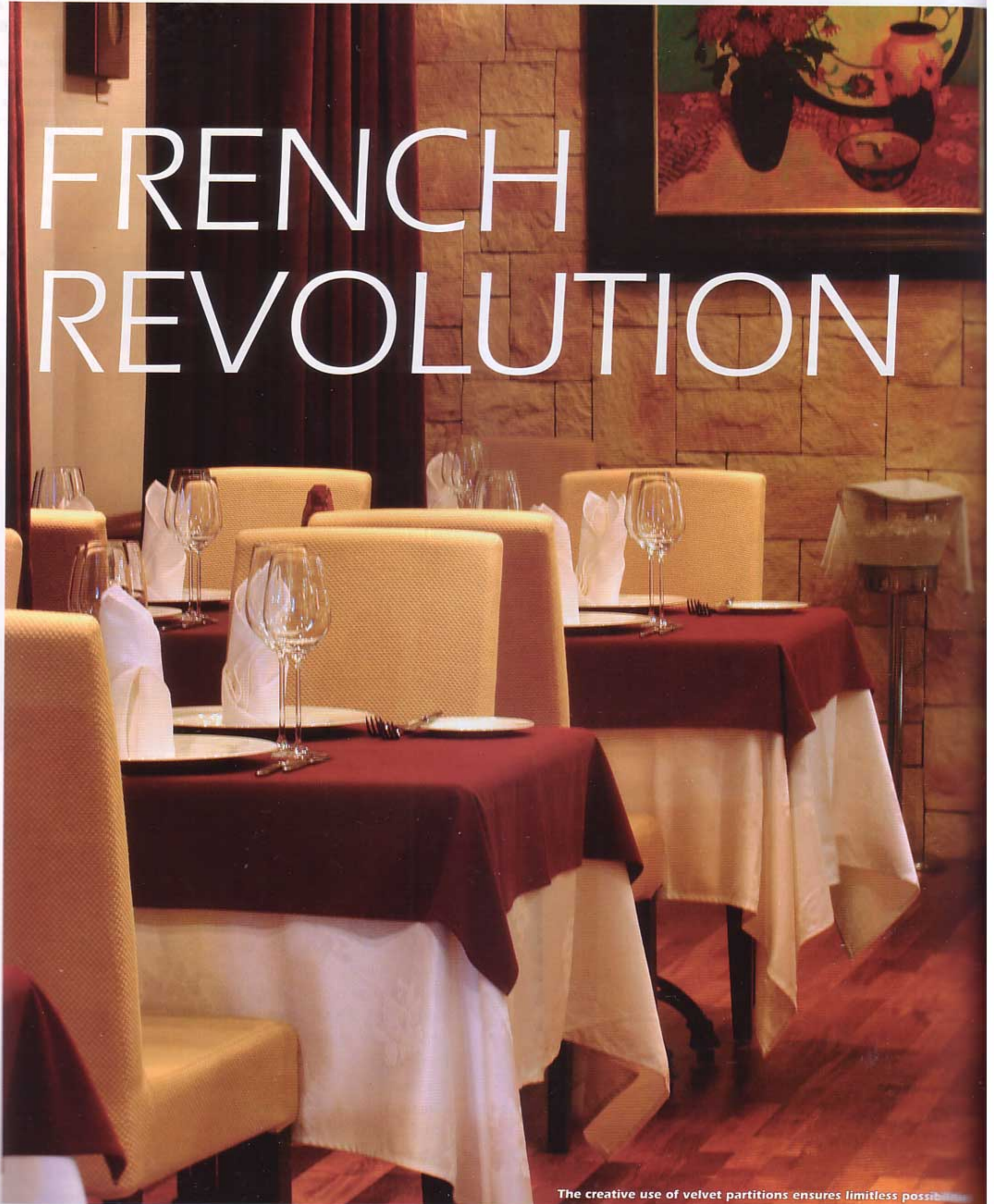


**Mansor Tun Abdul Aziz** gets a taste of authentic Gallic gourmet at Bangsar's Le Francais and enjoys the experience

# FRENCH REVOLUTION



The creative use of velvet partitions ensures limitless possibilities

# Bangsar Bon Appétit

Jerome Deconinck is every inch a French man, from the lilt of his surname to the tilt of his *toque blanche*. **Mansor Tun Abdul Aziz** discovers what makes the gentleman chef tick

CHEF JEROME DECONINCK believes that the brimming passion for his art goes back to his childhood in the idyllic town of Annecy, which is situated close to the Alps between Italy and Switzerland. "I come from a long line of superb male cooks," he avers in emblematic French charm.

"My artist grandfather spent as much time in the kitchen as my nanna and my father shares the same inclination too. Since my grandfather hailed from the seaside town of Brittany where the freshest seafood is available, I spent hours watching him whip one traditional dish after another."

It appears as no surprise that Deconinck defines himself as a traditional French chef

but with a modern twist. "I stick to time-tested traditions developed throughout my 14 years of experience but my presentation is quintessentially contemporary."

The 28-year old head chef and director of Bangsar's newest French sensation Le Francais is a graduate of the Centres de Formation d'Apprentis of Groisy, but feels he derived his real education from the hands-on training at La Ciboulette Restaurant in his hometown.

"It's very important for a cook to garner as much hands-on experience to improve his skills. At La Ciboulette, I was very much inspired by a chef who believed in good quality food, impeccable service and

generous helpings," says Deconinck who though not well travelled has had the privilege of serving French statesman and former Prime Minister Lionel Robert Jospin as well as at his country's mission here.

"Age has nothing to do with being a cordon bleu but being passionate is important. That is the difference between a good cook and an excellent one." Deconinck does not believe in "updating or messing up" French cuisine. "There is enough variation and appeal in French cuisine and I intend to offer them all to our discerning diners. At Le Francais, we change our menus often in order to achieve that."

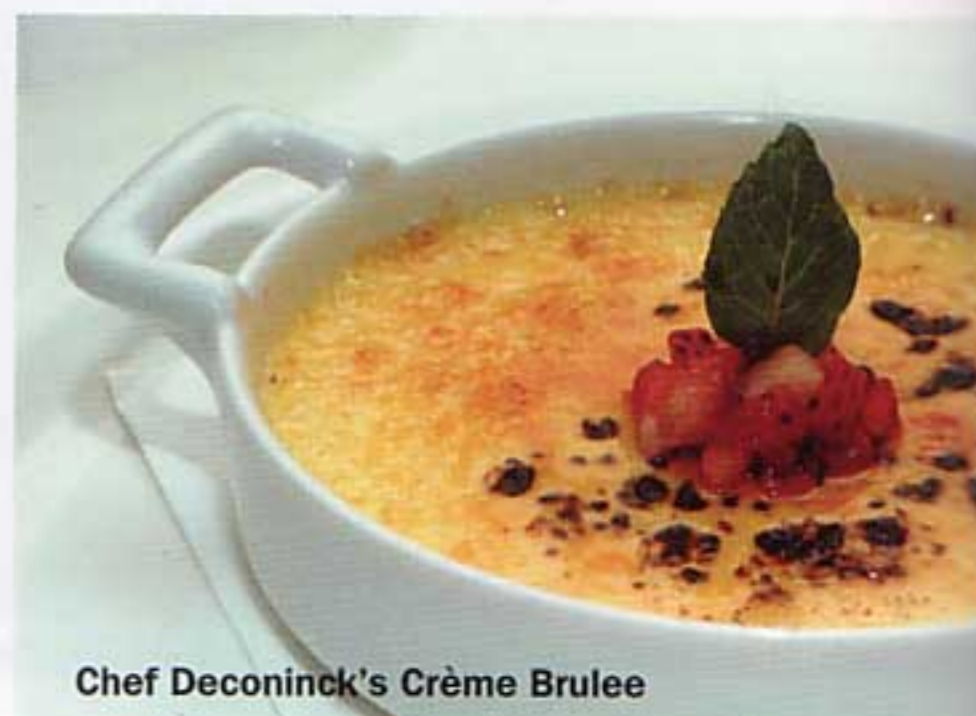
Just how authentic and fresh is the food at Le Francais? Deconinck declares that there is no place for a microwave oven in his kitchen. "For example, I prepare my beef dishes exactly the way the French do — lovingly sautéed and hand-basted to bring out the best flavours.

The proof is indeed in the pudding. "The discerning can tell the difference of texture and taste of well-prepared dishes. That way, they will come back again and again not only for the food but also for the whole dining experience. It is also important to me that I meet every one of my diners. There is a wealth of information and experience that I could learn from them."

When inquired about what makes him happy, he gladly extols: "Full house with a long queue at Le Francais. I love to see my patrons enjoy their food, even if they resort to what some may perceive as *déclassé* habits like wiping their plates clean with bread! It will be sad to turn such passionate people away." 🍷



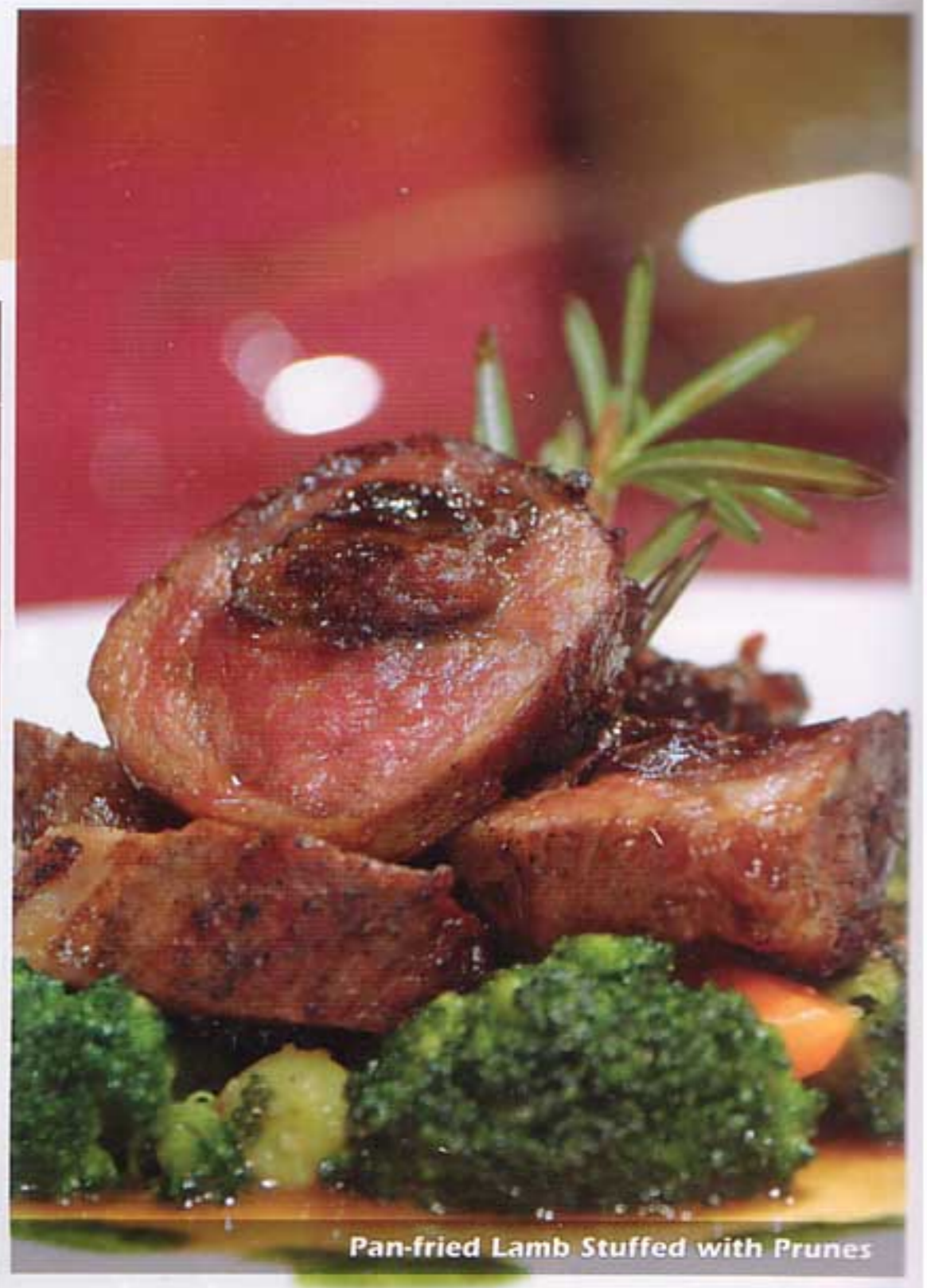
Chef Jerome Deconinck



Chef Deconinck's Crème Brulee



The Valrhona chocolate fondant with home-made vanilla ice-cream



Pan-fried Lamb Stuffed with Prunes

FROM HAUTE COUTURE to haute cuisine, the French have always been known to be connoisseurs of the finer things in life. The new French restaurant Le Francais in One Bangsar beautifully supports this fact. Classy, minimalist and *le tout moderne* the place features an impressive menu, extensive wine selections, a cigar divan and unsullied service that ensure a wholesome dining experience.

Indeed, with so much going for it, many would perhaps expect the place to be richly decorated but I thought the sparse décor worked rather well. Also, the restaurant only seats about 50 if you want to feel truly comfortable. In this sense, the establishment's layout is crafty because it allows for those private tête-à-têtes just as well as it does for small groups — thanks in part to the creative use of velvet partitions for one thing.

As our party of two arrived at the restaurant, we were greeted by the maitre'd and ushered to a discreet corner which afforded us a good observation of the lunch crowd. As we settled into our seats, the knowledgeable captain helped plenty with our wine selection. We also decided to let him make his recommendations on what we should eat.

We started with two world-class selections — the obligatory *foie gras* artfully accompanied with duck ham, Mesclun salad and a dribbling of balsamic dressing, and

the escargot *fricassee* drenched in red wine sauce and candied shallots. The starters were decadent; the pate just melted in the mouth and merged well with the duck ham's delicate bite while the escargots' succulent texture was to my opinion worth seconds.

Choosing a main course at Le Francais can be difficult but only because there are quite a few to pick from. Again, we settled for the chef's recommendations and out came the prune-stuffed pan-fried lamb and the roasted monkfish served with red capsicum, wild rice and white butter sauce.

The lamb is quite popular at this restaurant and it did not take long for us to discover why. A handsome portion of the tender meat was stuffed beautifully with a whole prune, served bite-size on a bed of blanched broccoli and a sprig of rosemary. Lovers of lamb, rejoice! This is one dish that will get you coming back for more. The monkfish was just as delectable — the moist meat nicely juxtaposed with the buttery sauce while the rice lent a delicious nuttiness to the whole combination.

Not to be missed is the wonderful selection of desserts. We were mesmerised by another two variants of French decadence — the caramel soufflé and the Valrhona chocolate fondant with home-made vanilla ice-cream. Our serial indulgence was well worth the calories.

The caramel soufflé was as light as a cloud and delicately sweet and airy. The firm baked brown top, sprinkled with powdered Sucre, invites you to "shovel" your through to the sugary surprise at the bottom.

In the case of the fondant, what looks like an innocent scoop of vanilla ice-cream perched on a chocolate cupcake is actually a lusciously moist cocoa fondant case concealing thick chocolate sauce that oozes out luxuriantly upon contact with your dessert fork. Mingling gently with the ice cream, the fondant is not just dessert — it is a total experience of luxe French cuisine and lifestyle.

Le Francais' head chef Jerome Deconinck does not believe in fusion food nor does he substitute ingredients. He also believes in generous servings in line with what the French consider themselves to be — true lovers of good food. Hence, the freshest ingredients are flown in regularly to ensure authenticity, and the menu is revised regularly throughout the year. 🍷

#### Le Francais French Dining

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Telephone (03) 2282 2510

Website [www.lefrancaisfrenchdining.com](http://www.lefrancaisfrenchdining.com)

Lunch Operating Hours Noon to 2.30pm  
(Mondays to Fridays)

Dinner 7.00pm to 10.30pm  
(Saturdays. Closed on Sundays)