

FILM REVIEW

American Cuisine (CUISINE AMERICAINE)

(Comedy - French)

A Polygram Film Distribution release (in France) of a Les Films Balenciaga, Polygram Audiovisual, M6 Films production. Produced by Regine Konickier, Jean-Luc Ormieres. Executive producers, Robin O'Hara, Michael Johnson.

Directed, written by Jean-Yves Pitoun. Camera (color), Jean-Marie Dreuju; editor, Monica Coleman; music, Rene-Marc Bini; art director, Valerie Gral; costume designer, Edith Vesperini; sound (Dolby Digital), Pierre Befve, William Flageollet; culinary stylist, Danielle Sommet; assistant directors, Luc Etienne, Jean-Marc Tostivint; casting, Francoise Menidrey, Hopkins/Smith/Barden. Reviewed at UGC Normandie, Paris, Aug. 27, 1998. Running time: 92 MIN.

Louis Boyer Eddy Mitchell
Gabrielle Irene Jacob
Loren Jason Lee
Vincent Thibault de Montalembert
Tax Inspector Michel Muller
With: Isabelle Petit-Jacques, Sylvie Loeillet, Anthony Valentine.
(French dialogue version)

By LISA NESSELSON

A pleasant cross-cultural comedy with just the right dose of mutual Franco-American joshing, "American Cuisine" follows the trajectory of a self-taught young cook from New York who apprentices with a crusty four-star legend in Dijon. With suspense, romance and plenty of mouth-watering examples of the controlled frenzy behind the scenes in a top-flight eatery, pic is recommended as a box office entree on international menus.

Lifelong food enthusiast Loren (Jason Lee) is kicked out of the U.S. Navy after slugging the superior who bawled him out for serving "sissy food" to an admiral's guests instead of rot-gut American grub. After two days making pizzas in Brooklyn with his Italian-Irish



Irene Jacob and Jason Lee trade recipes in the cross-cultural comedy "American Cuisine."

family, Loren (short for "Lorenzo") finds himself en route to France to apprentice with his idol, chef Louis Boyer (Eddy Mitchell), working in the great man's kitchen in exchange for room and board.

Loren cuts his fingers along with the vegetables and can't begin to match the pace of the experienced staff, who call him "New York" and make jokes at his expense. However, he's a team player who survives the hazing and manages to win the respect of his co-workers. But will the boss ever give his seal of approval to a Yank?

The otherwise ferocious Boyer dotes on his adoring daughter, Gabrielle (Irene Jacob), a successful restaurant architect, whom he raised after his wife's death. Her fiancé, physician Vincent (Thibault de Montalembert), while a decent chap, doesn't fully appreciate Gabrielle's lingering devotion to her dad's restaurant. She would seem to have more in common with Loren, whose dad split when he was a kid.

Aside from the normal pressures of running a luxury eating establishment, Boyer is also faced with a humorless tax inspector (Michel Muller), merciless restaurant critics and the local police in search of illegal foreign workers. Boyer's behavior grows increasingly bizarre.

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Experienced scripter ("Beaches," "To Kill a Priest") and first-time helmer Jean-Yves Pitoun was born and raised in Gaul, but has made his career in the U.S. since attending UCLA more than 20 years ago. His Stateside training is evident in script's jaunty attitude, tight structure and neat resolution, all of which hew far more closely to Hollywood-style storytelling than most Gallic fare. Snappy pacing and peppy lensing complete the picture.

Mitchell is great fun as the chef, Lee ("Chasing Amy") brightly holds his own in a role that calls for fancy food prep as well as nuanced French delivery (thesp learned the language just for the movie), and Jacob is good if somewhat under-utilized as the headstrong love interest. Sylvie Loeillet does an amusing turn as a New Age enthusiast whose recipe for sex is missing a few crucial ingredients.

Pic also shot in an English-language version, in which the three leads speak English when Lee is present but French characters otherwise speak French among themselves.