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Chez Catherine offers its guests a true dining experience in Westfield

There are some fine dining restaurants that are able to provide an escape from the ordinary through a combination of ambiance, cuisine and service. Spending time enjoying an afternoon or evening meal at Chez Catherine in Westfield provides all three of those elements — and more.

A standout among the vibrant mecca of more than 450 stores, services, and dining establishments in this medium-sized picturesque town, is this classic French restaurant at 431 North Ave. West. It has received culinary accolades from food critics at The New York Times, Food & Wine and New Jersey Monthly.

One reason for the outstanding reviews is Executive Chef Christine Migton who began as a sous chef with the restaurant before she was promoted five years ago. An honors graduate of The Culinary Institute of America, her resume includes well-known eateries in central New Jersey. Her recipes incorporate fresh regional ingredients to reflect the seasons but she also introduces healthy, flavorful alternatives to the traditional French fare.

The menu changes on a regular basis but Escargots a la Bourguignonne is a popular hors d'oeuvre that remains a constant. Specialty desserts follow entrées such as Dover sole, braised leg of lamb, pan seared duck breast and Black Angus N.Y. strip steak for three- or four-course dining.

The extensive cocktails and wine list includes French imports and Champagne, of course.

Monthly wine dinners are a special event that require reservations, as does every seating, to ensure that patrons are accommodated without having to wait for a table. There is also added space on the lower floor of the restaurant, which mostly caters to private parties.

Stephane Bocket has owned the restaurant since 2016, with partners Peggy and Michael Cowan, but



Owner Stephane Bocket carves a duck.

Chez Catherine

served in a management role with Chez Catherine the 12 years prior. His easy laugh and friendly demeanor only add to the pleasurableness one can expect during a visit. He oversees the staff and many

other details to ensure that patrons are pleased with every aspect of their dining experience.

"I'm the owner but that's what you're supposed to do," he says of arriving early each day to prep and take on tasks such as polishing the silver. "You know, you do everything."

Perhaps that is why the restaurant has been a favorite with patrons for over 40 years. Everyone is treated as a VIP from the moment they enter the elegant space, which is reminiscent of the Provencal region, with soft music playing in the background.

He is an expert at reading his customers and follows their lead if they prefer to have a quiet intimate dinner without many interruptions, or favor interacting with the approach-able Bocket who enchants diners when speaking in his native tongue.

"I take pride in making (the customers) happy," he said. "Because it's a small place, we can personalize the service. We're not uptight. I just want to make sure that guests are comfortable."

His career encompasses stints at restaurants helmed by decorated chef Alain Ducasse as well as establishments throughout France and New York City. His zeal for Chez Catherine and fine dining is evident in the many years, since the early 2000s, that he has devoted himself to the restaurant — first starting out as a server, then as Maitre d'Hotel.

"We're doing what we're doing because we love it ... and we're passionate," he said.

Visit www.ChezCatherine.com or call 908-654-4011 for event information, take-out options, or to make a reservation.

— Debra Stevko Miller



Mixed baby greens, dill vinaigrette, shaved fennel, plums and blue cheese.



Braised leg of lamb and spring vegetables.



Pan seared duck foie gras, blackberry coulis, cacao nibs and toasted baguettes.



Red snapper, basil oil, eggplant purée with saffron couscous.