

Culinary couple creates chic Buckingham bistro

By CARL LAVO
COURIER TIMES

Theresa and Marc BrownGold are best known in Bucks County as the authors of some unique works. First came Groovy Granola by BrownGold. Then, JustFood by BrownGold. And now JustEat by BrownGold.

These aren't titles of best-selling cookbooks, but rather a recipe, a specialty food store and a restaurant respectively. Together, they sketch the couple's 20-year-love affair with food.

JustEat, their European-style bistro on busy Route 202 in Buckingham, is their latest endeavor.

Recently Mary Anne and I dropped in for dinner on a Saturday evening to see what all the buzz was about. The restaurant is tucked away almost out of sight in the Buckingham Green shopping center, a strip of two dozen or so stores about two miles below Lahaska. The center is anchored on one end by Just Food, a prepared foods store that the couple formerly operated, now under new ownership. "We discovered that we were working all the time and not enjoying it. So we decided just to concentrate on JustEat," explained Theresa as she ushered us to our table for two.

JustEat is a classy neighborhood-kind-of-place where you can enjoy chic cuisine in a relaxed setting, a place where the BrownGolds work side-by-side to create a memorable dining experience.

The centerpiece of the restaurant is a large, open-air, stainless steel kitchen. Marc, who for five years was executive chef at the highly respected Hamilton's Grill Room in Lambertville, does all the cooking using a hardwood-fired grill and oven. High gloss, decorative tables, each candlelit, proliferate in the L-shaped dining room, capable of seating 60 comfortably. A dining bar that can seat eight overlooks the grill, offering regulars a chance to converse with Chef Marc and a sous chef at work preparing grilled whole fish, braised short ribs, enormous lobsters and a wealth of seasonally-adjusted recipes.

Art works, many by Theresa BrownGold, decorate the walls. A profusion of green, brown, gold, copper, rose and wood tones plus tiled floors lend a pleasing, modern elan to the setting.

Theresa, former catering sales manager at Hamilton's Grill, describes the restaurant as "European, small, unpretentious; sophisticated but not snobby," an idea harking back to her teenage years hobnobbing around Paris as a nanny to twins.

On the night of our visit, the crowd at JustEat was a mix of nattily attired couples and families in casual dress.

The menu is diverse and changes every month, depending on seasonal local ingredients, what fish are running and many other factors, said Theresa. The BrownGolds are very conscious of



Theresa and Marc BrownGold work together to create a memorable dining experience at JustEat by BrownGold in Buckingham.

KIM WEINER / COURIER TIMES

JUST EAT BY BROWNGOLD

Buckingham Green Shopping Center,
Route 202, Buckingham (2 miles below
Peddler's Village)

215-794-1818/215-340-0142

Dinner only Mon-Sat, 5:30-10; Sun,
5-9:30

Charcoal grilled, seasonal menu;
entrees \$18-\$35

Master Charge, Visa only

Reservations recommended on
Saturdays

Bring your own wine or spirits.

No smoking.

freshness and quality and pay attention to detail. They also like to experiment with taste. "But we're not going to go real wild in one direction," said Theresa. "We're not going to go from Italian to Swedish. Basically Marc and I are striving for sophisticated comfort foods."

May's menu on a single page stresses three main categories — soups and salads, appetizers and entrees. (Bistro selections such as tuna, beef and vegetarian burgers are available Mondays through Thursdays only)

Among salad offerings in the \$7-\$9 range are Bibb lettuce with mango, cashews and lime vinaigrette, and

JustSalad, consisting of hand-mixed greens with olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Appetizers (\$8-\$12) include raw oysters with mignonette, sautéed crab cake with a lime and horseradish mayonnaise; grilled shrimp scampi, and grilled veal tenderloin and arborio rice with red grapes and ginger vinaigrette. Entrees (\$17-\$35) include whole fish as staples, augmented at times by whole lobsters (\$15 per pound). You can also order, among other choices, a vegetarian pot pie, wood oven roasted half duck braised in loose tea with orange glaze; roasted cod, rack of lamb with mint leaf crust, wild salmon, and wood oven roasted half chicken with herbs under the skin. Dessert selections (\$6.50) and a cheese plate (\$12) are also on the menu.

After a setup for the bottle of white wine we brought along, we began by sharing an outstanding platter of very fresh, miniature spinach leaves, mixed with large, crunchy pine nuts in a light vinaigrette, after which Theresa told us a little about the couple's background.

The BrownGolds' fascination with food came almost by accident. Theresa was a playwright scholar at Villanova. Her husband graduated from Temple with a degree in psychology. They worked various jobs at local restaurants to make ends meet during their lean college years, and met in the early 1980s at City Bites restaurant in Philly. After

their marriage — with a new name that combined their two surnames, which neither wanted to give up — they devoted themselves to food.

And so begin what they now refer to as "our two and a half decade trek in the food world." Stops at Frog restaurant, Valley Green Inn, 16th Street Bar and Grill and The Restaurant School eventually led to Hamilton's Grill and their idea for a restaurant of their own, JustEat. It opened about five years ago, a spin off of Marc's interest in grilled foods culled at Hamilton Grill.

For entrees on our visit, we indulged by sharing a 5-pound lobster at the suggestion of our server. From across the room, we had a good view of Marc as he grilled the crustacean, cracking it down the middle to give easy access to the tender, very juicy meat inside. With drawn butter and a tasty assortment of grilled garden vegetables in a side dish, the enormous lobster stretched across the table. For the next hour, we enjoyed working the shell with utensils to get every eatable vestige of the lobster. Its massive claws contained meat with a sweet, smoky essence that won the night.

We brought the evening to an end with Theresa's apple pie, remarkable for the fresh, flaky crust and generous filling. Others have described it as "to die for," and we couldn't agree more.