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## Master Chef Mitch SuDock Earns Rave Reviews



Leeann Lavin, NY Food Examiner

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Slideshow: [All-Star Chef Mitch SuDock](#)

An all star review for an "all-star chef," New York Newsday's restaurant critic, Erica Marcus, reviewed Mitch & Toni's American Bistro, master chef Mitch SuDock's latest restaurant. <http://bit.ly/qf8GNE>

Chef Mitch SuDock is also a featured chef in this reporter's soon to be published, "Hamptons & Long Island Homegrown Cookbook."

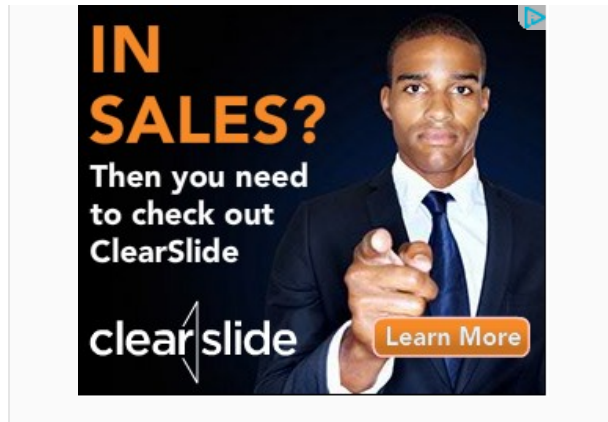
Located in Albertson, Long Island, this farm to table chef says being exposed to fresh-from-the-farm ingredients early in his restaurant career helped him establish his own cooking philosophy so that in 2004, when he opened Bistro M in what was formerly a Long Island candy store, he knew food from local producers would be the basis for his menus.

When Mitchell was growing up on Long Island, his family had a modest ornamental vegetable garden in their yard, along with wild mint and a spot for growing basil. Today, at his successful Mitch & Toni's American Bistro restaurant, Mitchell grows the same plants for garnishes. His brother and sister-in-law bring him fresh fruits and vegetables from their garden's end-of-summer surplus, as does one of Mitchell's neighbors. And Mitch & Toni's American Bistro manager has a neighbor who simply leaves foodstuffs on their doorstep. The bounty of Long Island is such that it turns the locals into botanical Robin Hoods.

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Mitch is happy to once again be close to the Long Island farms he knew growing up, including the Rottkamp Farm, located a few miles from his restaurant.

Food purveyors continually offer to get him anything at any time of year, but Mitchell says cooking with out-of-season or out-of-state food is not what he wants to do. "Why would I want to get peaches from Ohio or Ojai? . . . We already lost one generation to Betty Crocker," he says with restrained judgment.

Mitch sometimes thinks of himself as a teacher for the restaurant's staff and customers, and he finds that customers are always eager to learn more about what they are eating. Mitchell leaves the kitchen most nights to greet his guests, urging them to try this or that. Sometimes customers are ambivalent about eating something they haven't had before, preferring the familiar or safe, so he sends out things for them to try. The food's quality and extraordinary taste have earned him not only followers, but also glowing, three-star reviews from the *New York Times*, *Newsday*, and *Zagat*.

Chef Mitch is so keen to expose more people to good food that he has produced a series of successful tasting events. He creates new Mitch & Toni's Bistro menus every week with daily additions in each of the categories, based on market conditions. Out of respect for their work and contributions to the restaurant's success, he includes the names of local farmers and fishermen on the Mitch & Toni's Bistro menu.

The biggest changes he sees coming in the world of Long Island food are "how [regular] things get redefined," which suggests that Mitch SuDock is already looking at things in a new way, using the limitless, local possibilities waiting to be rediscovered.

Mitch & Toni's American Bistro

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Newsday Review:

All-star chef Mitch SuDock

September 28, 2011 by ERICA MARCUS

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A trim figure in chef's whites and cargo shorts, chef Mitch SuDock makes his way through the dining room of his 4-month-old restaurant, Mitch & Toni's American Bistro in Albertson. He introduces himself to new customers, but most of the diners seem to know him, and they greet him as if he were a favorite nephew made good: handshaking, backslapping, cheek-kissing.

SuDock, 42, estimates that more than half of his customers followed him and his business partner, Toni Contino, from Bistro M in Glen Head, the three-star restaurant he operated from 2003 until this April. But they seem to be coming more often -- Sandy and Ed Goldberg of Roslyn have been in 25 times, according to SuDock's count. "I think it's been more," said Ed Goldberg, "because sometimes we've been here under someone else's reservation."

Goldberg has long been a fan of SuDock's. "Mitch really cares about his customers," he said. "A few years back I had a bypass operation and since then whenever Mitch is in the kitchen and sees an order from me, he makes sure he doesn't use too much salt. And of course it doesn't hurt that I love his food."

SuDock's talent and winning personality made Bistro M one of Long Island's top dining destinations, but its size (50 seats, no bar) and off-the-beaten-path location limited the amount of business it could do. "It was a perfect starter restaurant," SuDock observed. (The space now houses Saffron, owned by John Forte, a former Bistro M chef.)

With Mitch & Toni's, SuDock has moved from Triple A up to the Majors. He's almost doubled his capacity, with 78 seats, plus 12 at the bar. Now that he's centrally located on a main thoroughfare, he has walk-in traffic and, for the first time, a reason to serve lunch. (At dinner, the bustle can veer into clamor, which SuDock conceded has been an issue for some diners.)

#### A REAL CROWD PLEASER

At Mitch & Toni's, SuDock appears to have found that sweet spot where artistic integrity meets "what customers want." Barry Wohl, who considers himself "a regular customer of wherever Mitch is," said that he "is one of the few chefs on Long Island who is a real, classic chef. He's not just cooking

for himself or for an elite clientele. With all his training, he is making accessible food for everybody."

In fact, SuDock got his degree, with honors, at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park and cooked under some of Manhattan's best chefs -- Alfred Portale at Gotham Bar and Grill, Tom Colicchio at Gramercy Tavern, Bill Telepan of JUDson Grill -- before moving out to Long Island in 1999 to work with Guy Reuge at Mirabelle, then in St. James. Having grown up in Old Bethpage and being newly married with a young daughter, he was tired of the Manhattan restaurant rat race and wanted to raise a family on Long Island (he has since divorced).

SuDock is a meticulous chef, but his menu is largely free of fancy ingredients such as sweetbreads and veal cheeks. With more seats to fill and a broader clientele, he has both expanded his menu and lowered the prices between 10 and 20 percent. "People here want something simple enough that they know what it is, but not so simple that they could cook it at home." He never forgot what he learned from his mentor Telepan. "Bill always said, 'You have to have your chicken, your salmon, your steak.'"

#### GOING THE EXTRA STEP

On a busy Wednesday evening in September, SuDock is following his mentor's advice. SuDock pan-roasts the breast and leg of his chicken separately so the former doesn't overcook, then he plates it with string beans and a macaroni and cheese shot through with bacon, onion and peas. The salmon is grilled and served with toasted quinoa, ratatouille and a shower of basil. Most steak eaters order the flatiron steak with roasted corn panzanella (bread salad), but a few go for the filet mignon, a healthy 8-ounce slab, served with creamed spinach and Gorgonzola-stuffed pasta pouches. It is a beautiful dish.

When the dinner rush ebbs, he will often step into the dining room to greet customers and to confer with his partner, Contino, who runs the dining room with grace and efficiency. Contino started back at Bistro M as a part-time hostess, became a runner, then a waitress and, by the time the restaurant closed, manager. In the latter years of Bistro M, SuDock and Contino knew that many of their customers referred to the place as Mitch and Toni's, and so it didn't take long to choose a name for the new venture. New customers, raised on such fictional restaurateurs as Bryant & Cooper and Burton & Doyle, are slower to figure it out. Said SuDock, "People come in and ... wow! 'There is a Mitch! There is a Toni!' They are amazed." (So far, he said, no one has confused the restaurant with East Hampton's Nick & Toni's.)

SuDock has also been amazed at how glamorous his line of work has become. When he graduated from high school in 1986, his parents weren't thrilled at the prospect of their son, the chef. They insisted he get four years of college. Shortly

after graduating from the University at Albany with a degree in economics, he enrolled at the Culinary Institute and was on his way.

"It must be the Food Network," is how he explains the thrill customers get from talking to him. Or it might be the talented, caring chef in question.

#### ON THE MENU

In his 2 1/2-star review, Newsday critic Peter M. Gianotti praised Mitch & Toni's tuna tartare, tender baby back ribs and meaty, sweet Asian-accent BBQ chicken wings, among the appetizers. Favored mains, ranging in price from \$17 to \$34, include the bacon-wrapped monkfish, orange-glazed roasted duck breast (served with a fine confit of leg), a juicy, first-class strip steak and, of course, the chef's signature pistachio-crusted halibut with lemon-beurre blanc.

A three-course, fixed-price dinner menu for \$29.95 is served on Monday to Thursday from 5 to 6:30 p.m.

Lunch, which started earlier this month, leans heavily on salads and sandwiches, none of which costs more than \$15. Also on offer are some starters and pastas from the dinner menu, as well as "more substantial" fare such as steak frites and bourbon-glazed pork porterhouse.


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