Chez Jacqueline’s: The “real” French cooking bar

by Blair Dahl

Ah, Paris... you've read about it, seen it on TV and the movies, maybe even been for a visit. And, when we think of Paris, we imagine walks over a moonlit bridge, a motorcycle ride around the Champs Elysees, and most often, a meal in a café, talking into the wee hours of the morning. For most of us, none of the above will happen, but I have a surprise for you... I can tell you where to find a café where long evenings are spent talking, dancing, eating, and enjoying a touch of France. Chez Jacqueline’s in Breaux Bridge offers that true French-style dining experience.

Owner, manager, and head chef, Jacqueline tells me she began cooking at age three in her parents' restaurant outside of Paris.

"In our family, as soon as you could move around, you could stir a pot," explained Jacqueline.

Cooking was in her blood, and at 18, she headed off to the Culinary School in Paris for three years. Later, at age 25, she traveled to America and worked as the Food and Beverage Director for Hilton Inn.

But her heart's desire was what she remembered from her youth, a restaurant of her own. "My dream was a place... little inside, big outside... with cozy tables and umbrellas," Jacqueline recalled.

Coming to Cajun country meant being closer to her French roots and finally she was able to realize her dream. Today, her charming restaurant in downtown Breaux Bridge evokes images of a Paris café. You cannot miss the brightly clothed outdoor tables, the sign advertising today's specials, or the lime-green sign that brightens the whole side of the street.

Inside, it is cool and comfortable with various pictures of France, cotton tablecloths, and an elegant wine selection. As you enter, Ms. Jacqueline greets you from a self-portrait. Yes, the chef is also a painter, and several of her works grace the walls of the café. Food and art, a true French combination.

But it is really the food, and the food experience that sets Chez Jacqueline’s apart. She serves authentic French cuisine and Cajun dishes with a French flair. Folks can't get enough of her gumbo, which is a little different in that it calls for a light roux and lots of seafood.
Jacqueline is shocked at how the locals keep asking for her French Onion Soup, "even in the summertime!" she exclaims. Jacqueline gets fancy with a rabbit-duck-flambé tourneau as well as a shrimp flambé. There's also delicate lamb chops with herbs de Provence and satisfying pork tenderloin. Her daughter, who helps out in the restaurant, can assist you in selecting the perfect wine to compliment your meal. Some of her wines hail directly from France and she imports all of her spices from her birthplace.

Dessert cannot be denied. You can have the classic French taste of crème brûlée, or if that's not splurge enough, you may try the Ile Flottant. This "floating island" is meringue surrounded by a caramel cream and cognac sauce. I had never heard of it before, and patiently Jacqueline spelled it three times for me. It is hard to find in the U.S. French restaurants, but it is something most visitors to Paris try and are broken-hearted when they cannot get it in the states. It is a taste that cannot be described, and we are to be envied to have it so close by!

Two words put Chez Jacqueline's above the rest--single seating. No, that doesn't mean you eat alone! It means that, if you reserve a table for seven o'clock on Friday evening, you can stay as long as you like. There will be no party of four waiting at the bar for you to finish up that last sip to enjoy the food, the wine, the music, and each other. She told me how just recently a party of six came in at around six and stayed until eleven. Hers is not a place for fast food, and that is just the way she likes it.

"Every meal is cooked as ordered. To me, it is a challenge to please my customers with the best food," explains Jacqueline. Can she top it? Of course! Once a month she prepares a special dinner. It is a seven course dining extravaganza, and it is invitation only. Don't worry; you can get invited by leaving your name and number with Jacqueline. She calls her list to see who will attend then whips up a meal fit for the finest of occasions! The September 15th scheduled meal is bouillabaisse, a rich soup of lobster, clams, mussels, mahi-mahi, and shrimp. Diners should plan for an evening they will never forget.

And, as if her monthly dinner parties could be outdone, she "puts the icing on the cake" at Christmas time, when she serves foie-gras, a French delicacy of goose liver. Like oyster dressing and fried turkey, it is reserved for the finest of occasions and the best of company.

"The people in this area have an exquisite palette that recognizes good food," stated Jacqueline as if to explain all the love she puts into her cooking.

Don't be fooled by words like Fine French food and invitation-only dinners. Chez Jacqueline's is a quiet, down-to-earth café. Jacqueline makes it so.

"My favorite part of my work is meeting new people every day and pleasing all my customers, new or old, with good food."

Breaux Bridge holds a special place in her heart. If you look above the wine rack, you'll see photos of her beautiful grandchildren. And you can tell she feels at home in the Cajun-French culture we all love.

Let me encourage you to go see Jacqueline at her restaurant, Chez Jacqueline. Don't think an evening talking the night away in a Parisian café is an experience only seen in the movies or read about in books. Chez Jacqueline's serves exquisite food and fine wine in a comfortable and friendly atmosphere with pleasing music and all the time you need to make your evening memorable.

Chez Jacqueline's hours are Thursday, Friday, and Saturday 7:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. until closing with Sunday, Monday, and Wednesday hours being 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. She is closed on Tuesdays, but is available for catering events. On Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. there is live music. Happy Hour is from 4 to 6 p.m. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Call 507-3320 or 277-4938 for more information and Jacqueline will answer all your questions. Chez Jacqueline is easy to find at 114 Bridge Street in Breaux Bridge. Just look for the bright green sign advertising "Real French Cooking." Come for a taste of Paris with a little Cajun style!