

BASTONE BREWERY

Brewpub's new menu offers fresh European cuisine

If you're in the mood for a taste of Europe, look no further than cozy Bastone Brewery, which recently revamped its menu.

On a recent Friday night, after hearing about the new menu, we ambled into the cavernous, high-ceilinged restaurant on Main Street in Royal Oak. The changes were prompted largely to focus more on the casual brewpub feel and less on the French-inspired cuisine on which some of Bastone's entrées had been based.

And while the media continues coverage of the recession, there was no sign of it, as the restaurant didn't seem effected. Several families with youngsters, couples, friends and baby boomers all toasted the chilly evening away.

As we slid into a wooden booth, the waitress shared the new selections at the five-year-old eatery, including walleye and coq au vin (chicken in a red wine sauce). Wood floors, walls, benches and more create an atmosphere of Old World Europe.

Incidentally the name Bastone comes from the name of a town in southeast Belgium. It was of strategic importance to Allied defenses during the Battle of the Bulge.

To get inspired in the Belgian mood, diners can attack an order of pomme frites (\$5.95), which are Belgian potatoes, much like French fries. It is said that authentic pomme frites are twice-fried and served in cone-shaped containers with a variety of dips. Here, the potatoes quickly arrived in a cylindrical container along with a chosen bleu cheese mayonnaise accompaniment. The friendly waitress brought garlic mayo as well, thinking we'd want to try that, too. The bleu cheese concoction was lacking its mainstay — bleu cheese — and tasted more like thick mayonnaise. The garlic sauce was not very powerful, either. Unfortunately, the potatoes were barely warm and not the least bit crispy, so it was easy to save room for dinner. On not-so-busy nights, perhaps they

BASTONE BREWERY

419 S. Main St., Royal Oak
(248) 544-6250
www.bastone.net

★★★

HOURS: 11 a.m.-11 p.m.

Monday-Thursday; 11 a.m.-midnight Friday-Saturday; noon-10 p.m. Sunday.

PRICES: Pizza, about \$8; hors d'oeuvres \$5.95-9.95; sandwiches, about \$8; soups and salads, \$4.95-10.95; entrées, \$9.95-23.95; six-beer sampler, \$7; pint of variety beers, \$3.95-4.50; pitchers of beer average about \$13.95 each.

CREDIT CARDS: All major

LIQUOR: Full bar and beers crafted on site. Beer to-go is available.

NONSMOKING: Permitted in a few booths in bar area and at the bar.

PARKING: Metered street parking and metered parking lot behind restaurant.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS: Yes

RESERVATIONS: Yes, suggested Friday and Saturday evenings.

★★★★ Outstanding

★★★ Very good

★★ Good

are better.

Other diners honored Belgian lifestyles with orders of moules (\$9.95) — fresh black mussels with a variety of sauces, from tomato to white wine-based.

The complimentary bread (herbed, hot and yummy) would be great with the mussels, but we opted to save room for other goodies.

The new warm pretzels with white-cheddar fondue (\$8.95) were doughy, salty perfection. We also nibbled on one of six thin-crust pizza options. I will never veer from the sweet pepper and artichoke combination (\$8.95). It was crisp, hot and divinely fresh. Also falling into the top-of-the-top category was the macaroni and cheese Florentine. The little elbow noodles mingled with spinach and artichoke hearts in a Parmesan sauce, all beneath a crusty top. So warming for a winter's evening.



The Oakland Press/JOSE JUAREZ

Clockwise from top left, pan seared walleye, a beer sampler tray and macaroni and cheese Florentine are shown at Bastone Brewery in Royal Oak.

For a main dish, try the pan-seared walleye (\$18.95), a lovely dish smothered with a thyme beurre blanc sauce. The pungent thyme flavors enhanced the fresh fish perfectly. It's nice to be able to actually taste herbs in a dish — in this one, the cook truly allowed it to play a starring role, and it came piping hot. Meanwhile, encircling the delicious fish were two piero-

gies, stuffed with a potato and shrimp filling. The two flavors complemented one another well.

My husband also opted for fish — a flounder dinner special (\$20) that was cooked en papillote (a French cooking method, baked within paper). Although the fish was outstanding, the tiny serving was the size of a half a slice of pizza. As for accompaniments to

the minuscule entrée, he savored three — yes three — asparagus spears and one small red-skin potato that had been quartered.

He was glad he had ordered a large salmon Caesar salad. His greens (\$11.95) boasted an ample piece of Atlantic grilled salmon among fresh romaine lettuce and shaved Parmesan. My salad — Bastone's standard green salad (\$4.95, \$8.95) — brimmed with beets, walnuts and Belgian endive (again staying true to the Belgian theme). It's a nice combination, but be sure to order dressing on the side, or it will be drenched.

All dinners on the menu, from the aforementioned new coq au vin (\$13.95), chock full of mushrooms, to the herbed Belgian waffle (\$12.95 and smothered with wild mushrooms and leeks) to the fish and chips with artichoke tartar sauce (doesn't that sound interesting? \$13.95) come with beer recommendations, and that's what takes this restaurant to a unique level — it's an award-winning brewery. Pints, pitchers and petite samplers are de rigueur here. Favorite varieties include Monumental Blonde (American style and light), Main Street Pilsner (Bohemian style), Great White Wit (Belgian style with hints of orange, lemon and coriander), and so many more.

Many patrons come just for the beer, but now, thanks to the new menu, they can enjoy it with a variety of beer-friendly snacks, like cheeses, meats, olives and breads, all to be enjoyed amid new pendant lighting at the bar and intimate wall sconces.

The restaurant truly scores with dessert. Try a vanilla bean crème caramel number (\$4.95) and a fantastic slice of lemon cheesecake with raspberry sauce (\$6.95). Both of the desserts — and most of our fare — helped us maintain our membership in the clean-plate club.

To prevent restaurants from giving special service, The Oakland Press dining reviewer is anonymous. Each review is generally based on a single visit.