

Three-ring cuisine: Chef Robert Young juggles menus at the Bastone complex

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FREE PRESS RESTAURANT CRITIC

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It's hard enough to execute one menu well, much less three at once from different cuisines.

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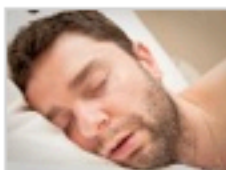
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But that's the challenge executive chef Robert Young tackled last summer at the Bastone complex in Royal Oak, where the Belgian-themed Bastone brewery, the trendy Vinoteca wine bar and the Cuban-style Café Habana share the same kitchen.

Part of his mission was to improve the kitchen's consistency. But there were other objectives as well.

Born in Wales and schooled in classic European cuisine, Young, 34, wanted to dial up the European influence at Bastone. And at Vinoteca, he wanted to offer a wider range of dining options and prices.

The changes are in place, and he says guests are embracing them.

While pizza and burgers are still featured at Bastone, more customers are ordering entrées, he says. The most popular dish on the menu is the new Leuven Waffle (\$12.95), topped with grilled chicken, leeks and peppers in sour cream sauce.

There's also a comfy Belgian side dish called *stoemp*, a delicious stir-up of mashed potatoes, cheeses, spinach, carrots, herbs and seasonings. It comes with several dishes, including a very good grilled *onglet* -- the European name for hanger steak -- marinated in pinot noir.

At Vinoteca, the menu now has a design-your-own appetizer plate, as well as a couple

of full steak dinners. "People can order a lot or a little," Young says.

No major changes are planned at Café Habana.

Young's favorite part of working as a chef is being innovative. "I like pushing boundaries. You don't want to push people away, but you want to try to encourage them to try new things."

The Bastone complex is at the corner of Fifth and Main; call 248-544-6250.



Fattoush salad, hummus and pita bread at La Feast in Livonia. (SYLVIA RECTOR/DFP)



A version of this story appears on page 8Z of the Thursday, Feb. 4, 2010, print edition of the Detroit Free Press.

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