

DINING

# Bardot Brasserie Keeps It Simple

Bien sûr Michael Mina's latest restaurant excels with French classics

By Al Mancini 9:00am

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Clockwise from top: onion soup gratiné, bread pudding and Heritage chicken roti. | Photo by Jon Estrada

Since 1999, when he came to Las Vegas to open Aqua in Bellagio, Michael Mina has been something of a Las Vegas institution. Over the years, as his national network of restaurants and bars has grown to two dozen, his Las Vegas presence has remained strong. And while individual restaurants have come and gone, occasionally changing their names or cuisine, I've always admired him for the consistent level of quality he and his team deliver. So while I was disappointed by last year's closure of American Fish in Aria, I've been anxiously awaiting its replacement. And after several visits to **Bardot Brasserie**, I'm happy to report it's as good as I'd hoped.

While there haven't been a lot of changes to American Fish's open kitchen, the dining room and bar have been remodeled. The large, elegant space is decorated in dark wood and glass, and meant to replicate Paris of the 1920s. In keeping with that theme, the menu is packed with such French classics as steak tartare, steak frites, charcuterie and raw

seafood. It's probably the simplest menu I've seen in one of Mina's fine-dining restaurants. And absent fancy frills, there's nothing for the chefs to hide behind. This food is an exercise in well-executed simplicity, and it's a testament to executive chef Josh Smith and his staff that they're able to pull it off so well.

Perhaps the best example of this simplistic approach is the heritage chicken: a simple baked bird accompanied by green beans with mushroom and brioche pudding (really just a fancy take on stuffing). To read it on the menu, or even see it on your plate, it comes off as one of the most boring meals you can imagine. But as I dug into the crispy skin and succulent meat, I experienced one of the best chicken dishes I've had in a long time.

That level of execution carried over to most of the dishes I've tried. The chickpea fries are crispy and delicious, accompanied by a roasted eggplant dip served inside a baby eggplant skin. The tartare is perfectly seasoned. Duck wings come lightly glazed with an orange sauce that makes the accompanying dip unnecessary. And garlicky escargots are individually wrapped in flaky pastry. If you're a French onion soup fan, Bardot offers it plain, or with Périgord truffle, braised oxtail and a soft poached egg. The latter is a bit indulgent, and could probably serve as full meal for most people, but it's delicious.



Escargots Bardot

Mina made his reputation cooking seafood, and with the departure of American Fish, he no longer has a seafood-centric restaurant in town. So it's nice to see a handful of ocean offerings on this menu. And his mastery of fish is apparent in the way he transforms the wings of a skate (traditionally considered a garbage fish) into a true delicacy with a simple caper brown butter. (I could live without the accompanying roasted cauliflower puree, however.)

Bardot also offers an *a la carte* weekend brunch that combines highlights from the dinner menu with more breakfast-oriented dishes—as well as an option for bottomless rosé for \$18. Don't miss the brioche French toast with toasted almonds. The Croque Madame sandwich, which is available on



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Bardot Brasserie's interior

both menus, is also quite good, although the bread is cut a bit too thick for my taste.

Other minor complaints include topping a wonderful foie gras parfait with a bit too

much sweet port gelée, as if they're trying to mask the duck liver's taste to make it more palatable for newcomers to the dish. And the potato gnocchi were like crispy potato croquettes, closer to Tater Tots than pasta.

Foie and Tots aside, Mina has once again wowed me by taking me in a new direction—Bardot Brasserie is a great addition to his local résumé.

### Al's Menu Picks

- Escargots Bardot (\$17)
- duck wings a l'orange (\$13)
- heritage chicken roti (\$36) and French toast (\$14)

### Bardot Brasserie

In Aria, 855-434-7148. Open for dinner 5–10:30 p.m. daily, brunch 10 a.m.–2:30 p.m. Sat–Sun. Dinner for two, \$80–\$200.



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