

Patisserie Lenox: Luxuriant pastries

By Sharon Smullen
Special to Berkshires Week

LENOX — Everyone deserves a birthday cake. As the summer solstice sun beat down, we beat a path to the door of Patisserie Lenox to celebrate my son's special day with a slice of sweet delight.

Cool air greeted us as we entered the welcoming surroundings — caramel-colored walls adorned with country scenes of sunflowers, a striking pink and white orchid, small round café tables. A larger stone-inlaid table was set in a sunny bay window overlooking umbrella-topped patio tables and the street beyond through lace half curtains. Plump cushions topped every chair, and the sounds of Jacques Brel and jazzy French pop filled the air.

Approaching the counter to place an order is like entering Aladdin's cave. The dizzying choices in the pastry case will set hearts thumping and juices flowing: multilayered Napoleons, cone-shaped cheesecakes, fresh fruit tarts large and small, mini cream-filled choux puffs, exquisite whole gâteaux.

We selected a rectangular slice of Opera cake. My daughter described the decadent strata of chocolate and coffee ganache with almond genoise topped with a jaunty sliver of chocolate as "layers of scrumdiddly-umptiousness."

The apricot tart seemed a perfect complement — tangy, not too sweet, the orange fruit tinged with toasted tips over almond paste in a flaky pastry bowl, with a few blueberries offering a fanfare of fruity flavor.

Milky swirls topped generous cups of café au lait, while the Puerto Rican coffee, already French pressed, arrived without the flourish of watching the grounds go down.

While walking hot beverages back to the cream and sugar counter is somewhat precarious, it lets the café offer a wide selection of sweeteners, from brown crystals to liquid sugar

in good taste

restaurant review

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and honey.

While there primarily for desserts, we sampled lunch dishes, including a chilled gazpacho of cucumber, avocado and tomato — perfect for a scorching day. The warm, filled croissant was deliciously flaky, even if paired with a somewhat bland spinach and ricotta filling. By contrast, the individual ham and Swiss quiche was crumbly, rich and cheesy. Fresh mixed greens came topped with a tangy citrus dressing.

The pastry selection was extensive and appealing, with

If you go ...

What: Patisserie Lenox

Where: 30A Church St., Lenox

Summer hours: Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Saturday, 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.; Sunday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Accessible: The café is wheelchair accessible; the restroom is not.

Price range: Pastries (\$2 to \$5) and light lunch (\$10)
Credit cards: Accepted.
Information: (413) 551-9050 or www.patisserielenox.com
Rating: 4 chef's hats



fruits, jams, cheeses, nuts and chocolate adorning croissants and breakfast breads dusted with sugar or glazed to a sheen.

Patisserie Lenox makes cakes to order, and the walls display photographs of some magnificent wedding cake creations, including a striking "croque en bouche" tower.

Busing our own tables was a small price to pay for such elegant and exceptional fare.

Owner Jean-Yves Bougouin is the real thing. Hailing from Brittany, France, he apprenticed as a pastry chef in Paris, scoring the top grade on the graduating culinary exam. He moved to Montreal and honed his skills in top North American restaurants including La Grenouille in New York City. He started his own businesses on Long Island, servicing restaurants and Air France; his

pastries even flew on Concorde.

A pilot himself — he was a paratrooper during his military service — Bougouin often flew on weekends to the Berkshires, where he decided to build his dream house in Becket for his Russian-born linguist wife, Yulia, and their young daughter, Sonya.

"I bought a log house kit on eBay," he said in an interview after my meal there. "We love it here."

Out walking in Lenox one winter afternoon, he saw the restaurant and decided to make the move. It wasn't a planned decision but a spontaneous one, he said. He and Yulia opened the patisserie in April 2011. The café has worked much better than expected, he said. Customers rave about it on Facebook, and he counts Gov. Deval Patrick and James Taylor

among his clients.

The flourless chocolate cake with chocolate mousse is one of his favorite recipes. He bakes everything from scratch using fresh ingredients, organic local produce and European butter — there's less water in it, he explained.

"One of our signature cakes, which most people love and also looks gorgeous, is the white chocolate mousse and raspberry," Yulia said.

Whether relaxing over a coffee and almond croissant, or walking out with a pink bakery box filled with delectable delicacies, a trip to Patisserie Lenox will always be a real treat. **BW**