



La Belle Helene

*The design of La Belle Helene evokes a 19th century Parisian shopping arcade with its skylit look and feel.*

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## Elior, Starr open authentic French brasserie

*La Belle Helene is located in the building where Elior has its headquarters and is designed to showcase the organization's culinary expertise.*

Mike Buzalka | Aug 21, 2018

If you want to show off your culinary chops, you can't go wrong by going French. That seems to be the tack Elior North America and its Starr Catering Group unit are taking with the debut of La Belle Helene, an authentic French brasserie located at



street level in the Barings building in the Uptown district of Charlotte, N.C., a building in which Elior North America also now has its own corporate headquarters.

Elior North America is the North American unit of French contract catering firm Elior Group and is one of the largest foodservice management firms in the U.S. , placing No. 5 on the 2018 FM Top 50 Contract Management Companies listing.

**Related: A photo tour of Elior's new French concept menu**

The roots of the initiative that led to La Belle Helene lay in the acquisition by Elior (then known as TrustHouse Services Group) in 2015 of Starr, a high-end caterer and operator of dining establishments in corporate offices and cultural centers like the New York Historical Society, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Perez Art Museum Miami; and in a subsequent relationship established by Elior and Starr with Barings Bank.



Even the bathrooms at La Belle Helene were carefully designed to look spectacular.

The deal for Starr “really helped us launch our Ingredients for success [initiative], which is our focus on culinary innovation, exemplary service and supporting local communities with the global resources of the brand,” explains Brian Poplin, president/CEO of Elior North America. “But as we were looking at the organization and its growth and success over the last couple of years, one of the things we found was that we really didn’t have an ability on a daily basis to showcase our culinary expertise.”

An opportunity to remedy that presented itself when Elior and Starr were approached by Barings, which was in the process of building a new headquarters office in downtown Charlotte.

“They asked if we could potentially do the food for all their employees in the building,” Poplin recalls, “so we started discussions around a B&I opportunity,” but the Elior team soon realized that this might be extended even further.

“One thing that triggered in our minds was, why not put your money where your mouth is and put your corporate headquarters in a location that is owned by one of your clients, and [one that also] gives you an ability to test new concepts at the street level,” Poplin explains.





The La Belle Helene operation is overseen by Executive Chef Michael Rouleau.

That led to Elior North America moving its headquarters into the Barings building when it opened last year, along with a highly successful unit of its Parliament coffee shop concept in the facility.

The company also started working with its partners in Paris and celebrity chef Alain Ducasse's Ducasse Conseil culinary consultancy to create a special, authentic French brasserie concept for the Barings building, which would be operated by Starr. That effort resulted in La Belle Helene and Starr CEO "Simon [Powles] and his team have done a great job of creating an environment at 300 South Tryon [the street address for La Belle Helene] that gives us a daily opportunity to really demonstrate our focus on our ingredients for success," Poplin says.

La Belle Helene is overseen by Executive Chef Michael Rouleau, who joined Starr last year as executive chef of the Barnes Foundation garden restaurant and kitchen

in Philadelphia before being named to head the La Belle Helene operation, for which he traveled to Paris to train with Ducasse Conseil.

La Belle Helene is designed as a classic French brasserie (“brewery” in French), which means it emphasizes its bar/beverage program while providing a relaxing atmosphere and comfortable dining experience with simple food and inviting design.



Of course, “simple food” takes on a whole new meaning in a French cuisine context. The focal point of the restaurant is its rotisserie oven, which prepares such fare as locally raised Poulet Rouge chicken slowly roasted to perfection with green market vegetables as well as daily roast specials such as leg of lamb and even suckling pig.

Also among regular menu features are steaks, salads, sandwiches (lunch only), appetizers like escargots and foie gras terrine and entrees like grilled chicken paillard, Maine lobster cassarecce and hand-chopped beef tartare. For a look at some of the dishes served at La Belle Helene, go [here](#) .

The design of the space was overseen by Richard Lafond, a Paris-based consultant who specializes in classic brasserie design. His conception turned the large (nearly 7,000 square feet) space into a replica of the covered passages in Paris that served as early shopping arcade prototypes in the early 1800s. La Belle Helene’s ceiling draws



its inspiration from the glass-enclosed ceilings of those pedestrian walkways and gives the restaurant a skylit look and feel.

La Belle Helene is open for lunch during the week, for dinner Monday through Saturday and for Sunday brunch.

La Belle Helene is one of four retail foodservice concepts in the Barings building. The others are the Barings Café, the Barings Coffee Bar and Parliament. The first two are in-house outlets for employees of companies in the building while Parliament and La Belle Helene are street venues that also obviously draw significant traffic from the in-house population, for whom they provide additional dining options without leaving the premises.



La Belle Helene is placed as a street restaurant that also serves as an extension of the dining amenities offered in the Barings Bank building in Charlotte.

But the traffic potential is hardly restricted to Barings building tenants as the structure is located in the midst of a sizeable hub of professional activity: Charlotte is the third largest financial center in America.

Powles emphasizes that the development of La Belle Helene came in consultation with Barings. “We really want for clients to be part of whatever we’re doing so that we provide solutions for what they’re looking for,” he says. “So, for Barings, it is an extension of food and beverage amenity services as well as the flagship restaurant in their world headquarters that is really something special.”

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