



JOE RAY FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

One more happy meal enjoyed at Le Bistro Paul Bert, where the focus is on the classics.

Browse wines or cookbooks

Continued from preceding page
the week, but it's something the regulars love.

In sharp contrast to Bistrot Paul Bert and Café Titon is Le Temps au Temps, run by whiz-kid chef Sylvain Sendra.

"The Paul Bert is an institution," Sendra says, moving his hand in a flat line signifying quality and consistency. "Oh! look at this!" he yelps, distracted by a tub of rosy meat. "Pork entrecôte!" he exclaims, showing off the beautiful cuts.

On a given night, customers with a hard-to-get reservation at Le Temps au Temps might start with a sardine tartare with a Burgundy wine jelly, follow it with a beet and squid risotto, and end the night with sautéed Burlat cherries with homemade vanilla ice cream — all from a kitchen half the size of my childhood bedroom. When things get moving during lunch prep, Sendra runs a hand mixer with his left hand and reaches across the kitchen with his right to stir a sauce on the stove.

He opened three years ago, but Sendra says he's only just hitting his stride. To celebrate, he renovated, sinking about \$80,000 into a budget for an assistant (and equipment) in the kitchen, and a dining-room air conditioner

"So the food got better but the prices went up?" my inner cynic asks aloud.

"We didn't touch them," Sendra responds, giving yet another reason his prix-fixe menu, at about \$41, is one of the best bargains in Paris.

A few doors down at Crus et Découvertes, Mikael Lemasle is the neighborhood wine seller.

"The shop is a link between the artisan winemaker and my customers. It's a way for us to support the little producer and for people to put a face on the wine they're drinking," Lemasle says, summing up what he half-jokingly calls his "petite résistance" against large producers.

On this day, he's brought winemaker Frédéric Rivaton of Domaine Rivaton in the southern Languedoc Roussillon region in



for a tasting.

"Mikael is very personal in his approach to wine," says Rivaton, whose rough-hewn hands look as though he might never get the vineyards out of them. "He does a good job of educating his clients."

Sure enough, Lemasle might spend 20 minutes with a customer to sell an inexpensive bottle of wine. This low-pressure attention is probably why some of them spend their lunch breaks wandering through his store.

There's a similar feeling a couple doors down at La Cocotte, an artsy, food-only bookstore with butcher's paper lining parts of the walls and furniture. The store sports an eclectic mix of books, ranging from high-end conceptual photo collections to beautiful photo-recipe books by star chefs to "Diners à Bollywood" and an English-language card game called "The Housewives' Tarot" that comes in a mock recipe box.

"It's a neighborhood based on conception," says owner Andrea Wainer, who opened the shop in May. The way she explains it, it's easy to imagine that the art stu-

dents who used to live here because it was cheap became the architects and graphic designers who live and work here now. Apparently, they like to eat well, too.

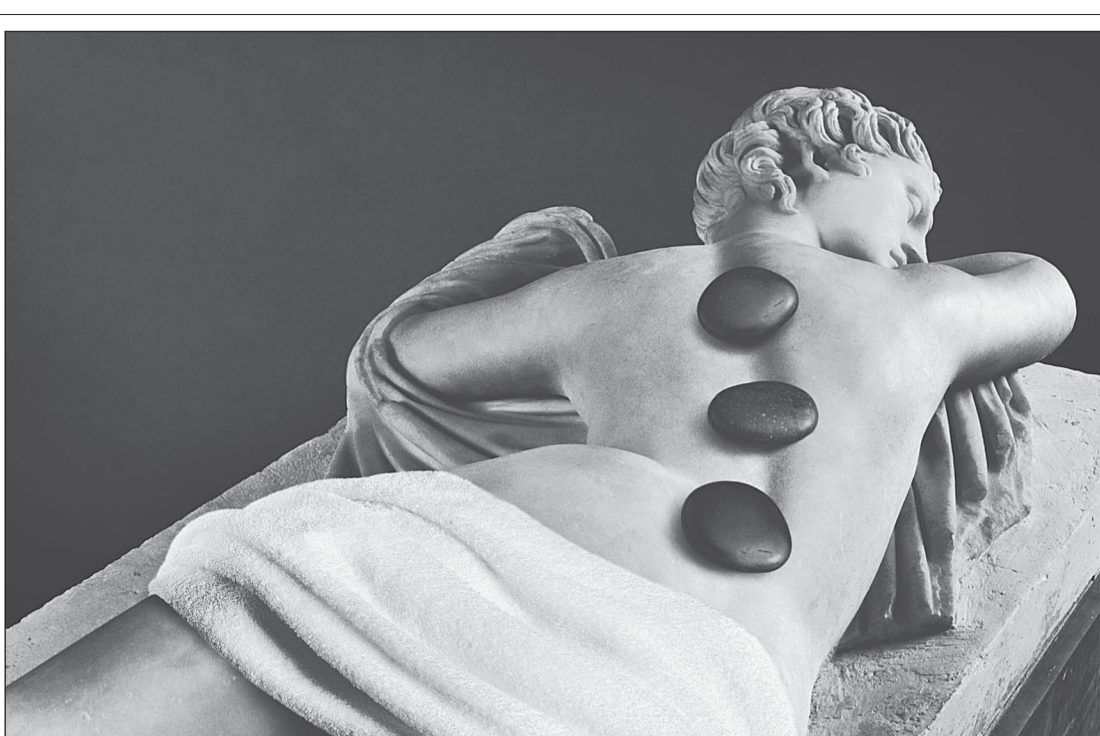
"I was looking in another part of town when I was ready to open the store, but I saw this and said, 'Toc!' " Wainer says, giving a knocking sound to the decision made. "People come, a place opens, and more people come," she adds, referring to the food-based synergy that rebuilt the neighborhood.

It's hard to tell if the area is hitting its stride or will keep getting better. A new park directly behind Bistrot Paul Bert recently opened its gates, a new kindergarten was built next to it, and more and more good places to eat and drink continue to pop up.

"It wouldn't have worked without the neighboring businesses," says Wainer. "People come find my store by accident when they come to eat . . . and this street attracts people."

"People used to come [here] because the Paul Bert was here," says Sendra, referring to the origins of the rebirth. "Now they come because they know they eat well."

Joe Ray, a food and travel writer based in Europe, can be reached at his website, joe-ray.com.



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