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In the Mix



Contemporary Cuisine at Yesterday's Prices

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*Find Them at Laney
College's Bistro
Restaurant*

As you enter the modern, airy dining room whose windows overlook a tree-lined estuary, the lilting strains of a French crooner set the mood for an elegant lunch. Tables are stylishly set, white linen topped with whimsically bent salt and pepper shakers. But a glance at the menu induces a double take: Goat cheese soufflé with seasonal greens for \$3.95? Duck confit with apple and pear hash and a warm →

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bacon frisée salad for \$7.95? Almond cake layered with orange cream and chocolate praline mousse for \$2.75? Is this a time-traveling taster's dream? No, it's the Bistro at Oakland's Laney College, a showplace for students from the Culinary Arts Program to strut their stuff.

Recently remodeled using sustainable materials, the pale gold wood paneling and dramatic curved accent wall welcome diners to upscale surroundings that match the sophisticated food.

The Bistro serves lunch four days a week: Tuesday's and Wednesday's international menus traverse the globe to highlight a different cuisine each week. You may find Chinese tea-smoked quail with bok choy; Korean grilled beef bulgogi with assorted kimchi; Middle Eastern *bamia*, a lamb and okra casserole; or North African fish chermoula with couscous and carrot raisin salad, all for under \$10. Thursday's and

Friday's menus showcase seasonal ingredients in classic bistro fare: organic baby greens with paper-thin slices of persimmon, chèvre crumbles and pine nuts in a champagne vinaigrette; an organic Niman Ranch burger with Manchego cheese aioli and garlic fries; a hearty lamb shank with pomegranate sauce; or chicken, leek or mushroom pasta pillows with a saffron chervil cream sauce.

These luscious dishes are prepared by Laney's budding chefs as part of their two-year certificate program in culinary arts or baking and pastry. As one of the oldest culinary schools in the country, Laney's program has been training students for more than 40 years and is staffed by faculty who have worked at top local and national restaurants such as Tavern on the Green and Jordan's at the Claremont Hotel. Laney's intensive curriculum prepares students to work in the food service industry as chefs, pastry chefs, bakers, line cooks, caterers, restaurant managers, and in many other roles, at a fraction of the cost of most professional culinary schools.

Department chair Lorriann Raji was the pastry chef at the Mark Hopkins Hotel for 13 years and taught at a private culinary school before coming to Laney. "I appreciate teaching here," she says, "because I feel I am making a difference in the community." Chef Raji is the instructor for the contemporary

plated desserts class where fourth-semester students turn out dazzling creations that provide a decadent finale. The eye-catching quartet of desserts – temptingly on display as you enter the restaurant – definitely steal the show with vibrant colors and dramatic forms: for instance, a tuile butterfly atop a three-layer red velvet cake or a feather-light ricotta cheesecake rimmed by passion fruit curd nestling under a foot-high lacy sugar web.

Laney's Bistro serves up exquisite contemporary cooking at retro prices. As a bonus, you may be the first to sample the culinary creations of America's next top chef.

Laney's address is 900 Fallon St.; the bistro is located in building E at the back of the school on the lower level, facing the estuary, closest to Seventh Street. Visit www.laney.edu/wp/bistro for more info; and here's a link to a handy locator map: www.laney.edu/wp/bistro/bistro-location-map.

Read more *Anna Mindess* at eastbayethniceats.com.



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