

## BISTRO PROVENCE

13616 Memorial, Houston (713) 827-8008

Bistro Provence, much like Cafe Rabelais in the Village (Hankamer Update January 2006), is a small, intimate neighborhood restaurant, serving honest country French fare. Unlike classic French menus, on which the carefully prepared sauces show the talents of the kitchen, the Bistro Provence menu lets the quality of the fresh basic ingredients speak for themselves. The affordable menu offers for starters Tapenade Provencale-traditional black olive, anchovy and garlic spread; Assiette de Charcuterie-pate, cured and dried ham, dry sausage, and pork head cheese, accompanied by cornichons, bread and butter; Soupe a l'oignon gratinee; and Bouillabaisse-fish soup Marseille-style. Main dishes include several varieties of personal-size pizza, featuring choice of condiments such as goat cheese, mushrooms, provencal herbs, black olives, mussels, crawfish, scallops, and calamari. Full entrees include Civet de lapin (traditional rabbit stew), Cuisse de canard Confit (duck leg cured and simmered in its own juices) served in a mixed bean panache; Brochette de gigot d'agneau (grilled lamb and vegetables on a skewer); and Poussin roti (whole Cornish game hen), de-boned, topped with Provencale herbs and Dijon mustard, and roasted in the wood-burning oven. And, of course, all items can be matched with an appropriately chosen and affordable wine from the south of France.

## MCGONIGEL'S MUCKY DUCK

2425 Norfolk Houston (713) 528-5999

Surprisingly, Houston has many "pubs," some actually more or less faithful to the English variety. The Richmond Arms comes to mind, as do the trio of pubs in the Rice Village on Morningside, which are so close that one can actually pub-crawl from one to another: Baker Street Pub & Grill, Brian O'Neill's, and The Ginger Man. But in Hankamer's judgment, none equals the Mucky Duck, located on a little side street just east of Kirby. In addition to having some of the most genuinely nice staff of any restaurant in Houston, the Mucky Duck offers authentic pub fare, AND live entertainment. Hankamer has enjoyed the songs and antics of Kinky Friedman (yes, the same candidate for governor) and the yodeling ballads of Don Walser, as well as other acts, both established and aspiring. In addition to its large selection of adult beverages, the Mucky Duck offers a tasty selection of salads, homemade soup, or chili as starters, and its "Pubsnaacks" menu includes Welsh Rarebit, aged cheddar and ale baked over toast and topped with sauteed mushrooms and crisp bacon; black bean queso with ripened avocado; Scotch egg-hard boiled egg wrapped in spicy sausage, coated in bread crumbs, and fried until golden brown; Bangers and mash-two authentic English sausages with baked beans and mashed potatoes, laced with cheddar cheese. A variety of sandwiches is available, and the "Specialities" on the main menu include baked Shepherd's Pie-ground beef and mushrooms in a savory sauce, topped with mashed potatoes and sprinkled with cheddar cheese; Steak and mushroom pie; Angel hair pasta dishes garnished with shrimp or chicken breast; and Beef Guinness-tasty beef stew with potatoes, carrots, and onions, marinated in Ireland's own Guinness stout. Apple pie with cinnamon and walnut streusel, Chocolate mousee, and Bread pudding top the dessert offerings. Tickets for the widely varied selection of entertainers range from \$10-20.

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*Note: By way of qualifications for reviewing restaurants, Hankamer has owned and operated numerous restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, discotheques and banquet halls over the last forty years; he has travelled to over 70 countries and has studied and lived in Europe for over three years; he was co-owner of a home delivery wine of the month club and imported his own wine labels for years.*

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