

At Home with Patricia Wells

Paris Restaurant Picks for 2003

FLORA

36, avenue George V

Paris 8

Tel: 01 40 70 10 49

Closed Saturday lunch and Sunday. 32 € lunch menu. A la carte, 35 to 60 €.

Flora Mikula, former chef/owner of the popular 7th arrondissement Provencal restaurant, Les Olivades, moved on to new quarters with a new menu and a new, more contemporary style in the summer of 2002. Flora's new spot is clean, classy, and on the mark. The menu cleverly covers all bases, using with care and creativity the ingredients of the season, be they artichokes, red fruits, sorrel, eggplant, summer truffles or woodsy girolles mushrooms. I most loved the super-fresh langoustines, quickly pan-fried, and served with artichokes and a colorful, full-flavored lobster coral vinaigrette, as well as the meaty roast turbot with lemon confit. From the wine list, a good choice is Marcel Richaud's Cairanne – priced at 21 € -- a fine, Grenache-based red ready for drinking now.

LE TIMBRE

3, rue Sainte-Beuve

Paris 6

Tel: 01 45 49 10 40

Closed Saturday lunch and Sunday. About 32 €.

A timbre is a postage stamp, and this is the size of the elbow-to-elbow bistro where Englishman Christopher Wright holds court. The place crawls with Anglophones but is worth a visit for the clean, clear bistro fare: On my last visit I loved the unusual beet soup laced with curry; the paper-thin slices of Spanish ham – jabugo – with a salad of lentils; fine roast squab served with rich and buttery cabbage; pan-fried Auvergnat sausages served with a parsnip puree and a nice, creamy sauce. Prices – goody for us – are the size of a postage stamp, too.

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LE REPAIRE DE CARTOUCHE

8, boulevard des Filles de Calvaire and 99, rue Amelot

Paris 11

Tel: 01 47 00 25 86

Fax: 01 43 38 85 91

Closed Sunday and Monday. About 45 €.

Chef Rodolphe Paquin has close to perfect bistro pitch, turning out such favorites as seared wild boar steak (sanglier) with red beets in vinegar ; a warm oyster soup studded with cubes of soft, succulent calf's head (tete de veau); or a perfectly spiced terrine of

blood sausage (boudin noir) with a welcoming green salad. We loved the ever-dependable Minervois red, this from Le Bois des Merveilles.

AUX LYONNAIS

32, rue Saint Marc

Paris 2

Tel: 01 42 9 65 04

Fax: 01 42 97 42 95

Closed all day Sunday and Monday lunch. 28 € menu. A la carte, 40 €.

Alain Ducasse has taken over this classic 1890's bistro near the French stock exchange, or Bourse, transforming it into the sort of place we love to go today, a classic Lyonnais style bistro with zinc bar, bright floral tiles and colorful deep red façade. It could serve as a museum piece or film set, and the food is convincing and gently re-tooled. I adored the remake of the classic sabodet, a strong and earthy sausage made with pig's head and skin, one that warms the insides of a cold winter's day. Rather than plopping the sausage in a pool of rich sauce, the venerable sausage is poached gently in broth, covered with a layer of potatoes, and perfumed with a lightened sauce gribiche, or mayonnaise, laced with capers, cornichons, and herbs. Equally appealing is the classic roast chicken, garnished with tomatoes, mushrooms and onions, and deglazed with the traditional touch of red wine vinegar. The wine list is pricey, but stick with the Fleurie, Brouilly, Chiroubles or Moulin-a-Vent, all at around 30 €.

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ABAZU

3, rue André Mazet
Paris 6
Tel: 01 46 33 72 05

Closed Sunday lunch and Monday. About 40 €.

Miam is all I can say. I adore Japanese food and this new teppanyaki restaurant features food cooked directly on a flat metal grill: vegetables, fish, meat, even foie gras. I loved the moist teppanyaki chicken as well as raw offerings that included a carpaccio of beef and a platter of raw oysters served with a pungent ponzu sauce, a flavorful blend of rice vinegar, lemon juice, soy sauce and kombu, or kelp. The lovely selection of sake is very tempting.

TM CAFÉ

54, Boulevard de La Tour Maubourg
Paris 7
Tel: 01 47 05 89 86
Fax: 01 45 56 03 84

Closed Sunday and Monday. About 40 €.

Paul Minchelli has left his vast Left Bank fish restaurant, and it's now in the hands of the former staff. Prices are lower, the menu is reduced, but one can still find some fine fish and shellfish here. On a recent visit we loved the tartare of salmon and sea bass (saumon et bar); the simple steamed sea bass and the wonderfully spicy salt and pepper shrimp. The encornets ail piment (fried squid with garlic and red pepper) were dull and soggy. The wine list needs help, though the 26 € Pouilly Fumé was very drinkable.

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CAFÉ RUC

159, rue Saint Honoré

Paris 1

Tel: 01 42 60 97 54

Open daily. About 20€.

Put this charming spot – halfway between café and restaurant – on your list while visiting the Louvre. It's a classy place, with nice space indoors and on the terrace. Excellent oysters, fine green salad with lots of varied greens, and a decent potages legumes --- vegetable soup – for when you're in the mood.