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Lafayette's Bistro Burger a High-End Burger Haven

By A.K. Carroll



Photos A.K. Carroll

Oyama Sushi and just off of Mt. Diablo Boulevard.

Though plans for the eatery's opening have been in the works since early this year, Bistro Burger didn't crack its doors until early October; its grand opening was Nov. 19.

Owner Ali Kazemi grabbed the Lafayette space on a bit of a whim. When a friend of a friend mentioned that Susan Foord was closing, he also suggested that Kazemi move in. A resident of Piedmont, Kazemi decided to have a look, and before he knew it he was making plans to overhaul the space, installing the grease trap, plumbing, and floor plan necessary to transform it into a modest, yet modern eating establishment.

In contrast to the hustle and bustle of Kazemi's FiDi Bistro Burgers, the Lafayette outpost is a breath of suburban calm. In place of bumper-to-bumper traffic and lines winding out the door, you will find clean open seating, a sunny back patio, and attentive table service. "It's an outlier," said Kazemi, who views the Lafayette Bistro as more of a "high end" endeavor. It is no white tablecloth to be sure, but it is a step up from your usual burger joint, and offers more sophisticated entrée options including a marinated tri-tip sandwich, a grilled salmon burger, and a spinach salad served with goat cheese, pumpkin seeds, and strawberry shallot dressing.

The salad is the creation of Chef Pietro Buttitta, who was hired exclusively for the Lafayette location and is crafting a customized menu that will feature pasta, brunch, and steak by the end of the year. You will find some of the same classic burgers, seasoned sides and fresh salads that feature at Bistro's other four locations to be sure, as well as exclusives like the spicy kale salad, the Lafayette burger, and truffle parmesan fries that I tried during my visit. There is also a children's menu to accommodate for the younger crowd and a spacious 10-stool bar that serves a selection of wines and beers - the only Bistro location to do so.

If you're the kind of person who prefers to "ease in" when trying new things, you might check out Bistro Burger's Happy Hour, which runs from 4 to 6 p.m. daily and features \$2 off all beer and wine, burgers, sandwiches, salads and small plates. Or, if you're like me, you can Russian roulette the menu and dig right in.

I started with a simple kale salad, topped with crispy fried chickpeas and shredded parmesan and dressed in a flavorful spicy dressing influenced with Indian flavors. Next came a basket of the signature house truffle fries, decked with zesty herbs and generously sprinkled with parmesan. The fries were French-cut and thin, soft but not soggy and fresh from the fryer. No sauce required,

I unfold a thick white napkin and spread it over my lap. (Though I don't know it yet, I will definitely be needing the napkin by the time my meal is over). I look down at my phone and when I look up my eyes grow wide at the sight of the silver tray coming toward me. Artfully stacked and splayed atop the sheet of metal are slices of tomato, leaves of lettuce, rosette pickles, spicy sprouts, and fanned avocado wedges - all the fixings for Burger Bistro's deconstructed Lafayette Burger. Though it isn't the best burger I have ever eaten, it is certainly one of the prettiest.

They can't possibly do this in the Financial District, I think, at least not during lunchtime. The calm of the dining room is one of the many differences you will notice at Bistro Burger's most recent site in Lafayette, located in the former location of Susan Foord Catering and Café, behind

though the house ketchup is a treat, more of a sweet marinara than its vinegary tomato sauce relatives. In comparison to the heavy indulgence of my dining partner's mushroom and brie-topped Paris burger, my Angus beef Lafayette burger was lush and fresh with crisp toppings, spicy sprouts, and gooey pepper jack served with a buttery yellow bun. There was some assembly required, but I have never had a problem with licking my fingers when they are dripping with delicious.

Though I didn't intend to finish a salad, fries, and an entire burger (4 and 6 oz. patties are available), before I knew it my plate was empty and my napkin was covered. A yellow-hued spear-cut pickle marinated in cumin, coriander, caraway seeds, and other "special" ingredients was the perfect way to end my meal, though Bistro does offer dessert. Maybe next time I'll go for the dark chocolate brownie or creamy banana milkshake. I'm sure to need a napkin regardless.

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Editor's note: In the Oct. 5 Business Briefs, Lamorinda Weekly stated Bistro Burger serves cocktails, but it only offers a selection of beers and wines.



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