



Record photo by MICHAEL MINEZ

FIRST-RATE: A wine-country mural graces a wall at Lodi's Cottage Bakery Restaurant.

Full service, fine food

Lodi's Cottage Bakery Restaurant delivers it all

By Howard Lachtman

Record Staff Writer

Man — or woman — cannot live by bread alone, even if they're dining in a bakery.

In our case, that would be dining at The Cottage Bakery in Lodi.

It's an old family business that took a new lease on life three years ago when the Knutson family decided to expand into a self-service cafe and full-service dining room. The bakery remains, making the Cottage three times as tempting.

The attractive dining room was crowded when we arrived, with a full house for booths beneath the wide and colorful wine-country murals decorating the wall. The quietly elegant room exudes a warm, inviting atmosphere, with carefully shaded lighting and illuminated border florals.

With executive chef Julio Camberos in charge, the food provides a tempting assortment of wood-fired grill and rotisserie items (\$9.95 to \$15.95), innovative pasta dishes such as the kung pao chicken pasta (\$10.95) and house specialties such as snapper Vera Cruz (\$12.95), chicken Angelica (\$13.95) and seafood jambalaya (\$15.95).

Those who prefer to serve themselves can select from wood-roasted meals both individual (\$3.99-\$6.99) and family-sized (\$13.95-\$26.50), fresh pizzas (\$6.50-\$14.50) and sandwiches

(\$3.95-\$5.95) at the adjacent cafe.

We sampled an excellent pan-seared escolar, a whitefish done to perfection, drizzled with a light pepper vinaigrette and served with a roasted ratatouille (vegetable stew) of zucchini, eggplant, squash, tomatoes, onions and peppers (\$15.95). Our fish was beautifully done. The vegetable mix was anything but routine.

With a choice of soup or salad, we opted for the butter-nut squash soup, a creamy and savory treat. Our thoughtful server kept the bread basket filled with a fresh assortment, including Kalamata olives.

Service was another plus, with a staff trained in presentation and technique. One had the feeling of being invited not merely to dine, but also to linger and relax, exactly what most diners were doing during our visit.

The Cottage serves (and anticipates) the varying needs of its customers so well that it defines

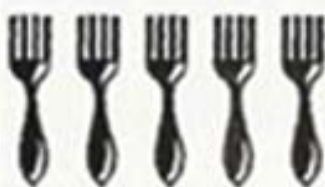
the meaning of a full-service restaurant.

It delivers appealing entrees, average prices and a sense of community in a dining room. Not to mention the tempting bread basket.

The future may bring a Cottage restaurant operation to Stockton, which currently has only the bakery end of the enterprise.

If the meal and service we enjoyed here are any indication — and if the quality of the Lodi venue can be replicated in Stockton — that can't happen too soon.

Rating (out of five)



Restaurant review

Cottage Bakery Restaurant

■ Where — 203 S. School St., Lodi

■ Hours — 6 a.m.-9 p.m. Mon.-Thurs.; 6 a.m.-10:30 p.m. Fri., Sat.; 7 a.m.-9 p.m. Sun.

■ Payment — Checks and credit cards OK

■ Information — 334-2544 (dining room); 334-2595 (cafe)

■ Price range — \$4-\$6 (breakfast); \$6-\$9 (lunch); \$9-\$16 (dinner)

Highlights

■ Dining room and self-serve cafe (formal or casual dining)

■ Creative menu, early supper specials, weekend chef's menu

■ Cafe special pizzas, food to go