

SATURDAY 16 July 2005

BY ALICE CHING

EVER felt intimidated stepping into a fine-dining French restaurant? Fortunately, Klang Valley folk can now savour excellent French cuisine at slightly more affordable prices.

Le Français French Dining at One Bangsar, run by Chef Jerome Deconinck, is a semi fine-dining place where "you can have a good time with good food, good wine and good company."

Starched white-and-burgundy tablecloths are paired with modern, cream-coloured chairs on natural timber flooring. Heavy, maroon velvet curtains add a touch of old-world luxury whilst hand-painted plates and artwork lend colour.

Chef Deconinck, who comes from Annecy, a town in the French Alps, said, "Diners should be able to savour good food without shame. I would love to see them picking up a piece of lamb chop and eating it with gusto — use their fingers if they have to. I don't mind."

Le Français's public relations officer David Swinburne concurred. "Diners are welcome to share dishes. After all, we just want everyone to have a good time."

Said Chef Deconinck, "I already decided in my teenage years that I wanted to be a chef. Both my grandfather and father are good cooks. Whenever we sample a nice dish, my grandfather will try to replicate the dish at home."

Chef Deconinck first arrived in Malaysia in 1999 as the French ambassador's chef. After four years, he left to work at a highland resort. Now he is married to a Malaysian. It was a dream come true for him to have his own restaurant as it allows him the freedom to plan the menu, cook and pair his dishes with good wines.

"Staff is treated like part of the family. They are given the chance to learn, experience and sample dishes so they can recommend specialties to customers," said Deconinck.

Juicy Tenderloin with Red Wine Sauce.



French dining at its best

Pork-free

LE FRANÇAIS FRENCH DINING

One Bangsar
63F Jalan Ara
Bangsar Baru
59100 Kuala Lumpur
☎ 03-2282 2510

☐ Closed for dinner on Tuesdays.

Evidently, the time spent with his staff has paid off as we were constantly asked during dinner if everything was up to our expectations.

Dinner started off with the heady aroma of leek and truffle of the Poultry Puff Pastry in Truffle and Leek sauce (RM32). The light and airy puff pastry with chicken filling went very well with the creamy sauce.

Another delight was the Salmon Tartare (RM30). Finely chopped salmon scented with dill (a type of fresh herb) is served with candied tomatoes (skinless and lightly sweetened), rocket, red cabbage and frisee lettuce.

If you enjoy creamy soups, the Cream of Garlic (RM22) is a must. Light on the palate, the smooth and creamy soup is imbued with a delicate garlic aroma and a lovely

sweetness. Best savoured with warm, oven-fresh breads.

The star dish of the evening was undoubtedly the Beef Tenderloin with Red Wine Sauce (RM58) which came with tender green asparagus and pearl-shaped vegetables. The aroma alone made our mouths water. After just a mouthful, we understood why Swinburne had waxed lyrical about this dish. The secret lies in the chef's flavourful stock.

Salmon is a tricky fish to prepare and can easily be ruined by overcooking but Le Français rose to the challenge admirably. The fish was lightly seared on the outside, leaving it with a crisp skin and flaky flesh. The meat was pink, its sweet flavour and moistness retained. We enjoyed every bite of our Salmon Fillet (RM48) with orange-butter sauce and *mille feuille* of vegetables

(sliced eggplant, yellow squash and zucchini).

Those who like lamb will find the Walnut Crusted Lamb Chops (RM66) with candied garlic and Bohemian vegetables sublime. The meaty lamb ribs contrasted nicely with the rustic, gritty walnut crust while the soft, candied garlic added a subtle sweetness. Even the Bohemian vegetables, dainty vegetable dices lightly drizzled with balsamic vinegar, was a departure from the usual steamed vegetables.

Throughout dinner, the attentive service staff ensured our plates were cleared and our glasses of water refilled.

We bemoaned the fact that profiteroles (small, sweet buns filled with custard or cream) had been taken off the menu recently. This was because too many customers complained about the crisp choux pastry — the chef was amused to discover they expected the pastry to be soft and soggy like those sold at a supermarket bakery.

Since Chef Deconinck would not dream of compromising such a classical French pastry recipe, he decided to replace the profiteroles with something else.

The same fate almost befell the Crème Brûlée (RM28). This delightful dessert is always served warm but some customers had expected it to be cold. I love this nice and warm dessert for its soft, velvety texture. Real vanilla beans were used to flavour this dessert. The thin sugar layer on top was also nicely browned.

If you like a dessert with a sour twist, try the Lemon Tartlet (RM32). Be warned though that the initial tartness can be quite a shock. Order a pot of freshly brewed tea (Earl Grey is great) to go with this invigorating treat. The tea, together with the wild strawberries and chestnut ganache, will help to temper the sourness of the lemon.

Dining at Le Français is a satisfying and affordable affair. You can order from the à la carte menu or enjoy a three-course meal at RM138 or a four-course meal at RM158. From Fridays to Sundays, set lunches are served at RM50 and RM70 for two- and three-course meals respectively. The chef will select the wine, mainly Australian and French, to complement the dishes. **W**



Poultry Puff Pastry with Leek and Truffle Sauce (above) and the Salmon Fillet with accompanying orange butter sauce and vegetables.