit more than a range, a grill, a fryer, a cash register, and a drinks case, plus two cooks in chef’s whites, one with a knit cap that looked like an upside-down golden poppy.

The one with the cap turned out to be the owner, Grégoire Jacquet, who came from France in 1989 to cook under Jacky Robert at Ernie’s, and then spent seven years with the Ritz-Carlton traveling from Puerto Rico to Bali and back. When Jacquet’s wife got pregnant, the couple **continued on page 32**

decided to settle in Berkeley; Jacquet reworked the tiny Bistro Stella to serve restaurant food “you can eat everyday.”

The two tiny picnic tables out in front were taken up by a large — well, six-person — party, so I decided to take food back to the *Express* offices. All Grégoire’s to-go fare is cooked to order. Since the food is made with care and precision, even the sandwiches take slightly longer to assemble, so if you’re in a rush, you can call ahead or fax in your order. (You can download the current month’s menus from www.gregoirerestaurant.com)

Lunch features an octet of sandwiches, all affordably priced between \$4.50 and \$7.50. Be sure to splurge on a side or two of potatoes. Like a good northern Frenchman, Grégoire offers not one but four types: roasted potatoes, french fries, crispy puffs, and potato nuggets. To make the puffs, the chefs drop tiny scoops of cheesy mashed potatoes into the fryer until the outsides form a thin, brittle shell. They should be eaten immediately and ecstatically, while the insides are molten; fifteen minutes later the puffs soften into pleasant potato cakes.

Two open-faced sandwiches were stacked on slices of sourdough that had been liberally brushed with olive oil and grilled until cracklingly crisp. The simplest folded thin sheets of prosciutto over top, crowned by a shower of parmesan; a second piled fresh mozzarella on grilled eggplant and zucchini, accented by sun-dried tomatoes and squiggles of intense basil pesto. Sliced grilled shrimp tossed in a creamy mayonnaise were spooned into a hollowed-out crusty round of pantofolina bread slathered in a tomato-herb vinaigrette. My favorite was a warm sandwich of thinly sliced lamb, pink at the core, covered by a brown, silky mass of caramelized onions punctuated by sharp arugula leaves. All were spectacular — I found myself thinking of them days later.

Grégoire makes several desserts: I preferred the almond wheel cake, small, dense ring-molded cakes to be dipped in a sugary, concentrated strawberry coulis. The “minute-baked apple fold” turned out to be an upscale McDonald’s apple pie: a rectangle of puff pastry sprinkled with cinnamon sugar that enclosed stewed apples. It could have used an extra minute in the oven to crisp up the puff pastry.

For dinner, Grégoire offers casual entrées such as ribs, chicken wings, and fish and chips, along with more formal lamb chops and grilled prawns and a couple of vegetable sides. All are priced above the pizza-cheap Chinese range, but below most bistro menus. Like *Delicacy**, Grégoire’s food is made by restaurant-trained chefs, who think of butter and oil in terms of mouthfeel and richness, not calorie content.

I returned from a second visit to Grégoire with a cardboard box piled high with jointed chicken wings roasted in a blackened herb crust, with a sweet spiced jerk onion marmalade. Another contained two grilled lamb chops, perfect medium-rare, with a less intense tomato and green olive vinaigrette. More potato puffs and an order of grilled asparagus rounded out the meal.

Both Grégoire and *Delicacy** offer affordable, interesting lunches that are a cut above your normal ham and swiss. As for dinner, whether you’re really saving money by eating off your own china is for you to decide. ■