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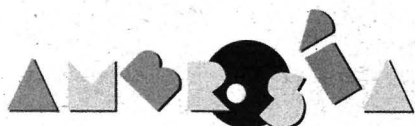
*Mona Rizzo*



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**FOOD** BY MARINA TAYLOR

## Sublimity in the Suburbs

KoHo is worth the drive.

**KoHo Bistro:** 2101 Bailey Hill Rd.  
681-9335. 11:30 am-9 pm M-Th,  
11:30 am-10 pm F, 5-10 pm Sa. \$-\$\$.

When KoHo Bistro first opened, I have to admit I thought it looked like a recipe for disaster. The location was obscure, in a semi-defunct mall out on Bailey Hill, and the menu was gourmet, not geared at all toward the high school crowd across the street at Churchill. Now, over three years later, I have to admit I was wrong: Somehow, beautifully and with simple elegance, it works.

From the bleak mall outside, the place feels like a cozy, sophisticated secret escape. The space inside is small, but carefully designed, and ends up feeling more casual and homey rather than formal or pretentious.

### The enchantment began when the plate was set down. It looked like a Netherlands' still life.

Professional and warmly courteous servers find tables and dole out heavy, leather-bound menus. Each table, the night I ate, was started with a plate of crispy fried green olives, and a basket of bread. The bread was amazing, made in-house every morning, crusty on the outside and tenderly cakelike on the inside. It's enough to swear off the low-carb diet for good. KoHo also makes its own pasta, which I'll have to try next time.

The menu changes seasonally, though the basics remain — salmon and seafood, pork, steak, a vegetarian entree, plenty of salads. KoHo features a salad of the day, from Hay Bales! farm, and a wonderful Caesar salad (with croutons made from that same wonderful bread, if I'm not mistaken.)

I started my meal with the Obsidian Stout Battered Brie, tantalizing because it sounded so contradictory. Beer and cheddar, maybe; brie and wine, sure. But beer and brie? However, my doubts were again unfounded — it worked perfectly. The enchantment began when the plate was set down. It looked like a Netherlands' still life. Gleaming colors and textures, such as crisp, bright green apples, golden buttery crackers, shiny black huckleberries and blueberries accented the wedge of cheese encased in its delicate, meringue-like shell. The brie was wonderful on its own, and tasty with the fruit. However, water crackers might have matched better with an already slightly oily cheese like brie.

When the entrees arrived, the amount of food on the table was a little staggering. Heaps of food covered the plates, and the

plates covered almost all the table's surface area. The normal trade-off between quality and quantity doesn't seem to exist here. Mountains of food, with impeccably fresh ingredients and high-quality standards make this place unique. And even reasonably priced: dinner for two came in around \$40, including tip, drinks, and enough take-home for a nice lunch the following day. Other restaurants in town with comparable local and high-quality ingredients charge quite a bit more.

The summer soup is a tomato gazpacho, which comes with or without mussels. Gazpacho can be a million different things to a million different chefs. Here at KoHo it is simple to the point of plain, blended and smoothly zesty with garlic and onion. It is served with an island of diced cucumbers

and waves of avocado sauce: beautiful. The portion was way too much for me, especially with such a strongly flavored soup. Next time I'll just order a cup. Brown sugar smoked Greener Pastures chicken also landed on the table, with a wonderful German-styled potato salad, filled with diced veggies, light and sweet, and grilled veggies. Everything was cooked to perfection.

Dessert had to be tasted too, of course. I eavesdropped on a table behind me and was all set to order the Napoleon, but it wasn't being served that evening. The choices were another list of homemade decadences: ice creams, cookies, cake, strawberry crème brûlée. The brûlée is almost always impossible to resist, especially if it's got a new twist. Strawberry qualifies, and I ordered it. The custard was sweet and creamy, sweeter than traditional, but a dark, almost burnt sugar on top compensated and balanced the flavors nicely.

KoHo's new first sous chef, Nicole Peltz, is fresh from school, but not new to the restaurant. She was hired on as a kitchen assistant in the summer of 2000, just a month after Kim and Kevin Hyland opened the restaurant. She enjoyed her experience so much she went pro at the New England Culinary Institute in Montpelier, VT. During her studies she interned at Frontera Grill and Topolobampo, two of Chicago's most successful restaurants. Her skills are obvious and meld well with the wonderful atmosphere KoHo has constructed so carefully in its corner of the suburban jungle. **CW**

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