

DREAMING OF AN AUTUMN in Paris? Perhaps southern France? Does the thought of warm crusty baguettes served with sweet cream butter, a glass of hearty red wine and a plate of beef Bourguignonne bring a smile to your face? Now, more than ever, Kansas Citians can step inside the door of a number of local restaurants and be transported to France. During the past few years, bistros with French-trained chefs manning the kitchens have sprung up around town. A bistro, by definition, is accessible dining, with nothing fussy or uptight—just great French comfort food, excellent wines, and a relaxed atmosphere. In other words, a bistro is the ideal environment for today's lifestyle.

Patrick Quillec is a Frenchman transported to Kansas City. Having opened his third restaurant, Patrick is the reigning king of bistro dining. And, like most kings, he has his family involved in running the empire. Patrick, and his Voila! Restaurant Group, began with **Hannah Bistro**, at the corner of 39th & State Line Road, in what had been a Pizza Hut. Hard to imagine a low-ceiling, squat, colorless building being transformed into a thriving, informal-yet-destination dining spot. Part of its popularity, no doubt, is due to the amply parking lot, a rarity on busy 39th Street. However, Hannah Bistro owes its success to the food.

Rather than appetizers, Patrick has a selection of "small plates" meant to whet your appetite or serve as French tapas. The mussels are perfection, especially when you sop up the wine-infused broth with

bread. A trio of soups features homemade, seasonal soups served in a unique presentation. For those wanting a light meal late at night, it fits the bill. The salads and sandwiches are all excellent. Such bistro standards as Steak Frites are distinguished by the curry-flavored French fries. They are so delicious that people order them as an appetizer. I am in love with the warm apple tart, which requires a few minutes to prepare. It arrives with the ice cream melting from the hot pastry, with a rich caramel sauce uniting the flavors. I share this with my husband and we always have dueling forks.

Café Provence, in Prairie Village, is Patrick's second place. The tiny restaurant has been a homerun thanks in part to its frog legs, escargot, and heavenly onion soup. The extensive wine list and a casual-yet-intimate atmosphere make for a pleasant experience. The menu is more limited than Hannah Bistro, as is the seating, but the food is of the same high quality. Patrick's sister, Nadine Millier, has recently returned to Kansas City in order to manage the Prairie Village restaurant. The chef, Thierry LeQueau, has captured a solid clientele in this boutique bistro by offering daily specials and lighter fare for lunch. He is particularly gifted at lamb preparations, and his salads are inspired.

Patrick Quillec's newest star, **Café Paris**, opened late this spring in a strip mall at 105th and Metcalf. Once again, Patrick has proven he can transform a nondescript characterless building into a questionable location into the very essence of a French brasserie. Café

Paris is by far Patrick's most ambitious undertaking, with a spacious, elegant bar dividing the smoking and non-smoking dining rooms. Keeping the tastes of families in mind, the menu includes a cheeseburger and macaroni and cheese, along with trout almondine, lamb navarin, and Friday night special of bouillabaisse.

Thick velvet curtains divide the spaces, lace curtains adorn the etched glass on the entrance door, and a piano by the entrance helps set the tone for this inviting, intimate spot. One night, a patron jumped to his feet and began singing along with the aria being played. The dining room fell silent. Thankfully, his voice was as smooth and melodious as the sauce in the coq au vin. Everyone broke into applause when he finished his last note.

Bistro dining is like that. Free, relaxed, easy. Great food and wine, conversations, and good cheer. It's no wonder that more and more diners are opting to visit a bistro. What's not to love? **KC**

FEATURED RESTAURANTS

Café Paris

105th & Metcalf, OP, KS
913-383-1000

Café Provence

3936 W. 69th Terrace, PV, KS
913-384-5998

Hannah Bistro

3895 State Line Road, KC, MO
816-960-1300