

New bistro promises 'a new taste of the Old World' in Saint John

A German couple that has been running the Dufferin Inn bed and breakfast and restaurant in Saint John West for a dozen years is going to bring a taste of Europe to a new restaurant in the city's uptown.

Opera Bistro in the CenterBeam Place, formerly the Heritage Place at the corner of Prince William and King streets, will bring "a new taste of the Old World" to the city, says Margret Begner of the Dufferin Inn.

The bistro will open in May.

Opera Bistro's European-style food items will include an icewine truffle, a stress-release truffle, pannini, Italian espresso and coffee and homemade gellato.

Another European touch is the manner of serving wines and "tappas."

Mrs. Begner said tappas - appetizer-sized pieces of different foods - work very well with wines. And the restaurant is going to have the European tradition of sampling wines. Guests will be able try up to five different wines in small amounts.

The restaurant would have a computerized system for storing wine so air doesn't enter the bottle and the wine doesn't lose its quality.

"They can be open for as long as you want without affecting their quality," said Mrs. Begner.

Seventy per cent of the wines will be Canadian and the remainder from all over the world.

Some of the German foods to be offered will include kaesespaetzle, a kind of pasta with cheese, sauerkraut (a type of cabbage) potato soup and beef rouladen - cucumber and ground meat rolled in thinly sliced beef and roasted.

There will also be European and Canadian pastries.

"The bottom line is that we use fresh ingredients and organic products as much as possible," she said.

Mrs. Begner was a medical dietician and hospitality-industry instructor in Germany and her husband, Axel, a certified master chef and pastry chef.

The Dufferin Inn has been recognized for excellence in several categories. In 2003, it became a Designated Bay of Fundy Recommended Experience. The year before it received an honourable mention for Tourism Innovation and a Merit Award for Business Excellence from the Province of New Brunswick. Last year, the inn was finalist for the Operator of the Year award in the third annual Tourism Awards, hosted by Tourism Saint John and Hospitality Saint John. Until now Mr. Begner was the only chef, but now they are training Melissa Richards to help him. The sous chef is in Cologne, Germany, for a five-week internship. The couple used to own a restaurant in the Cologne area before they came to Canada.

"We sent her there to get some European experience. She will be working in four different restaurants," she said. "It will be a whole new learning experience for her."

The Opera Bistro be able to accommodate 80 guests and another 30 in a glassed-in courtyard at the back, Mrs. Begner said.

Construction on the bistro is underway and the Begners move in April 2 to set up the kitchen and do other decorations.

The restaurant is going to have a partly open kitchen and guests will be able to see the cooking, she said.

"It creates entertainment for the guests. Seeing how they prepare your food creates a bond between the customer and the chef," Mr. Begner said.

It would be open seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Opera Bistro will also cater, Mrs. Begner said.

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