



Bistro Zinc:

big-time bar
in the Berkshires

For first-timers to **Bistro Zinc** in Lenox, Massachusetts, one quick scan of the space will cause locals and out-of-towners alike to recalibrate their vision of a New England restaurant and watering hole. A sleek, crescent-shaped, 13-seat zinc-topped bar fills the back room, but it doesn't diminish the remaining space. Instead, the bar and its stylish backbar are of a piece with the adjacent dining tables and front dining room. The rooms are separated by a partition, but the wall's large glass panels help join the two spaces visually and spiritually.



bistro zinc

56 Church Street
 Lenox, MA 01240
 413-637-8800
 bistrozinc.com

Owner Jason G. Macioge
General Manager Franck Seguin
Number of Employees 35;
 2 part-time bartenders, lunch;
 3 full-time bartenders, dinner
Bar Focus Classic and specialty
 martini cocktails
Average Drink Price \$8
Signature Drink and Price
 Orange Bliss, \$8
Pouring Cost 25%
Average Bar Bill \$14; \$35 with
 dinner
Gross Annual Revenue,
Restaurant \$1,750,000
Gross Annual Revenue, Bar
 \$375,000
In the Well Sutton Club Vodka,
 Sutton Club Gin, José Cuervo
 Gold, Barton's American Whiskey,
 Gilbert's Scotch

Bistro Zinc's welcoming curvilinear bar is a marvel of form and function.

Smart lighting, both natural (windows and skylights) and man-made, provides the perfect atmospherics by day and night for guests to enjoy the ravishing French bistro fare and the well-selected roster of international wines, spirits, and beers. Spectacular floral displays add color and fire to the handsome interior. Bistro Zinc has big-city panache and smashing good looks—a spot-on fit for Lenox, a picturesque resort and second-home town in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts and

home to the world-class Tanglewood Music Festival. Moreover, it has a bar that is both intimate and formidable—the centerpiece of a wildly popular, award-winning venue.

All in the Families

Bistro Zinc is the brainchild of Jason Macioge, a restaurant-lifer who started washing dishes at age 13 and developed a passion for the business as a college student in Ottawa, fueled in part



Taking care of Bistro Zinc every day elicits frequent smiles from Jason Macioge, a restaurateur who loves the business.

Customer- and Bartender-Friendly

The restaurant and bar were an immediate hit from opening day in early 1999, drawing both locals and visitors hungry and thirsty for a cutting-edge eatery and watering hole. The capital investment was paid off quickly, and over the years Macioge's nimble management has maintained Bistro Zinc's positive financials, a key being his daily diligence. "We track sales on our POS system, and I am here seven days a week," Macioge explains. "So I know who is here, what is selling, and what our guests are asking for."

This hands-on management style has allowed for quick and necessary changes in the bar program. Macioge comments, "We have reduced our inventory in the liquor category. At one point we had over 35 vodkas; we now have about 20, and that [reduction] goes for bourbon, Tequila, and single malts as well." Macioge is particularly careful to keep pars low during the slow winter season. He offers, "If we run out of, say, Ketel One, I'll go across the street to the liquor store and buy one."

Bistro Zinc's bar started with a solid mix of classic and original cocktails made with premium spirits, well-crafted beers on tap, and an all-French wine list, with a dozen wines by the glass. Individual spirits, cocktail, and beer selections have changed over the years and with the seasons, and the wine list now is composed of international selections, but the mission to sell premium beverages at a fair price has remained. Customers choose wine 60 percent of the time (30, 5, and 25 percent by the glass, half-bottle, and bottle, respectively). Cocktails and beer evenly split the remaining 40 percent of beverage orders.

Macioge's prices are in line with those of area restaurants. "Second-homers and tourists think our \$8 and \$9 cocktails are cheap," he confesses. "But they all expect big-city cocktails at country prices." What you get for your money is a well-composed drink, such as the Sauternes Martini (Sauternes, Lillet Blanc, and vodka, \$8) or Traditional Sidecar (Courvoisier, Cointreau, and lemon juice, topped with Champagne, \$9) prepared by a professional bartender in a hospitable and cheerful setting. Beer drinkers can order a draft pint of Anchor Steam, Pilsner Urquell, and others for \$5 or choose a bottled beer for \$3 or \$4. The restaurant also stocks a small but thoughtful selection of Champagne, Port, Sherry, brandy, and grappa.

The former bartender has a natural affinity for his restaurant's bar, and its design is a working bartender's dream come true. Bisecting the backbar is a freezer filled with martini glasses, vodka, gin, and other spirits; this arrangement allows bartenders working either end of the bar easy access to frigid glasses and spirits for the specialty cocktails and shortens drink prep time (no icing down martini glasses). All other glassware, wine, beer, and other spirits are easily accessible, and patrons can spot their favorite spirit on the uncluttered, well-lit backbar.

by meeting Ion Aimers, a successful restaurateur and creative thinker who became Macioge's mentor and lifelong friend.

After college and stints behind the bar and as a manager at Berkshire-area restaurants, Macioge hooked up with a family friend, Charlie Schulze. The two partners invested \$500,000 in expanding and transforming a building in the heart of Lenox's commercial district into a French bistro, a concept inspired in part by the success of Manhattan's Balthazar.

Apart from the neophyte restaurateur's acute sense of the local market and his business acumen, Bistro Zinc's success sprang from the collaboration of two families. Frank Macioge, Jason's father and a gifted architect, designed the interior to fulfill his son's vision. Judith Gordon, Macioge's mother, is a talented florist who composes the bistro's striking floral arrangements. Schulze contributed a number of beautiful framed photos (some shot by ex-wife Carole) to the decor, and he supplies silent support—a nonmeddling partner who trusts Macioge's instincts and management skills.

Orange Bliss

2 oz Grey Goose Orange Vodka, frozen
1 oz Alizé Gold Liqueur
½ oz orange juice
½ oz pineapple juice
Orange-slice garnish

Combine vodka (from freezer), liqueur, and juices in a mixing glass. Shake and strain into 5-ounce martini glass. Garnish with orange slice.

Over the years, Macioge has had to make some difficult but practical bar-business adjustments. “Bar sales have decreased over the years, primarily due to the state’s smoking ban,” he states. “And we no longer cater to a younger crowd—the liability issues have become too risky. We now have a ‘no shots’ policy.” But these changes have not curtailed his sense of fun. Macioge likes to surprise his bar customers by offering a flight of five vodkas tasted blind. His guests almost always rank the well vodka and modestly priced vodkas over the upscale brands.

Providing top-flight food and beverages is central to the Bistro Zinc experience, and Macioge is constantly taking the pulse of his patrons. “We get comments all the time—some of them completely absurd—but I still listen regardless of how loony the suggestion,” he sighs. “If it’s a good idea, we will somehow incorporate it into our program. If a regular guest asks to get something special, I will in a minute.” He has empowered his staff to offer small tastes for customers unsure of a beverage choice, and he will take back a wine unconditionally.

Seasonal Business and Staffing

Two endemic problems at Bistro Zinc—and all Berkshire venues—are the seasonality of business and staffing, but Macioge has found a way to live with each. “I take a hit from October to May,” the restaurateur admits. “During the summer, we’re booked weeks in advance. We have 78 seats, and we’ll do 140 to 160 covers on a Saturday night and 30 lunches at the bar. On a good Saturday night in winter, we’ll do 110. On winter weekends when driving conditions are bad, business is terrible.”

Unlike many area restaurants, Bistro Zinc does not close in the winter, but his staff shrinks to a core of talented chefs and



Bartender Caitlin Brennan composes a perfect Orange Bliss to please all of the senses.

managers, two professional servers who count on year-round income, and loyal part-timers. “The labor pool is small, and during the busy summer, we hire college students, who are here for a couple of months and have other interests besides waiting tables,” he concedes, adding, “but we’ve been lucky with our bartenders. We never advertise for the bar.”

Despite his daily presence, Macioge expects his key staff to take charge, and this management approach pays off in staff loyalty and retention. General Manager Franck Seguin, who runs the front of the house, including staff-education sessions and premeal meetings, remarks, “Jason lets me manage the wine list and the waitstaff. He totally supports my work.” Bartender Caitlin Brennan concurs, noting, “Jason has done every job, so he can relate to his employees. He’s on our side.”

Macioge is also a partner in three other thriving Lenox restaurants, but Bistro Zinc is where he can be found—with his omnipresent basset hounds (Bubba and Peaches), family, friends, neighbors, loyal customers from near and far, and a bar that would be the envy of any ex-bartender turned successful restaurateur.