

## 'Selling happiness,' once crepe at a time in Greenwich

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People love to enjoy the food at Meli-Melo in Greenwich, Conn., Wednesday, April 10, 2013. The French restaurant and juice bar is marking its 20th anniversary this year. Photo: Helen Neafsey | [Buy This Photo](#)



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GREENWICH -- At 6:15 every morning, Marc Penvenne arrives at Meli-Melo well before the customers begin streaming into his restaurant, prepares himself a fresh soup or juice for breakfast and, on clear days, watches the sunrise spread across the bistro's windows, which look out on the bustle of Greenwich Avenue.

Once the customers begin to arrive at 7, Penvenne and his staff of 33 begin serving the dishes that have become Meli-Melo's signatures in the 20 years since it opened on the avenue: sweet and savory crepes, fresh, frothy juices and an assortment of 15 to 20 soups, hearty and warming in the winter, cool and light in the summer.

"When you come to work in the morning, you should be happy," Penvenne said. "I'm happy to be here. And when I'm not here, I miss it."

Marking its 20th year this spring, the restaurant is expanding its reach beyond the yellow-painted walls of 362 Greenwich Ave. with community events and additional services, including a mobile juice bar launched in March and a catering truck for its current catering business. Meli-Melo's kitchen is also working with holistic health and detoxification coach Kevin Reese to create a menu of juices and smoothies tailored toward health cleansing, available starting April 22.

A restaurant's story is not always about growth. Versailles, another longtime French bistro, recently shut its doors on Greenwich Avenue. Penvenne, who used to work there, said such events are unfortunate but inevitable in the restaurant business.

In the past two decades, however, the food, if not the space, at Meli-Melo has generally remained the same, with a casual approach to traditional French cuisine that's generally associated with white tablecloths and high prices.

"My idea was to go against that," Penvenne said. "We don't try to be upscale. The feeling people have when they come in is, it's comfortable. When they leave, they're in a good mood. We don't sell food, we sell happiness."

Penvenne, who came to Greenwich from Brittany, France, in 1990, is at the restaurant every day but Sunday. Like most owners of family-run businesses, he blends his home life with his work. His wife, Evelyn, and two daughters, Anne-Laure and Anne-Charlotte, are as much a part of the restaurant's history as he is.

Anne-Charlotte, 23, occasionally works at Meli-Melo as a greeter and server, with regular customers calling her "the sunshine of the restaurant," her father said.

Longtime patron Robert Baldrige is one of those, often coming to Meli-Melo three times a day for meals.

"It's a little like a Kafka-esque experience, because I come here every day," Baldrige said. "I love it so much. It's a family-run business, which is not so common today, especially on the Avenue."

Visit <http://www.melimegreenwich.com/> or call (203) 629-6153 for more information.

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