



Happy Birthday Bistro! When a beloved local restaurant turns 15.

When a beloved local restaurant turns 15, you can bet there will be corks popping, glasses clinking, much feasting, and revelry all around. Last week's weeklong celebration of the opening of **Rendezvous Bistro** was all that and more. It's the *more* that intrigues me. But first, I'll tell you about the party.

There were 3 very special dinners as the Bistro welcomed James Beard award winning chefs and prestigious vintners to join in the celebration. There was a night of fundraising for the **Joe Casey Memorial Fund**, and a special **Roadhouse Brewing Company** beer released in his honor. On the last day, the Bistro opened its doors to the whole town for party, free for all.

Any local will tell you there's something about the Bistro that makes it more than just a great restaurant. It's the kind of place that gets under your skin. Stay away too long, and there's this urge to stop by, if only for a quick drink. Once inside, it's as if you had never stayed away. Familiar faces welcome, the bar beckons, and the aroma of comforting, familiar foods surround — like lifting the lid of a pot that's been simmering away on the stove. Walking into the Bistro is like being on the receiving end of a big hug.

Jackson Hole didn't know we needed a bistro in our lives back in 2001 when restaurateur Gavin Fine and Chef Roger Freedman opened Rendezvous Bistro in a space that had been a Denny's. But we needed a bistro just like every neighborhood in Paris needs a bistro. We needed a place that was not too fancy, not too casual, not too expensive. We needed a place with paper and crayons on each table, welcoming our children. We needed a restaurant that was just as perfect for birthday celebrations, girls' nights out, and date night dinners, as it was for grabbing a quick bite at the bar before a movie. A place where we would always run into someone we know if we were feeling social, but with private tables too, in case we weren't.

I joked with Gavin Fine that I was probably his very first customer back in 2001. "You probably were," he laughed. Over time, he and Freedman went on to launch Bistro Catering and 5 more restaurants in Jackson Hole under **Fine Dining Restaurant Group** — Il Villaggio Osteria, Bin22, The Kitchen, Q Roadhouse and Brewery Co., and Bodega. All of FDRG's restaurants have different concepts but that same warm, welcoming feeling.

Each night of the weeklong celebration, Fine raised his glass to his restaurant family — the chefs, servers, bartenders, busboys, front desk, managers, and visiting chefs. And to us, his guests. Whether we are hardcore year-round locals, part-time locals or tourists, he considers us an extension of his restaurant family.

As Fine reminisced about 15 years of the Bistro, I sat at a long table surrounded by friends, as I have so many times over the years. We traded our own stories of the Bistro — countless dinners, endless discussions, memorable meals, all washed down by good wines.

There was the time I was sitting at the bar with my sons, Jack and Nick, eating burgers and watching a soccer game. Harrison Ford sat down next to 12-year old Jack; they were both wearing the exact same ski hat. Ford looks over at Jack, tips his hat, winks, and says, "Nice hat, kid." They didn't recognize Ford, of course. I waited until we were in the car to tell them that guy was Hans Solo. Only at the Bistro.

There was the time my office holiday party took over a table in the center of the room. As our secret Santa game started to get out of hand, one of the doctors I employed started dancing on the table, doing some sort of strip-tease. The next year, thankfully, the Bistro staff discretely booked us in the private room.

I'll never forget the time my boys and a friend started flicking spoonfuls of their chocolate bread pudding across the table at each other. The adults, engrossed in our conversations, lingering over our wine and dessert, didn't notice at first. By the time things got out of hand, the staff was actually laughing, as if to say "Don't worry. What's a little food fight?"

Generosity, family, community, inclusiveness — while many restaurants try to evoke these sentiments, most fall short. You need to feel it each time you walk in the door. It emanates from every person on staff. It's what makes the food so satisfying, the wines so delicious. It's the heart and the soul of the restaurant, and the Bistro's got it in spades.

Which may be why the whole town turned out to wish Rendezvous Bistro a happy 15th anniversary. And many more.