

# Immigrant makes dream a reality with Niko's Bistro

**After finding his calling as a chef, Niko Miletic dared to open his own place**

**John Gilchrist, For The Calgary Herald**

Published: Sunday, March 25, 2007

Growing up in the Dalmatian coastal city of Dubrovnik, Niko Miletic knew he was slated for a career in the tourism industry.

The old walled city, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has been a tourist attraction for centuries. Miletic started as a lifeguard at a hotel pool and worked his way up in the hospitality business. He met a Croatian girl named Dijana, they married, had a baby they named Nina, and he continued working happily in his hometown.

But the early days of Miletic's marriage and fatherhood took a turn for the worse when Dubrovnik became a pivotal point in Croatia's War of Independence. From October 1991 to May 1992, Dubrovnik came under siege from Yugoslavian and Montenegrin forces. The old stone walls withstood barrages of artillery shells and the townsfolk survived for weeks without electricity, water, telephones and contact with the outside world.



[View Larger Image](#)

**Niko Miletic, owner of Niko's Bistro, creates a wall of flame as he prepares salmon in a lemon white wine sauce.**

Lorraine Hjalte, Calgary Herald

In the early days of the siege, Miletic managed to move his wife and newborn to Italy, while he joined the Croatian

defence forces. Fortunately, a ceasefire was achieved and slowly peace returned to Croatia. And in the years since, the tourists have returned, too.

To get away from the strife, the Miletics took a short break in Canada. A break that has now stretched to 15 years and has seen the addition of a second daughter, Ivana.

The Miletics liked the look of Calgary so they decided to stick around. Niko found a job at La Brezza with Marco Abdi, a Somalian expatriate who has great familiarity with wartorn hometowns. Miletic started over, washing dishes and improving his English. Never having cooked professionally before, Miletic learned from La Brezza's Michele Aurigemma, now the executive chef at Q.

Miletic had found a new calling in a new land and by 2006 he was head cook at La Brezza. Abdi describes Miletic as one of the best people he has ever had on staff -- a hard worker and a fast learner.

A few months ago, Miletic realized another dream by opening his own place -- Niko's Bistro -- at 1241 Kensington Rd. N.W. (270-0082). It's a

32-seat, neighbourhood restaurant that features an Italian menu of pastas, osso buco and calamari. Given a bit of prompting, Miletic will trot out a few traditional Croatian dishes, but he is quick to point out that the food of the Dalmatian coast is a mix of Italian, Greek and Croatian. So his dishes are very much like those found in the restaurants of Dubrovnik.

In addition to being open every evening for dinner and every weekday for lunch, Niko's is also open Saturday and Sunday for brunch with a

decidedly non-Croatian mix of eggs Benedict, omelettes and pancakes.

Miletic wants to fit into the Hillhurst-Sunnyside neighbourhood somewhere between the pubs and the high-end restaurants.

Niko's has the look and feel of a casual neighbourhood hangout with soft light spilled over orange and cream banquettes and big plates of food. Inset on the padded banquettes are sunwashed photos of Dubrovnik and Croatia. But Miletic has no regrets.

"I love Canada," he declares, as the snow falls on Kensington Road outside. "Croatia is my home, but Canada has been very good to us."