

Bistro Niko

3344 Peachtree Road, Buckhead 404.875.8424, buckheadrestaurants.com French, \$17-\$28, Reservations recommended, Patio, Brunch Owner: Pano Karatassos Executive Chef: Gary Donlick

Bistro Niko, Buckhead Life Restaurant Group's first new Atlanta restaurant in eight years, opened with a bang last November. And this time restaurateur and owner Pano Karatassos, who's already covered American, Greek, Southwestern and Italian cuisines, plus steak and seafood, set his sights on what many consider the ultimate in haute cuisine: French. Therefore, Karatassos and his culinary staff didn't take this venture lightly. He spent more than a year researching in France, Chicago, New York and Washington, D.C., with his son, BLRG Corporate Executive Chef Pano I. Karatassos, and Bistro Niko Executive Chef Gary Donlick, before the concept came to life.

And dare we say Bistro Niko could be the *pièce de résistance* to Buckhead Life's restaurant empire? Well, the food certainly lives up to the expectations; the menu is stacked with traditional French dishes, not like some other restaurant menus that seem to be more "French-inspired." The "faux" gras terrine (it's really a chicken liver mousse) is just one of Donlick's house-made pâtés that is sublime and a must-order, as is the *confit de canard* salad (duck confit salad). *Coq au vin* is prepared classically, with browned chicken, potatoes, bacon and pearl onions all in a rich red wine sauce, but Donlick puts his own twist on beef bourguignon, choosing to re-

place the traditionally braised meat with Kobe beef cheeks.

The ambiance here is vintage French bistro, and includes a hall-way entry with white tiles and an exhibition kitchen, vintage sconces, Venetian glass mirrors and a large zinc bar as the main dining room's centerpiece. A smaller dining room, dubbed The Salon, features original period French posters, as well as 88 hand-painted tiles.

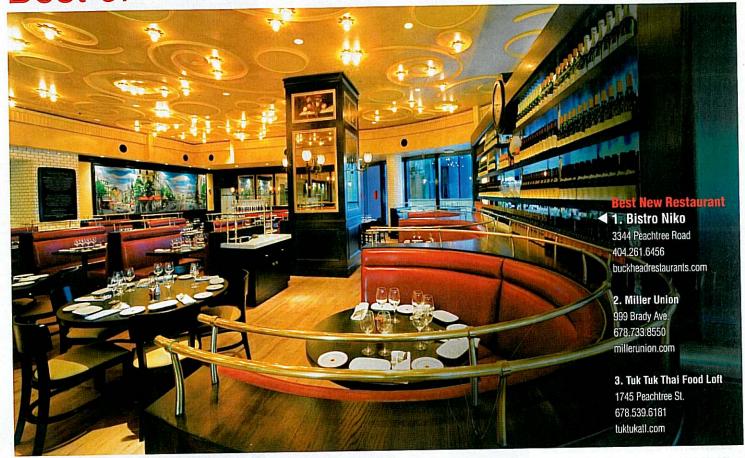
Of course, the service at Bistro Niko also makes it a stellar restaurant. Some staffers are originals from Pano's and Paul's, and all have a required reading list that includes some of the most influential culinary books ever written, including "Mastering the Art of French Cooking" by Julia Child, "Larousse Gastronomique" by Auguste Escoffier and Barron's "Food Lover's Companion."

Signature Dishes: Gougeres (light gruyere cheese puffs); tarte au saumon (traditional French pizza with salmon crème fraiche and chives); coq au vin; and citron tarte with meringue brûlée and orange sorbet.

What We Love: Bistro Niko's patio. It wraps around the outside of the glamorous Sovereign building and overlooks Peachtree Street, making it a hot spot for happy hour and people-watching.

100 Best Restaurants 2010

Best of





Best Healthy Dining

◀ 1. Seasons 52

3050 Peachtree Road 404.846.1552 Also located in Dunwoody at 90 Perimeter Center West, 770.671.0052 seasons52.com

2. R. Thomas Deluxe Grill

1812 Peachtree St. 404.881.0246 rthomasdeluxegrill.net

3. Dynamic Dish

427 Edgewood Ave. 404.688.4344 dynamicdish.net

Best Small Plates

1. Eclipse Di Luna

764 Miami Circle 404.846.0449 Also located in Dunwoody at 4505 Ashford Dunwoody Road, 678.205.5862 eclipsediluna.com

2. Tuk Tuk Thai Food Loft

1745 Peachtree Road 678.539.6181 tuktukatl.com

3. Pura Vida

656 N. Highland Ave. 404.870.9797 puravidalapas.com

Best Outside Patio

1. Nava

3060 Peachtree Road 404.240.1984 buckheadrestaurants.com

2. The Tavern at Phipps

3500 Peachtree Road 404.814.9640 centraarchy.com

3. Einstein's

1077 Juniper St. 404.876.7925 einsteinsatlanta.com

Best Power Lunch

1. Bone's

3130 Piedmont Road 404.237.2663 bonesrestaurant.com

2. Bistro Niko

3344 Peachtree Road 404,261,6456 buckheadrestaurants.com

3. Chops Lobster Bar

70 W. Paces Ferry Road 404.262.2675 buckheadrestaurants.com