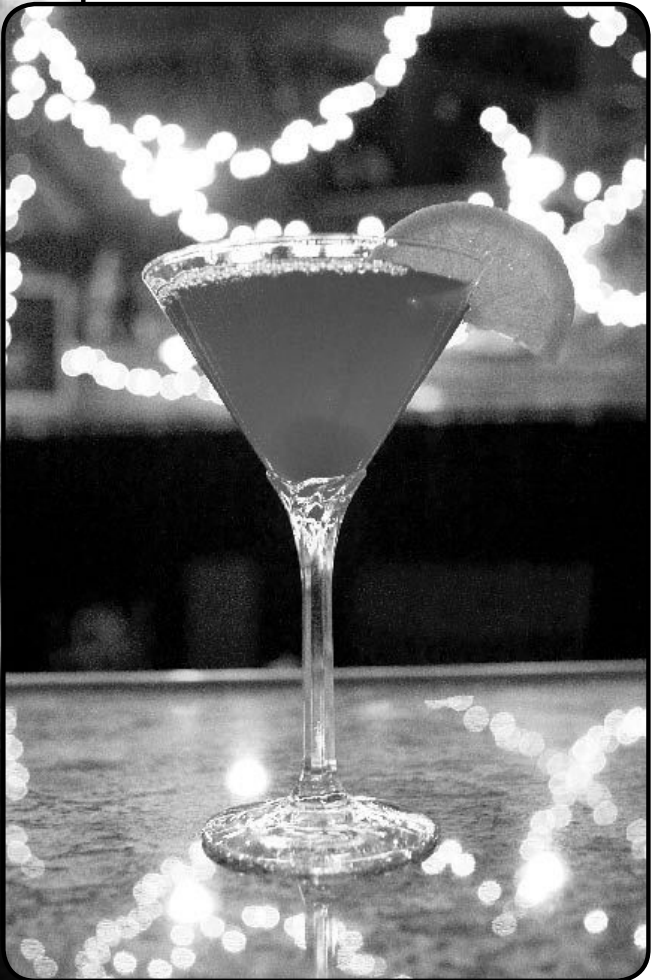


LA VIE BOHEME! *The Press dishes cuisine and culture*



Photos by Tanya Hills

By Stacy Davies

Sometimes you really *can* go someplace where everybody knows your name—and it's not traffic court. It can be a bar, and occasionally a restaurant—though hip, personable little eateries are often few. Bar scenes can deteriorate into drunken skeeviness as well, so it's rare when a joint can combine the two and keep the best parts of both. Such is the Press, tucked away in Claremont's little village.

When I first walked into the Press, I had a sudden flashback of my San Francisco pubbing days—exposed wood rafters and air ducts, dimly lit with edgy local artwork and gargoyles perched high, and the young, bookish-musicians-intellectual sort milling about with pints and martinis. I was home—even though SF had only been "home" for two years.

To clear up any calls of bias, I must admit to the following: I got a job as a waitress at

the Press several summers ago just to make friends (being a newly emigrated Long Beacher); I *hated* being a waitress, and wasn't a very good one, but did make those friends, and I quit with the well-wishes of grandmotherly spitfire owner Rose Jane, who never said a thing about my crummy service. She was the first! Up until this newspaper gig, I could often be seen at the Press guzzling down what burlesque dancer/bartender pal Tanya calls a Citrus Mistress, or nursing several of what is *seriously* the best Key Lime Martini on Earth.

That being said, I always found the food at the Press to be a bit too healthy for my palette—which really only means that I'm one of the severely demented meat-a-holics who's drawn to ultra-stinky cheeses, exposed garlic cloves and molten sauces that kick my ass awake at 3 a.m. (apparently, I'm really French). But even for a soon-to-be-struck-down-with-clogged-arteries type, I even found some staple Press items that

go well with any of their numerous fine wines or savory cocktails.

For apps, I tend to lean toward the succulent spring rolls, the so-good-you'd-swear-you're-in-Tokyo miso soup, or the house specialty and favorite of late-night eaters/drinkers, the Press fries. These are no ordinary spuds—they're hand cut from fresh pots and mixed with yucca and yams, much like those gourmet vegetable chips that are so splendidly indulgent—and come heaping on a platter with seasoned salt. A waitress friend once coerced me into the sautéed tofu, though, and I'm ashamed to say to that it was great, and made me consider for a millisecond that I could actually become a vegetarian one day. But the piece de resistance, is *absolutely*, the chips and salsa with *real* guac. You will *never* have any better, trust me.

The lunch salads and sandwiches are tops—and again, I puzzle that my favorite is the all-veggie Avocado sandwich, with chipotle mayo. I add onions and feta, though, and think that's how it should always be served. When it comes to entrees, I stick with the filet mignon medallions with horseradish cream and mashed taters. But the Thai ginger chicken and tomato

basil cream linguini are also yum. The veg lasagna is the *most* popular dish, it seems, and rightly so—you hardly even know there's no meat in it. Magic!

The food is really the *second* reason to go to the Press, however—anyone will tell you numero uno is the atmosphere. The wait staff is young and cool, the bartenders are attractive and friendly, and no, I'm not just saying that to get free drinks. In fact, two of the mixologists—Emad and Darlene—often appear at the Press with their bands, and they do so because they're *good*, not because it's a stipulation for employment. The Press, you see, is also a hop-pin' live entertainment venue—the only one in this college town worth mentioning—with acts like Rick Shea, Tony Gilkyson, Paddy Doyle's Boots and, amazingly enough, X legend John Doe. And there's a *reason* Doe plays here so often—coming back next week, in fact—and it's not the food or the drinks. It's the *crowd*, the digs itself—the students, musicians, professors and artists, all bunched up in one little spot, creating their own suburban bohemia—the only kind that counts anymore. **IE**

THE PRESS RESTAURANT, 129 HARVARD AVE., CLAREMONT (909) 625-4808. TUES. & WED., 11 A.M.-MID.; THURS.-SAT., 11 A.M.-1:30 A.M.; SUN., 5 P.M.-MID.; MON., 8 P.M.-MID. [DINNER FOR TWO \$40]