

Les Cochons d'Or serving great, glorious food

HOT SPRINGS – A needed dining niche has been delightfully filled, with the opening of Les Cochons d'Or.

Dining Delights

By Margo Oxendine



The restaurant, on Main Street in Hot Springs, is serving dinner from 5 until 9, Tuesday through Saturday, and brunch on Saturdays and Sundays from 11-2.

Les Cochons d'Or is the effort of Kyle and Crystal Krieger, formerly of White Sulphur Springs, W.Va. The couple would seem to be a match made in heaven: He's a top-notch chef, and she is an advanced sommelier, or wine master.

The two met at The Greenbrier. Crystal began as a bread server, but it did not take long before her winning personality, hard work and knowledge paid off – she moved up quickly through the ranks at the historic hotel. Kyle's formal training began at The Greenbrier, and his subsequent posts included The Grand Hotel in Mackinac Island, Mich., and the Ritz-Carlton in Naples, Fla. In what might be termed his "spare time," Kyle started a small mustard company, The Pig Cave, which sells its products nationally. The current issue of Southern Living magazine touts The Pig Cave Mustard, which is available at Bella's Gourmet Shop on Washington Street in Lewisburg, W.Va.

There's a natural progression from the mustard to Les Cochons d'Or. Crystal says, "When we all sat down to come up with a name for the restaurant, we went through several names. Kyle decided on Les Cochons d'Or, which means 'the golden pigs.' It is a spin-off of the mustard name. We all loved the name so we went with it." She adds, "Kyle was classically trained at the Greenbrier, and was influenced by classic French cooking skills. He wanted the restaurant to be American cuisine with classic French inspiration."

Co-owners of Les Cochons d'Or are John and Kate Loeffler, who also own and operate The Inn at Gristmill Square and the Waterwheel Restaurant in Warm Springs. The couples met while they were working at The Greenbrier; a solid friendship was formed, and that turned into a business partnership at LCdO, which is the shorthand the Kriegers use to refer to their restaurant.

On a recent Thursday night, LCdO was filled with diners, most of them local, and all of them happy. The place had a party atmosphere. Table-hopping was the order of the evening.

Suzy Shaver greeted guests at the door, Zach Barnhill grinned behind the handsome bar, Chelsea Fry made certain water glasses were quickly filled. Waiter Chris Mines kept a pleasant smile on his face, unfazed by the hubbub. Crystal glided from table to table, explaining and extolling the virtues of a very nice wine list. In the open kitchen, Chef Kyle and a sous chef bustled about, grilling, plating and tending to various pots of savory-scented side dishes. Despite the fact that the restaurant had only opened last week, everything was seamless.

As for the food at LCdO, it is sumptuous, innovative and beautifully plated. Several entrees are created with cast iron – almond-crusted mountain trout, pan-seared duck breast and leg confit, and an unforgettable



Top left: After Chef Kyle delivered the finishing touches, this filet of beef was served, accompanied by fresh asparagus and parsley, oven-roasted tomato and sauce Fogot, which is a derivative of béarnaise, with red wine sauce. Top right: Chef Kyle Krieger puts his masterful touch to a seared filet of beef at Les Cochons d'Or, the new restaurant in downtown Hot Springs. Middle left: Crystal Krieger, an advanced sommelier, advises the Phil and Becky (not pictured) Deemer party about a choice of wine for the evening. The Deemers were dining with Lee Elliott, foreground, and Bill Jones (not pictured). Middle right: The well-appointed bar at Les Cochons d'Or is tended by Zach Barnhill. The wine list is varied, and craft beers and cocktails are also available. Bottom right: It is difficult to choose between the three desserts on the menu at Les Cochons d'Or. You may just want to sample all of them. In the center is one of the restaurant's after-dinner cocktail confections, a butterscotch-kissed coffee with vodka, Bailey's Irish Cream, butternut schnapps and whipped cream. It packs a warming punch on a winter evening. (Recorder photos by Margo Oxendine)



seared filet of beef. Wood grilled entrees include poulette rouge chicken, basil-stuffed Faroe Island salmon, leg of lamb, braised flat iron steak and wood-roasted seasonal vegetables with garlic basil tofu spread, red quinoa, radishes, garlic-roasted asparagus, LCdO watercress and a spiced chick pea naan.

As for Le Cochon d'Or, well, that is, of course, pork – pancetta-wrapped tenderloin with sage infusion, forbidden black rice and balsamic jus.

The portions are generous. One might simply duck in for a soup or salad and an appetizer and leave satisfied. Soups include French onion with sourdough croutons, and cream of potato with bacon, cheddar, crème fraîche and chives.

There is a mountain Caesar salad that features baby kale, roast brussel sprouts, pickled tomatoes and shaved parmesan. It is served with these delightful little warm

bacon cornbread muffins. A few is hardly sufficient. Another favorite appetizer at brunch or dinner is the frisee aux lardons – warm soft-poached eggs, frisee and arugula, and pancetta fried shallots, doused with truffle vinaigrette.

Brunch features the traditional Eggs Benedict, a fall vegetable quiche, the grilled salmon, honey mustard glazed roast pork loin and a wood-grilled hanger steak, marinated in balsamic vinegar, served with sautéed spinach. The soups and appetizers include those offered on the dinner menu.

Now, to the desserts. There are just three, but try choosing between them. After a recent dinner, I was fortunate enough to be served all three. When our waiter, Chris, said Chef Kyle suggested a sampler of the desserts, I quickly agreed, imagining a plate with just that – a small sample of each treat.

When my desserts arrived, I was almost embarrassed. There were three full-sized

portions of warm toffee pudding with caramel sauce, fresh seasonal berry cobbler and a flourless chocolate cake with Bailey's crème Anglaise and salted caramel ice cream.

Ahem! They were each fabulous, and I got to take home the "leftovers," which kept me supplied in yummy desserts for the next three days.

When a fellow diner described the cobbler, she said, "It simply dances on the plate." Yes, indeed, and shimmies on the palate. Les Cochons d'Or hasn't been open long enough to generate much buzz on the Internet. Yelp features just one review, from a fellow in Charlottesville named Craig J. "Outstanding food, atmosphere, service and the unique cocktails make for a great evening. Just what beautiful Hot Springs needed. Can't wait to go back! CJ"

I could not agree with him more.