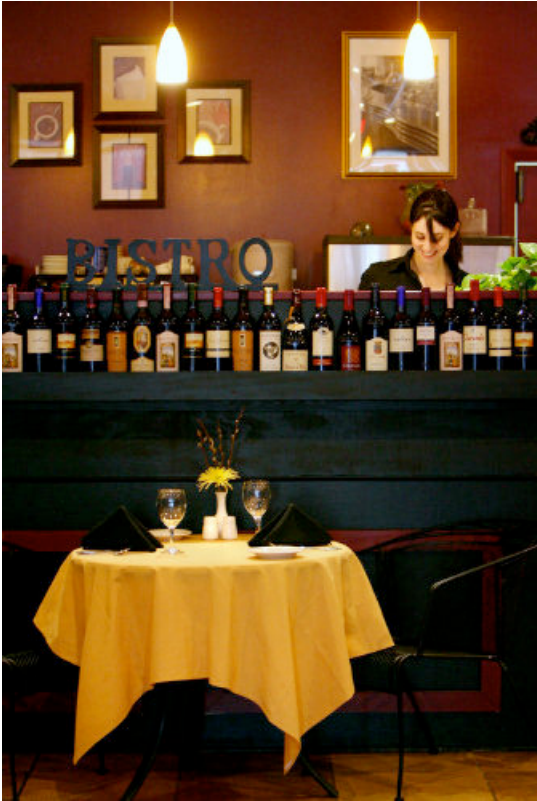


## Fine cuisine and warm, gracious atmosphere at Andrew's Bistro

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By Gail Ciampa

Journal Food Editor



Server Jillian Michaud, of North Smithfield, during a recent lunch at Andrew's Bistro. Below, the profiteroles, three ice-cream filled cream puffs with whipped cream and thick hot fudge.

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### CUMBERLAND

As soon as I saw the menu for a new bistro in Cumberland, I was seduced. Within two days, I was driving on Route 122 looking for the tucked away Andrew's Bistro. The enormous Powerhouse Gym, which shares the parking lot with the restaurant, offered the only clue we had arrived in the right place.

It was a Saturday night and early because I was determined to have the Saturday night special -- Châteaubriand. This classic beef dish for two, carved tableside and served with vegetables, isn't on many menus. At Andrew's Bistro, it's a tender beef tenderloin that's been grilled and served with wonderful versions of both béarnaise and bordelaise sauces (my favorite) and hearty smashed potatoes.

Being early also secured us what I think was the best table in the place, a cozy spot, almost an alcove, set between the front door and the bar with two comfy wing back chairs. It was like private dining with a view. That view was seeing crowds of diners

arrive and be greeted with a smile, handshake and how-do-you-do from owner Andrew Aytac.

The warmth of this man who's spent his working life managing upscale restaurants sets a tone for the restaurant. During two visits, I found each server, nattily attired in black, just as welcoming and gracious.

Aytac moved to the East Side of Providence three years ago from his most recent position managing at the elegant Brasserie Jo in the Colonnade Hotel on Huntington Avenue in Boston. He has worked in Europe and the Midwest as well. He thought he'd open his first restaurant, a bistro, in Providence, but found the cost would make it prohibitive to offer fine food and wine at what he deemed affordable prices. This is Cumberland's gain.

Andrew's specializes in both classic French and Italian dishes, all expertly prepared. The prices are indeed moderate, with all entrees under \$20 and many under \$15. The wine list, too, offers many fine choices in the \$20 to \$30 range for a bottle and \$5 to \$7 for a glass.

Beyond the lovely Châteaubriand (\$38.95 and serves two) offered on Saturday, each day has a special dish. There's Bouillabaisse, Canard À l'Orange, Skate Meunière and on Tuesday, Beef Wellington. I arrived too late for that dish on my second visit, drawn back again by the promise of the menu. But I was so impressed with the steak au poivre, I forgot about my disappointment. This pan-roasted New York sirloin (\$19.95) is crusted with black pepper but it is a divine Cognac demi-glace that makes the dish. A touch of cream adds a richness to the sweet sauce that perfectly balances the pepper.

There are so many ways to dine on this beautifully constructed menu one could satisfy any mood. So we went Italian one night with an appetizer Margherita pizza (\$7.95) with a nice thin crust and delectable proportions of tomato, basil and fresh mozzarella. Pleasing too was the entrée of Gnocchi À la Provençale (\$12.95), perfectly produced potato dumplings in a chunky tomato and basil sauce.

The bistro is small, with only 20 tables and a bar with 7 seats. The lighting is soft with wall sconces and pendants illuminating the bar area. It occupies the space that most recently housed Made From Scratch. It shares the strip mall with a few other stores and that giant gym. Aytac hopes to add another 20 plus seats for al fresco dining in the warmer weather.

One could imagine summer dining with the luscious crab cakes (\$8.95), two large cakes with plenty of shredded crabmeat balanced with a nicely seasoned mix. The accompanying rémoulade is good to the last drop. This French, mayonnaise-based sauce flavored with delicate capers is whipped light and ethereal.

The only disappointment in either visit was the vegetables. With the Châteaubriand, only broccoli and a few strands of peppers were served, while one expects more of a variety with this elegant dish. Plus, I'm no fan of broccoli.

The wine list is small but so chock-full of varietals from around the world, including old world and new world choices. We tried a just right Chilean Carmenere (Calina for \$25), the lost grape of Bordeaux that was discovered growing in Chile. The wine list offers everything from Nero d'Avola from Italy to Pinot Noir from Oregon and Tempranillo from Spain and French Champagnes. Andrew's offers only wine and beer, and the selection of imported beers is also small and nice, and includes Peroni from Italy and Pilsner Urquell, a Czech beer.

There's no letup with dessert. The profiteroles (\$5) are three cream puffs of fresh pastry filled to overflowing with ice cream and topped with whipped cream and real thick hot fudge. Chocolate lovers will drown in the lavish Chocolate Spoon Cake (\$5.95), so rich and moist you can't stop at one bite.

As we enjoyed dessert, Aytac stopped by the table because he wasn't at the door when we arrived. He apologized for not greeting us and making us feel at home. He didn't know us or make me as a critic. He does this for every table. I watched him. But he needn't have worried. His food made us feel right at home, if home were the Left Bank.

#### Bill of fare

A dinner for two at Andrew's Bistro might look like this:

Camelot Pinot Noir...\$7.00  
Crossings Sauvignon Blanc...\$6.00  
Crab Cakes Remoulade...\$8.95  
Steak au Poivre...\$19.95  
Gnocchi a la Provençale...\$12.95  
Profiteroles...\$5.00  
Total food and wine...\$59.85  
Tax...\$4.79  
Tip...\$12.00  
Total bill...\$76.64

Andrew's Bistro, 3755 Mendon Rd. (Route 122), Cumberland, (401) 658-1515, [www.andrewsbistro.com](http://www.andrewsbistro.com). Bistro casual. Free parking lot. Wheelchair accessible. Highchairs. No reservations. Open Monday through Friday for lunch 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Monday through Thursday for dinner 5-9 p.m.; Friday and Saturday 5-10 p.m. AE, D, MC, V. Appetizers \$4.95 to \$8.95; entrees \$11.95 to \$19.95; desserts \$3.95 to \$5.95; children's menu \$4.95. Wine and beer only with wines by the glass \$5 to \$9; and bottles \$20-\$65.

[gciampa@projo.com](mailto:gciampa@projo.com)