

Published April 24th, 2013

Rustic Tavern Soon to Open in Lafayette

By Sophie Braccini



Chris Amsden and Tressa and Gary Rust at the new Rustic Tavern bar. Photo Sophie Braccini

Before chef Gary Rust and his wife Tressa got married, they worked together with friend Chris Amsden at Lark Creek in Walnut Creek. After the couple's brief stint in San Diego and the welcoming of two children, the Rust's friendship with Amsden was still going strong. Now the three have decided to build a restaurant of their own together, Rustic Tavern, which opens May 1 at 3576 Mount Diablo Blvd. in Lafayette.

Gilbert Sonet is a veteran of the local food scene and he knows what it takes to make a restaurant a success. "All the people I find space for have been very successful," says the commercial real estate broker and restaurant consultant. "Lafayette is the best place to open a restaurant when you've mastered your art and have a good commercial sense. For Rustic Tavern, the place to be is Lafayette, with its educated residents and eclectic food scene."

The Rusts and Amsden took the plunge, the restaurant occupying the former Roya's Garlic Garden location. And they're doing it all on their own: investing their own money; utilizing contractors from their family to remodel; and lending a hand themselves for finishes. "We wanted a look that will be authentic and relaxed," says Tressa Rust who will be directing the front part of the

restaurant, "and we are adding an outside patio with plenty of flowers to take advantage of the large sidewalk."

Of course what makes or breaks a restaurant is the quality of the cooking, and Rust has no worries about her husband's ability. After all, she says that before she fell in love with the chef, she fell in love with his cooking - and many others did, too. "I remember when we were working together for the first time at Lark Creek," she says, "my customers were coming back asking for his Fish of the Day. I started to realize that he had followers who were coming back just for him."

The chef cooks fish so well because he was a fisherman many years ago; Rust tired of the very hard life at sea and chose the much easier (wink, wink) life in the kitchen. "I must always have had that love of food in me," he says, "from the time of my grandfather's vegetable garden and the dishes that came from his harvests."

Rustic Tavern will have a Fish of the Day on the menu, but that's only the beginning. Rust and Amsden are being very particular in their choice of farmers for the best meats, vegetables and fruits - an easy task due to their experience - and they are choosing fishermen and fishing practices that produce wonderful fish with minimal impact on the environment, since some species can be overfished. Rust is planning a creative menu that will change with the seasons.

"My cooking has a European flair," he says. "It is not super high-end, but it will be very pleasing for people who like to eat quality, organic and delicious food."

Amsden will preside over the bar, mixing cocktails and entertaining guests. He will also keep an eye on the eclectic drink list that includes beverages from all over the world including a gluten-free beer.

The three friends are very excited about their project and so are the Rust children. "My 6-year-old daughter loves to come in and play hostess," says the proud mom. "She says, 'Welcome to Rustic Tavern, would you like to be seated by the window?' and she and her brother are our official dessert testers."

They, too, are looking forward to May 1.

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA