

# Beauty and the feast

Mistral accentuates its fine cuisine  
with elegant plate settings



**By Bob Tremblay**

NEWS STAFF WRITER

BOSTON – Great dishes in great dishes. It could almost be Mistral's slogan.

The South End restaurant not only serves elegant French-Mediterranean cuisine, the award-winning eatery serves the food on elegant china and in attractive bowls.

The latest collection of culinary pottery comes from the south of France where Mistral chef-owner Jamie Mammano was honeymooning last summer. In a small market in Les Baux de Provence, he came across a treasure trove of brick red and ochre yellow pottery with traditional, hand-painted details such as local flowers, berries and olives. Impressed by the attention to detail and the craftsmanship, he purchased enough of the handmade pottery to outfit each table in his 180-seat restaurant.

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"I really wasn't looking for china," says Mammano. "I just stumbled upon this little shop and ended up buying 600 pieces. I was attracted by their appearance and how they'd work in the restaurant. They had a very soft pastel, country-like feel to them, not ornate by any stretch of the imagination. I'm not into that. The plates had very simple, beautiful earth tones."

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In addition to china, the pieces include bowls and pitchers, mostly made of terracotta. It's a fragile material to be used in the hustle-and-bustle restaurant business. "Breakage is phenomenal," admits Mammano. "We break a few hundred a year and most of the pieces I'm particularly fond of break too quickly."

Mammano stresses every day to his MISTRAL, Page C3



PHOTO BY MIRONA CAMPBELL

**Left, Chef Jamie Mammano's collection of terracotta ware from Provence is used by the restaurant for serving food.**



## Lovely dishes make Mistral beautiful

MISTRAL, *From CI*

staff to take care when handling these artistic creations. Some pieces, such as pitchers, suffer from stress due to daily usage and get retired to the shelves for display purposes.

The beautiful china is worth the expense, according to Mammano.

"People comment on it all the time," says the Long Island native. "They say, 'It's beautiful. Where can I find it?'" Because of numerous requests for the china, Mammano has started a catalog from which people can order plates, pitchers, bowls and serving dishes. "You can either go to Provence and that shop or come here," he says with a smile.

Interestingly, Mammano was at first opposed to buying such colorful china when Mistral – named for the wind that blows through the south of France – was getting ready to open four years ago.

"I wanted to use just white china, but my designer, Celeste Cooper, talked me out of it and I'm glad she did," says Mammano. Traditional thinking goes, when you're cooking fine food, you want it to be on a white background to show off its colors, he says. "You don't want any of the colors of the plate to interfere with what you're trying to produce on the plate. A lot of chefs think that way."

A trip to New York with Cooper convinced Mammano to think differently. "We went to see several French china companies and saw what they had to offer," he recalls. "I had the menu for the restaurant in my mind when I went down there so I visualized certain dishes in each one of these different types of china and I realized it would be a fabulous way to display the food."

The distinctive china also separates Mistral from the competition, Mammano says. When it comes to pleasing the customer, the more senses you appeal to the better.

"We provide a great environment, extraordinary service and consistently excellent food to our guests," he says. "Certain operations hit on some of those cylinders, but not all of them. We wanted to take it a step further."

"After you get through all the initial things, the excitement continues throughout the course of the meal by getting different china that people have never seen before. We try to attack every little nuance of the experience of coming here to dinner and the plates are a very big part of that."

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Mistral chef-owner

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When buying china, Mammano is looking for colors that blend in with Mistral's environment. "Basically the colors of this restaurant are mustard and sage as well as antique white colors and that's reflected in the china," he says. "We don't use blue because it's not really a food color."

The restaurant has about 12 sets of pottery, each containing anywhere from 30 to 60 pieces, says Mammano.

"We don't have a lot of artwork in the restaurant per se," he says, "because we pretty much look at the entire space as a work of art. No pictures hang on the wall. The restaurant stands on its own as a piece of art and the china contributes to that."

Art with a culinary function is not that radical a concept when you consider a chef is a culinary artist, says Mammano, who has an art collection at home located not far from his Columbus Avenue restaurant. "Food not only has to taste excellent, but also has to be presented well," he says. "People eat with their eyes as well as their palate."

A company in France is now designing more china for Mistral. It's a restaurant that definitely steps up to the plate.