

Chevalier Restaurant to Take Over Lafayette

By Sophie Braccini

Chevalier means knight in French. A young French chef, Philippe Chevalier, who will soon open a French Restaurant at 960 Moraga Road in Lafayette, certainly has the drive and the adventurous spirit his name carries. "This country is good to those who are daring," says Chevalier with a typical French accent, "I have proven myself in the East Bay and San Francisco as an Executive chef, it is now time that I start my own business."

The chef, now in his early 40's, came to the United States seven years ago to fulfill a childhood dream. He arrived in Danville in 2002 to take charge of Salamander and in 2003 was recognized as "Best Chef" in Diablo Magazine's Best of the Bay Area restaurants. His career continued in San Francisco and in 2004, the SF Examiner nominated "Chez Papa," where he was Executive Chef, San Francisco's Best French/European Restaurant.

His new restaurant will follow in the footsteps of the recipes that got him top awards in Danville and San Francisco. The restaurant's offering will be high-end, no compromise on the quality of the products, with friendly service and live music.

Chevalier already knows where to find local fresh meats and vegetable to create the Provence/Paris seasonal menu he is preparing. "Of course everything will be made from scratch," he promises, "you will see bouillabaisse on the menu (fish stew from Marseilles), aioli (a garlic and olive oil based sauce from Provence that accompanies vegetables and fish, among other possibilities), about 70% of the menu will be from the South of France, a light cuisine using grape seed and olive oils, the rest will be more Northern and Central French dishes." Chevalier doesn't want to say too much yet; he has a personal touch and likes to surprise his customers with creative salty and sweet inventions.

Chevalier wanted to go back to the East Bay to start his own business. He chose Lafayette for the small town feel that he longs for from his native Luçon in the Vendée region in France. "I've always liked this area since I worked in Danville," says Chevalier, "people here are worldly, sophisticated and appreciate high quality products and services." To the question regarding the already large number of restaurants in Lafayette, Chevalier smiles

gently, "Lafayette already offers an interesting range of foods, it was just missing a touch of Provence, a shade of lavender and romantic French evenings to obtain a perfect picture." Chevalier is counting on the charming garden of his restaurant to create the atmosphere he loves. He believes that the full bar license is a great asset, he will serve a full range of appetizers for those interested in a drink and lively conversation late in the night.

"We are opening the first week of July, in the evening only," says the Chef, "starting with an early-bird special from 5 to 6 p.m. with a \$32 prix fixe menu." Chevalier is recruiting local musicians to launch his dinner with live jazz on the terrace, most probably on Wednesday evenings. "There are excellent musicians around here, like 'Duo Gadjo,' a French-American couple living in Moraga, who play some great jazz and modern French music," he says.

The young entrepreneur definitely wants to become part of the Lamorinda scene. He and his wife Gretchen have settled in Orinda and are expecting their first child in early August.