

INDOORS

Cape Experience

Peddler's, a trip to French countryside

By Stephanie Foster
sfoster@cnc.com

Sometimes we frequent a restaurant because we pass by it every day or see it advertised. Not so, Peddler's. The tiny French bistro is tucked away on Thad Ellis Road, a mere 150 yards from Route 6A in Brewster, out of sight - but once visited, not out of mind. This restaurant is made for lingering.

Over the last seven years, the chef-owned establishment has developed a loyal clientele, mostly through word of mouth. With only 30 seats, it doesn't take a mob to fill it. The food and informal atmosphere make you feel as if you are in the French countryside. Sunflowers and roosters are artfully placed here and there along with plants and pots, giving it a homey feel. A small bar adds to the simple, friendly ambience.

White linen is protected by white butcher paper; a red rose and candles adorn every table. It is the ultimate in cozy.

Daily specials are handwritten on a wall. Authentic onion soup gratinee is \$8.50, fresh salad, \$7.50 and a plat de charcuterie (cured meats and accompaniments), \$12.75. Entrees run from \$18 to \$29. Cheaper than a cab to the airport. Best of all, the chef prepares each dish as if you were a guest in his home.

How did you become a chef?

I was born in France and came here with my family when I was 9. At 15, I went back and trained to become a chef. I come from a line of French chefs. I went to Hotel and Culinary School of Paris, then apprenticed in Nice for four years.

After that I was offered a position at a small, exclusive hotel in Beaulieu and worked there several years. Then, I worked for Western Hotels throughout the states. I worked my way out of the kitchen and into management. Eventually, I worked as the general manager of several exclusive country clubs.

How did you end up on the Cape?

My wife loved the Cape. We had vacationed here. I decided I would start cooking again in sort of a semi-retirement. She liked the business as much as I did. In 1999 we bought this place. It was rundown and had been closed for a number of years. It originally was a donut shop of sorts. Then it became an Italian restaurant/pizza place. Then it was sublet to a Greek family who did Greek food.

We saw the potential. It didn't look like it does now. We had to start from scratch. It's an enchanting place with wisteria growing over it in the summer and the price was right. We did breakfast, lunch and dinner. But it was too much work.

We decided to do dinner and emphasize French food, the food I know best and enjoy cooking the most. It's a labor of love. I do all the cooking. We don't strive to be a commercial place. I cook the classic way. My wife greets people. When my kids were in college they came down and helped in the summer. We kept it personal, a family affair. The wife serves and the husband cooks. It's very unique.

How would you describe the menu?

It's regional French cuisine prepared in an authentic way. The menu changes and follows the seasons. I feel strongly about seasonal produce and fish. We always serve several fish dishes. We're spoiled on Cape Cod. It's one of the best places for fish in the entire world. We are blessed to have such wonderful fish.

I always have a chicken dish. Always duck. Always a steak of some sort. I use organic produce and meats. There is a quote that has influenced me: "The basic principal of fine cooking is simplicity." In other words, the ingredients and spice and herbs have to compliment each other without overpowering the fish or meat. Natural flavors have to be the principal ingredient.

For instance, the beautiful thing about sole is that it's cooked the day it is caught. I sauté it in butter with fresh lemon. But if you don't know how to cook it, you can ruin it. The butter must brown to a point where it's brown without being burned. The fish has to be cooked properly and the right amount of lemon squeezed on it. It's quick and simple but takes a lot of concentration to make just right.

What's the most popular dish?

I have people who love the duck l'orange (\$27) and order it all the time. Or the steak o' poivre (\$29). Or the sole meuniere (\$26). It's hard to say.

What's your favorite food?

I don't have a favorite. I want to experience Indian to Asian to Middle Eastern food. Every culture has its own way of doing things. And ingredients. I like ethnic food - all of it. But I also like a simple grilled steak or fish. It depends on my mood.

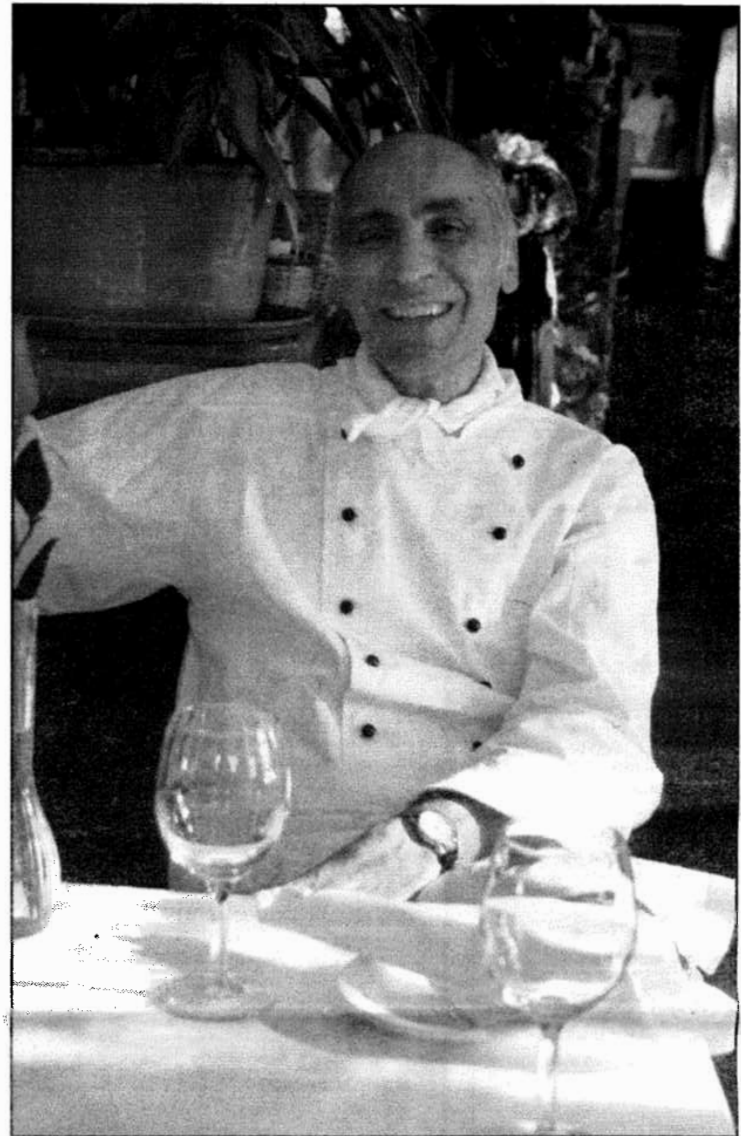
What ingredient couldn't you cook without?

Shallots. They are exquisite. They bring out the flavor of anything you cook.

If you go ...

Peddler's Restaurant, 67 Thad Ellis Rd., Brewster is open year round. From June to Labor Day it is open seven days a week; Thursday to Saturday, off-season. Call 508-896-9300 for more information or check the website at www.peddlersrestaurant.com.

Chef's SECRETS



Alain Hasson

Staff photo by Stephanie Foster

I always have a chicken dish. Always duck. Always a steak of some sort. I use organic produce and meats. There is a quote that has influenced me: "The basic principal of fine cooking is simplicity." In other words, the ingredients and spice and herbs have to compliment each other without overpowering the fish or meat. Natural flavors have to be the principal ingredient.

-Alain Hasson