

L'etoile's Downstairs Spot Will Be Cafe Soleil

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The bakery/cafe beneath L'Etoile is being reborn later this month as Cafe Soleil.

"That way we have the star and the sun," said Traci Miller, who with her brother, chef Tory Miller, took over both the distinguished 28-year-old Madison institution and its companion cafe earlier this year.

The youthful new owners have made some cosmetic changes as well. They've added a long, cushioned banquette stretching the length of the cafe, and this week they've finished painting the room yellow and a "merlot" red.

Before its grand reopening scheduled for Oct. 18, the Millers plan to take out the seating in front and replace it with copper counters, which will slightly increase the cafe's capacity.

There will also be some additions to the cafe's small repertoire, and fortunately nothing on the current menu will be scrapped. That's good news for those hooked on the smoked Norwegian salmon croissants and the artesian farm trout salad sandwiches.

L'Etoile itself, at 25 N. Pinckney St., has also had some remodeling work. The copper and wooden faux ceiling in the main dining area - which the staff affectionately referred to as the "copper grid" - has been removed, giving the room a more open feel.

Meanwhile, landlord Sonya Newenhouse, whose consulting firm, Madison Environmental Group, has its offices upstairs, built down and into the front area of the dining room, making the ceiling lower so it lines up with the other section of the room.

The changes make for a more cohesive dining room, Traci Miller said.

All the light fixtures have been replaced, and the room has been repainted appropriately: an eggplant purple and "Farmer's Almanac" yellow.

However, the restaurant's most recognizable feature, its exposed brick, is still exposed, so the remodeling won't be especially noticeable - except to regulars.

Both businesses are also getting new signage within the next few weeks.

Upstairs L'Etoile is featuring Nick Berard's black and white photographs of the farms and farmers that supply the restaurant. There's a particularly joyous group shot of the L'Etoile staff on a wagon at the Cates Family Farm in Spring Green during an outing and cookout this summer.

Berard is planning to shoot color photos from the Dane County Farmers' Market to be displayed downstairs in Cafe Soleil.

Besides the remodeling work, the Millers have also been busy with a Hurricane Katrina fundraiser, serving jambalaya for the past three Saturdays and raising a total of \$2,300 so far.

The \$5 portions are dished up in front of the cafe during the Farmers' Market and will be available for the next five weeks - until the market ends for the season.

Their goal is to raise \$10,000 and donate it through the global charity Mercy Ships, designated for the Katrina response.

A few years ago, Traci Miller, who is also a pharmacist, spent 13 months on one of the vessels providing free health care in port areas of North Africa.

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