

Restaurant Rap

Bonaparte Restaurant: 33 years of fine French Cuisine

By Mike Cohen

For more years than I can remember I have walked by Bonaparte Restaurant on Saint Francois-Xavier in Old Montreal, usually on my way to or from the Centaur Theatre next door, yet I never sampled the cuisine.

When the restaurant's director, Martin Bédard, reached out to me recently with an invitation I decided to go their website. What I saw intrigued me, prompting myself and a colleague to drop by for a tasting. Because the facility also includes a 37-room hotel, the restaurant is open for breakfast and dinner seven days a week and for lunch weekdays. There are à la carte, table d'Hôte and pre-theatre menus. The latter caters to a significant number of Centaur regulars, beginning at 5:30 pm. "This service always guarantees that you will be out of the door with plenty of time to see your show," says Bédard.

Bédard started at Bonaparte in 1989 as a busboy and moved his way up to waiter, Maitre `D and finally director. He also spent a decade in New York City, doing some musical theatre and working for world famous restaurateur Alain Ducasse. Bonaparte itself has been part of this city's landscape for nearly 33 years. It has a loyal crowd of regulars, many who come a few times a week. Tourists love the place and so do theatre-goers. "If you plan to come in the evening, I always make reservations first," warns Bédard.

Bonaparte serves classic French cuisine. The menu has a wonderful list of selections put together by executive chef Gérard Fort. A native of France, he headed for the kitchen of the Bonaparte as soon as he arrived in Quebec in 1991. Having worked in the Auvergne, Savoy, the south of France and his native Vendée region, he fills his plates with regional flavors and an essentially traditional French cuisine. For those seeking authenticity in fine classical French cooking, Bonaparte has become a standard.

There are wonderful soups, salads, hot and cold starters, fish and seafood, meat and poultry to choose from. Our server was Yannick, a native of Paris



The delicious lime meringue pie



Bonaparte Director Martin Bédard started decades ago as a busboy and now manages the popular Restaurant Bonaparte in Old Montreal

who actually spent his last two years as a server in Vancouver. My colleague started off with one of their marquee items, the homemade smoked salmon, accompanied by crispy vegetables and truffle oil. He enjoyed it immensely. I opted for the lobster salad, which was out of this world. Besides several pieces of lobster, the serving contained chopped tomatoes, lettuce, sliced carrots, cucumber, with hazelnut oil and maple syrup dressing. The Mushroom raviolis seasoned with fresh sage; Vanilla flavoured Shrimp and Scallop Harmony and Leek fondue, Crème brûlée and pan seared duck foie gras with gingerbread toast all sounded appetizing, but I'll have to consider those for future visits.

For the main course, I chose the roast duck breast, flavored with maple syrup and wild berries, while my colleague all along had his eye on the beef filet mignon, seasoned with peppercorns and cognac. Both came with mashed potatoes, green beans, butternut squash, shredded carrots and broccoli. My colleague said that his meat cut like butter while I savored every bite of my duck, something I do not see on many menus.

Certainly on any future list to consider would be their Dover sole fillet, the rack of lamb or the veal chop.

For dessert my colleague enjoyed every morsel of his lime meringue pie while I was intrigued by what they called their "Symphony," a sampling of cheese cake, red berry mousse cake, and chocolate and hazel mousse cake and crème brûlée.

Bonaparte has a lovely dining room and bar, with three delightfully decorated halls in the Empire style that dominated the Napoleonic era: The "Impératrice" hall, with its chimney, its majestic sideboard and French hotel

paneling, can accommodate up to seventy people; The "Verriere," revovated in 2011, with its stained glass, French doors and the glass roof, offers you maximum of brightness; and The Centre Hall, with its stonework and the small alcoves, gives you the feel for romance.



Bonaparte's homemade game terrine, onion "confit" and condiments

Bonaparte Restaurant is open Monday to Friday, from 11:30 am to 2 pm, every night from 5:30 pm to 10:30 pm and for breakfast. You can make a reservation by calling 514 844-4368. The address is 447 St-François-Xavier. www.restaurantbonaparte.com

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