

Dining

Table Talk 61

- Classic French cuisine at Westchester's Le Château
- Tuscan treats at the CIA's Caterina de' Medici

Foodnotes 81

- Out with the old, in with Modern American cuisine at Beso in New Paltz
- A new hacienda for Mexican fare in Rosendale

Eating Out Restaurant Guide

- Mid-Hudson 99
- Upper Hudson 102
- Lower Hudson 104

Eating In 103

- Joseph Dalu, of Rhinebeck's Le Petit Bistro, shares a recipe



Table Talk

French, Bien Sûr

Savoring the food of the Fifth Republic at Westchester's Le Château **By Jorge S. Arango**

"I nearly starved to death last winter!" exclaimed my friend Charlotte years ago, when she was about 95. Her favorite brasserie on the Upper East Side had closed for renovations and Charlotte, who never so much as lifted a frying pan, had been forced to patronize newer, hipper restaurants that served — gasp! — fusion cuisine. "It was insufferable! I only like cuisine classique," she ranted.

If she were alive today, I would have suggested she use her considerable means to rent a residence in South Salem, Westchester County, so that she might dine nightly at Le Château. You don't get much more classique than Le Château, one of an ever-rarer breed of luxurious establishments serving food in the grand French tradition. The survival of this venerable, elegant cuisine increasingly depends on places like this.

Occupying a Tudor mansion built in 1907 by J.P. Morgan for his friend, Dr. William S. Rainsford, Le Château is the epitome of the breed, owned since 1980 by Monique and Joseph Jaffré.

A stone-and-brick structure paneled inside with cherry, oak, and chestnut, its ceilings supported by massive beams, you could easily imagine yourself in Alsace.

There are several dining rooms, all appointed with white tablecloths and upholstered French provincial chairs, some in stripes, others in tapestry fabric. Art hangs everywhere — romantic landscapes, hunting scenes, portraits, and etchings. We were ushered into what looked like a former library, handsomely swathed in dark wood and dominated by an Arts & Crafts-style fireplace faced with terra-cotta tiles.

A vested waiter served hot, crusty rolls with silver tongs as we settled in with our glasses of wine: a perfumey, apple-scented Mario Trinchero Chardonnay from Napa Valley, and a summery Domaine Ott rosé, Claire de Noirs from Provence (\$8.50 each). In homage to Charlotte (who loved

Once an elegant mansion, Le Château is now an elegant eatery, with food in the grand French tradition



St. Andrew's Cafe going casual **83**



JAMES BLEECKER

"The Hudson Valley's pre-eminent landscape photographer."

Fine Art Prints Available at
Carrie Haddad Gallery

622 Warren Street, Hudson
(518) 828-1915

**Hudson Valley Magazine*



Seafood entrées shine at Le Château

to have "smoked sah-mon" with her cocktails), I ordered a smoked salmon timbale with marinated cucumber and a dill-and-lime sauce (\$13.75). The chef, André Molle, had lined a ramekin with thin slices of delicately smoked rosy fish and filled it in with more diced salmon, then turned it onto a plate and surrounded it with the accompaniments. This was literally an embarrassment of riches. Half the amount of fish would have sufficed, especially given the richness of the cream sauce. Fortunately, the cucumbers lightened things up considerably, but we still left salmon on the plate, fearing early satiation.

My companion ordered a special appetizer — seared peppercorn-crusted tuna served cold with basil oil, a balsamic vinegar reduction, and microgreens (\$16.50). It was mouthwatering, the fragrance of basil and the sweet-and-sour quality of the vinegar providing excellent pick-me-ups for the mild flavor of sushi-grade tuna. Molle worked for 17 years at the Carlisle Hotel and, before that, at L'Hermitage in Beverly Hills — Old World establishments to be sure, yet a dish like this shows he is open to more recent culinary movements.

An intriguing list of fine wines is expected from a French restaurant of this caliber, and Le Château did not disappoint. Prices begin in the \$30 range, and climb to \$300. Not having the budget of J.P. Morgan, however, we went with one of three similarly priced premier St. Emilion Grand Cru (Chateau de Lescours 2000, \$65), which was singled out by our captain. His choice proved it's not necessary to go into hock to enjoy an excellent bottle of wine.

Filled with wonderful berry flavors, it turned out to be a harmonious companion for the entrées.

But before our main courses we cleansed our palates with a mesclun salad tossed with truffle oil vinaigrette (\$8). You know you're in the hands of a pro when something so simple turns out to be exceptional. Molle layers the usual field greens with the sweet tartness of paper-thin slices of Granny Smith apple, the light acidity of cherry tomatoes, and the sharp crunch of spring onions, then infuses the whole concoction with a heady truffle aroma that elevates this salad to the level of revelation.

Again my companion ordered from the specials: a roasted loin of lamb with sauce Bercy on a bed of wild mushroom risotto (\$34). The medallions of lamb were so tender you could practically cut them with a fork. Cooked expertly rare, they were an ideal foil for the sauce, a classic reduction of shallots, white wine, and demi-glace. With the risotto, they formed a robust flavor that stayed just this side of rich. My entrée, on the other hand, was richness personified. Lobster fricassée with shiitake mushrooms, fava beans, leeks, and a shellfish cream sauce (\$36) would have sent my beloved Charlotte straight to the moon, though I was more than happy to go in her stead. The cream sauce was basically an undiluted bisque base laced with tarragon. It was so sweet and luscious that I felt I was committing a mortal sin with every bite. Understandably, this dish is off the menu for summer, but its popularity among patrons practically demands it be back with the first fall chill.

Happily courting a classique coronary, we dove into Grand Marnier soufflés (\$12.25 each) that were as soft and airy as eiderdown, though shot through with a boozy burnt orange scent that went right up the nostrils to the brain, inducing a kind of rush. If we had laid Charlotte to rest like the Egyptians, I would have placed this dessert in her sarcophagus, along with a glass of Poiré William (our indulgent finish to the meal). For a Francophile, there could be no better companions in the afterlife.

Le Château

1410 Rt. 35, South Salem. 914-533-6631

Dinner is served Tues.-Fri. 5:30-9 p.m.; Sat. seatings are 6-6:30 p.m. and 9-9:30 p.m.; Sun. hours are 2-9 p.m. Soups and appetizers range from \$7.50-\$18, salads \$7-\$8.50, entrées \$29-\$37 (except for Châteaubriand for two, which is \$80); desserts are \$11-\$12.25.
www.LeChateauNY.com

HVC

Imagine leisurely flipping
through this magazine
on your down time.

(hey, it could happen).



Hudson Valley Concierge
It's About Time.Yours.

845.264.1867

www.yourhudsonvalleyconcierge.com