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Hearty ales and fine-tuned fare at Manderes

By Roger Phelps



Robert Scott/The Telegraph

Tim Massaro of Folsom, left, comes in regularly for a cold beer served by Brent Whited, co-owner of Manderes.

The term Manderes translates into "you guys chew."

Romans would have said so after laying out a bacchanal's worth of drinks flanked by choice viands. As in, you guys chew these while you're quaffing - don't worry, the dishes match the drinks.

When the legionnaires got to Anglo-Saxon Hibernia, hearty ales were the drinks in question, as in fact they are - a myriad of them -- at Manderes, open since Dec. 9 on East Bidwell Street in Folsom.

Modern Americans have been led to be choice-conscious in dining -- but after all, in Europe when a five-star chef says, "Here's what's for dinner," and his sidekick sommelier says, "I'll be pouring this," true gourmands listen, lay back and love it.

To that end, before one's mandibles get to eating instead of, well, jawing, careful sampling can go on of the wild profusion and diversity of brews, suiting one to an innovative meal from the Manderes kitchen.

"We want you to come here on a date with your wife," said co-owner Dave Matthews. "We 'teach' customers how to eat the food. We want to construct the perfect bite. For example, the Chimay chicken comes with boiled seaweed. We tell people, 'Put a little seaweed in your palm, lay a little rice in the fold, eat it and see if you like it.'"

Chimay is a Belgian ale on tap at Manderes. It is made from a centuries-old recipe devised by Trappist monks. It joins more than 130 other ales and beers, several from Belgium and dozens from northern California.

Head chef Paul Mendoza is expert at getting the tasty ales into his food recipes, for example, the "black-and-tan" onion rings, drizzled with a good Irish stout. Matthews and partner Brent Whited are skilled at persuading customers to "pair" a drink and a meal according to expertly assembled taste lore.

The hands-on approach is catching on at "the gastropub," as it's nicknamed.

"Almost 50 percent of our regulars go off our recommendations," Whited said. "For example, a

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lady came in and said, 'I don't like beer -- I don't drink it.' I introduced her to one of our cherry styles. That's all she drinks now."

Mendoza, Whited and Matthews spend time bouncing gustatory possibilities off one another.

"We have to come up with new ideas on the fly," Whited said.

"I'll say, 'Hey Juan, this needs to be hotter,' and he'll say, 'What kind of hotter do you want? Asian hotter? Mexican hotter?'" Matthew's said. "I'll say, 'We're going to cook some bread today,' and he'll say, 'What do you want it to taste like?'"

Fruits of this collaboration currently include the "bulgogi hoagie," which is thin-sliced rib-eye marinated in a traditional Korean sauce, served as a sandwich. Another is a lobster ravioli.

"Nobody else serves a lobster ravioli," Matthews said. "The reason we do it is the beer. Any Belgian goes with lobster."

And, there's a crab, lobster and sweet-corn chowder.

"Myself, Juan and Brent wanted a chowder, but not clam," Matthew's said. "Now, the chowder is our most featured item. People say, 'I've never tasted soup like this.'"

Mendoza said Manderes is able to draw fully on his experience with and passion for marinades.

"I like giving steak new flavor," Mendoza said. "Another thing I like is to sauté shrimp. There's different ways."

Manderes server Andrea Lawson said her favorite dishes are the Allagash chop, the steak kabob and the Asian chicken salad.

As far as costs and pricing go, Manderes searches out the best goods available for its dishes, and for its rack of ale taps, and charges accordingly. Fine wines are also served.

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