

**L**e Bistro Vert (“the green bistro”), the new incarnation of the bistro concept propagated by the ECHOstore ladies — Pacita Juan, Jeannie Javelosa and Reena Francisco — together with chef Sau del Rosario, takes its name from a philosophical and practical standpoint, which in a nutshell is: going green will save the world.

Now, one doesn’t usually list the habit of eating out as part of a grand plan to save the planet. But the point of Le Bistro Vert is to provide a “socially conscious” dining experience. The founders believe that a sustainable food menu is a necessity in an overpopulated world straining its resources to the limit, and this means prioritizing local, organically cultivated ingredients instead of always importing supplies.

It is an outlet for small local producers — the backyard farmers that grow produce organically, or those tiny coffee farms up in the mountains with a similar aversion to pesticide use for their limited acreage. This is a small rebellion against the excesses of industrial food production, which relies on synthetic fertilizers and chemical pesticides and large amounts of water, not to mention those unsavory practices that lead to artificial hormones in milk or antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

They’re hoping to make it a green revolution, eventually, with more people becoming conscious of using organic products, hopefully lowering the costs of producing these items, and having these on hand (or plate) at cheaper prices.

“GENERATION G”

Ms. Juan, in a previous interview with *BusinessWorld*, spoke of sustainable food as being the trend of the moment, that there is a “green generation” (or Gen G) determined to stick to a lifestyle that would lessen the cumulative carbon footprint of each individual.

BY JOHANNA D. POBLETE, Reporter

# Return to innocence

This means cultivating habits that would, in the long run, have the desired effect.

It’s a message we’ve heard before, if we’ve been paying attention to the awareness campaigns of the likes of Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund. Little, doable things — like unplugging appliances rather than keeping them on standby mode, using reusable water containers rather than upping the plastic water bottle count, using handmade recycled paper or foregoing the paper trail and going electronic altogether — make a difference.

The commercial slant to the trend would be the patronization of green merchants, of which ECHOstore and Le Bistro Vert are but two. Same visionaries, same principles, naturally (and if the thought that this is all self-serving comes to mind, on the heels would be the realization that so far the founders have been consistent with their goals and, based on anecdotes, their own lifestyle changes).

“Green” here does not reach the extent that the restaurant is purely al fresco (the interior does use one visible air-conditioning unit), but one can bet the bulbs are energy-efficient. Architect Dan Lichauco, known for his green buildings and who teaches sustainable green architecture at the University of Santo Tomas, is responsible for an interior reminiscent of a green glass house, bamboo stencils and all.

LIGHT AND EASY

Of course, the food has to be good and not just good-hearted, which is where Mr. Del Rosario — French-trained by Michelin Etoile chefs and notable for his work at



JOHANNA D. POBLETE

Chelsea Market and Café, M Café, Pino, Hola España, Madison Grill, and that long-running ice cream ad a while back — and his assistant chef Michelin Galang, a first honor graduate from Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Arts Institute in Australia, come in.

Incidentally, Mr. Del Rosario runs Food Garage Bakery and Pastry that supplies artisanal breads to a number of establishments in Metro Manila, this one included. He’s also an admirer of chef Alain Ducasse, who in his recent visit to Manila, spoke of “going back to nature,” emphasizing local cuisine with local produce, and admitting to being disinclined to serve fish, since Europeans tend to eat only certain kinds of fish, and this put pressure on demand (ergo, triggering overfishing or cultivation in artificial environments).

Le Bistro Vert isn’t the kind of establishment that takes an extreme position, however. Fish as well as meat — Lucban *longganisa* for one — are on the menu. Nevertheless, there’s much grazing involved, given the proliferation of



JOHANNA D. POBLETE



JOHANNA D. POBLETE

ISN'T IT ORGANIC — (clockwise from top) a view of Le Bistro Vert’s interiors; smoked fish puttanesca with capers, olives, coriander and basil; complimentary taro and potato chips; and arugula, Davao blue cheese and cashew salad with balsamic dressing



locally sourced greens. There is also an abundance of root crops and cheeses. In one “bento box” (one of three healthy lunch sets for P350), one finds green pea soup with *kesong puti*, smoked fish and green salad with soy orange vinaigrette, beef stew with organic root vegetables and garlic potato mash, topped with coffee or tea with Choc Nut.

For a light and easy afternoon repast, this writer ordered the arugula, Davao blue cheese and cashew salad (P175) with balsamic dressing, shreds of green apple (skin attached at the ends) and large slices of tomatoes in the mix, and the smoked fish puttanesca (P195) with capers, olives, corian-