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FRESH START

Raising

The Bar

A COZY ESCAPE BOASTING FRENCH-MEDITERRANEAN CUISINE, BAR LOU SETS A HIGH BAR FOR FLAVOR AND FUN

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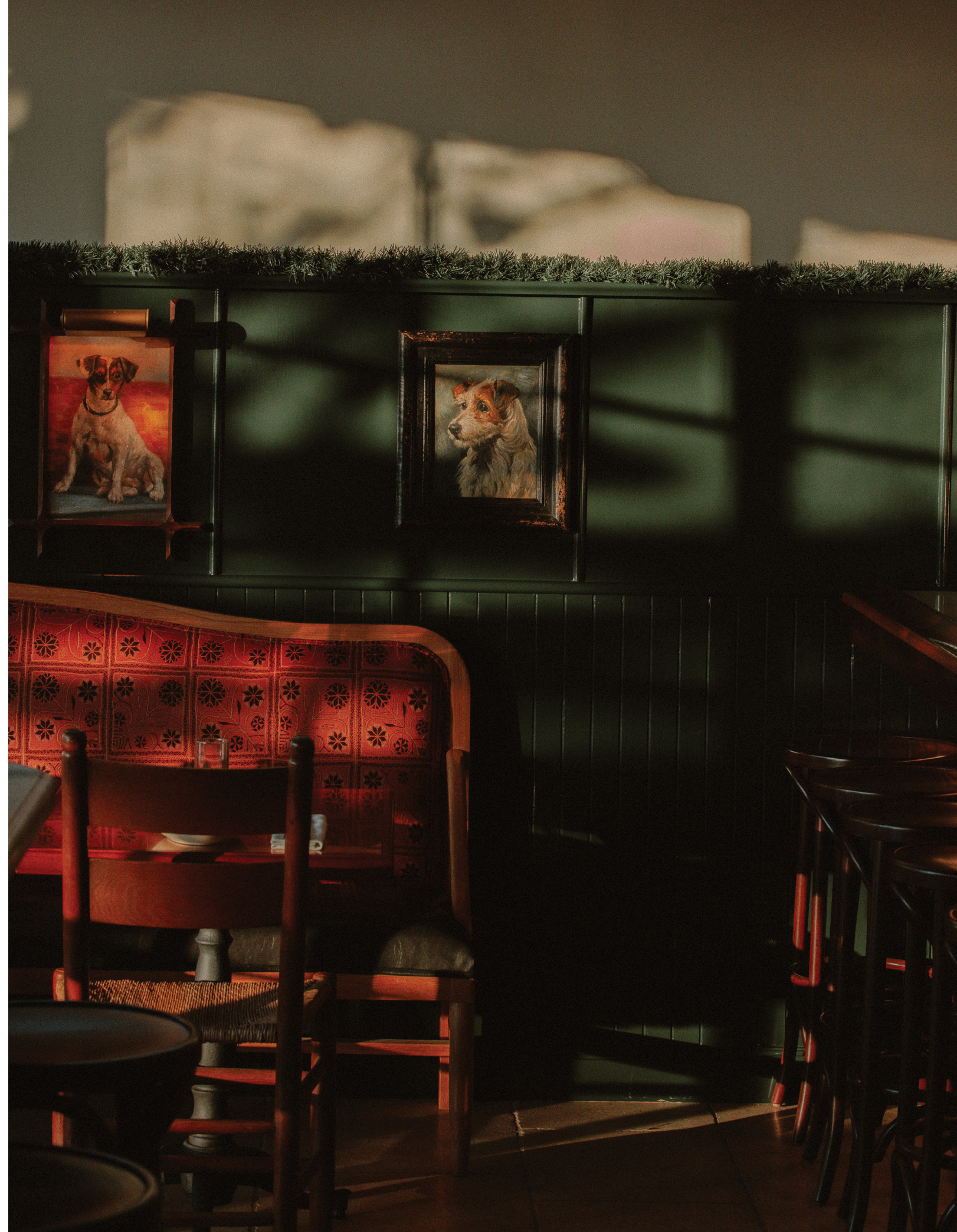
Out with the old, in with the Lou—with a French-Riviera-inspired menu and candid charm, newcomer Bar Lou has established itself in the Santa Barbara dining scene. Chef Brandon Boudet and co-owner Warren Ebbink bring their coastal Californian restaurateur experience, breathing life into an old space on Coast Village Road.

While only a few steps from the street, Bar Lou feels like another world entirely. A flight of stairs elevates me to a new level—both physically and experientially. I'm enthusiastically greeted by name, which verbalizes the welcoming atmosphere at Bar Lou.

I absorb the warmth of the staff and the cozy brick fireplace as we walk to our seats, taking in earth tones and cool fresh air. Sprawling tree branches above a dark wooden pergola provide the picturesque perch for the twinkling lights illuminating the outdoor patio. Even better, I can see the bar of Bar Lou—gleaming bottles and glasses beckon me through window panes, and I get ahead of myself imagining the drinks they'll craft.



GUILLOTINE





ROASTED CARROTS, BLACK LENTILS, SMOKY EGGPLANT PUREE & CARROT TOP PISTOU
HARISSA SPICED BEEF KOFTA WITH TZATZIKI & FATTOUSH SALAD

As I deliberate aloud between cocktails or wine to start the evening, my boyfriend aptly points out “Bar” is in the name—cocktails are in order. He opts for the “Guillotine,” but upon arrival, the only blade is a single delicate sage leaf resting atop a coral concoction. Partial to anything with tequila, the “Cote d’Azur” catches my eye, even before it’s brought to the table with a delicate sprig of baby’s breath stemming from the aquamarine. One sip of smoky mezcal confirms I made the right call.

Despite being seated outside, I make my obligatory lap around the restaurant (I tell my boyfriend I’m going to the restroom, but I really just want to investigate the photo ops inside). While the al fresco seating is casually whimsical, inside boasts an eclectic, homey-feel. Elegant white tablecloths and candlelight are balanced by pops of Bar Lou’s playful personality—my favorites being framed photos of canine friends that line the walls. The details bring the space a vintage authenticity, and I wonder how anything could have possibly existed here before a place that fits so perfectly.

After my restaurant rendezvous, Brandon, chef and co-owner, waltzes over to our table. Though I can’t put my finger on it, he personifies the calming yet contagiously captivating vibe of Bar Lou, and I suddenly feel like I’m just at my cool neighbor’s home for happy hour.

“We were going back and forth with names,” Brandon explains. “We went through grandmas, kids, and then decided on...” he trails off before flipping his phone towards me, revealing an adorable tawny Boxer with chocolate saucer eyes: his pup, “Lou.” As Brandon beams, I wonder if it’s about the restaurant or her, but I decide both are definitely worth being proud of.

The pride isn’t premature, either. Small share plates arrive, and most are at our server Graham’s recommendation. Fried zucchini blossoms and roasted carrots with lentils and eggplant puree are the first to grace the table—and our tastebuds—raising the bar from the high standard the cocktails set. Fried, roasted, and smothered in salty sauces, Bar Lou even makes eating your veggies fun!



COTE D’AZURE

The last of the sharables is the harissa spiced beef kofta with tzatziki and fattoush salad. At Graham’s suggestion, we included this Mediterranean specialty. Initially skeptical from the salad’s bitter dressing, I start to doubt Graham—until I realize it’s just user error. Once I create the perfect bite consisting of crunchy lettuce, smooth tzatziki, and tender beef, my trust is restored.

Bar Lou embodies classic dining, so we had to order an all time favorite: Steak au Poivre and Frites. Another one of Graham’s recommendations, I blame him for forcing my hand in ordering (I was secretly eyeing it on the menu the whole time). The plate arrives with a fry-to-steak ratio that favors the fries, and that’s just how I like it. I switch between savoring the seasoned steak and snacking on salty shoestring fries, and while it’s a classic, Bar Lou has somehow enhanced a longtime favorite once more. We wash down the meal with affogatos. Though the dessert is a sweet conclusion, I can’t help but feel bittersweet as our evening comes to a close.

With a unique fusion of French and Mediterranean flavors and an unbeatable location on Coast Village Road, Bar Lou fits right in while standing out. Named after man’s best friend, the restaurant will surely be a longtime companion for its patrons and has truly raised the bar—though, next time, I hope to meet Lou herself.*