

The Gazette

Landmark Chez Delmo to reopen just down the street, under new name
Shuttered restaurant's executive chef and kitchen staff moving to new premises

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Fans of Chez Delmo, the Old Montreal fish restaurant that has been shuttered since December 2004, are in for a happy surprise.

At a new location just down Notre Dame St., they will soon be able to savour the poached salmon and cream of tomato soup that were favourites at Delmo's for 72 years.

This renaissance is due to former Delmo manager Simon Desjeans. He is bringing all the restaurant's former kitchen staff, including executive chef Enzo Bertoli, and two of the waiters, to the new restaurant, which he has named Le Nantua.

"I'm calling it Le Nantua because at night we had Shrimp Nantua at Delmo, with crayfish as the base for the sauce," he said.

Re-creating Delmo, which was at 211 Notre Dame St. W., in the premises occupied by Chez Bernard, a traditional French restaurant at 275 Notre Dame, was not Desjeans's original plan. He had made arrangements to buy the building housing Delmo from owner Roland Perisset, but Perisset died before the deal could be finalized.

"We agreed with a lease and a three-year buy option, but the deal never went through," said Desjeans, who had been at the restaurant for 24 years. So Desjeans bought up Chez Bernard's lease and kitchen equipment. New space, new name, same menu.

With a \$250,000 renovation under way, Desjeans expects to open Le Nantua by June 1. He believes that with Bertoli's expertise - he worked at Delmo for 35 years and holds the classic sauce recipes - the fare at Le Nantua will equal that served at Delmo.

"I hear from all the old customers of Delmo - they're all anxious," he said. "I just received two calls today asking when I'm going to open."

He is aware that he cannot make Le Nantua the spitting image of Delmo - instead of the two long bars in the front room that gave the original its signature look, for instance, Le Nantua will have a 14-seat granite bar.

The old Delmo, in the meantime, is in the beginning stages of renovation by a consortium that includes the Holder brothers, owners of Cube and Holder, among other restaurants.

"We're completely redoing the place," said Richard Holder. They plan to update the restaurant, and at the same time "we're going to preserve its essence." It will be eight months before the fish and seafood restaurant can open, Holder said. While the facade will be largely untouched, there are plans to use the top two floors, left vacant for decades.

They will, he says, take out the low ceiling into the original Delmo dining room to reveal the staircase going up to the top floor. "It's going to be spectacular, very Parisian."

For more information on Restaurant Le Nantua, call (514) 288-4288. © The Gazette (Montreal) 2006