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OFF DUTY TRAVEL

4 Bistros in Paris for Frugal Feasts

How to tuck into a divine meal in Paris without forking over a fortune? Stick to lunch. These 4 ambitious neighborhood bistros offer 3-course midday meals for 25 euros or less



A warm vegetable salad with smoked egg yolk and salted ricotta at Robert.

By Sara Lieberman

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EVERY TUESDAY for the past two years, an old man with tortoiseshell glasses has lunched at Les Arlots in Paris's 10th arrondissement. "He sits in the same seat, at the same hour," said chef and owner Thomas Brachet. Down a quiet street over in the 20th arrondissement, the same group of seven architects shows up for lunch at least once a week at La Vierge, where the menu changes everyday, making a repeat visit all the more appealing. The price tag is equally attractive. Both Les Arlots and La Vierge offer two or three courses for under 25 euros. The *prix fixe*, founded by the godfather of French cuisine Georges-Auguste Escoffier in the early 1900s, is nothing new. But a different kind of *formule*, as it's commonly called, has emerged of late—specifically between the hours of noon and 2 p.m. on weekdays over in the *les quartiers gourmands* on the Right Bank. Rather than offering bargain hunters a discount for ordering multiple courses off the standard *a la carte* menu, these *prix fixe* meals stand alone. They change weekly—or more—and you're usually spoiled silly.

The following four restaurants, more or less neighborhood bistros, reflect the trend. They're located outside typical tourist destinations, but your palate—not to mention your wallet—will thank you for venturing into the unknown.

Le Cadoret



La Cadoret, which specializes in French comfort food, prepares 3-course midday meals for less than \$25.

Chef and co-owner Léa Fleuriot runs this 19-table restaurant in the rather remote 19th arrondissement preparing the sort of French food her grandmother made. “It’s family cuisine,”

says Ms. Fleuriot. “Most of the time, my ideas remind me of what I ate as a kid. I like this kind of comfort food.” Still, she often adds a contemporary twist, topping a creamy mushroom soup with slivers of raw mushrooms and croutons, or serving a caper-flavored carrelet white fish over a cloudlike turnip purée.

Tues.-Fri., 12-2 p.m.; 2 courses, 18€; 3 courses, 21€; Reservations recommended. 1 Rue Pradier.

Les Arlots

The décor of this unassuming bistro near Gare du Nord train station exudes nautical kitschy-cool, from a “Jaws” poster to old fishing rods. You’ll find more than fish on the menu, but chef and owner Thomas Brachet is clearly sea-focused. His prix fixe dishes change almost daily; recent offerings included beets with pistachio, honey and goat cheese and a buttery piece of whiting served with cockles and a sweet purée of carrots. A giant bouquet of flowers usually hovers over the wooden bar, at which there’s a lone stool for walk-ins; dozens of wine bottles line the wall of the 28-seat dining room where patrons only hush when they’re busy wiping their plates with sourdough bread from baker Thierry Breton.

Tues.-Fri., 12-2:30 p.m.; 2 courses, 19€; 3 courses, 23€. Reservations recommended, 136 Rue du Faubourg Poissonnière, facebook.com/lesarlots

La Vierge



At Les Arlots, well-priced wines line the walls.

Despite its retro tile floors and mismatched vintage plates, this spot on the east side of Père Lachaise Cemetery has a decidedly fresh feel. Formerly run by an Australian and French chef pair obsessed with instituting a zero-waste policy in their kitchen, the restaurant recently changed hands, but successors 31-year-old Laura Dalsheimer and 26-year-old Gabin Rodes are carrying on the tradition. They keep the prices low by using leftovers from lunch for dinner—extra mackerel filets become a “rillette de maquereau,” which is like a paté; oranges on hand for a citrus pasta might be later tossed into a cake for dessert. “What I like about the ‘formule’ is that it allows me to work with very fresh, seasonal products everyday,” said Ms. Dalsheimer. “It’s a balance between freedom and constraints.” This frugal approach to cooking doesn’t

mean a lack of variety. One day may bring a

simple starter of white asparagus and fresh ricotta and the next, a hearty lamb shoulder with roasted tricolor carrots.

Mon.-Fri., 12-2 p.m.; 2 courses, 16.50€; 3 courses, 20€; reservations recommended; 58 Rue de la Réunion; alavierge.com

Robert

Australian chef Peter Orr sharpened his knives at Nahm in London, followed by small-plate hot spots Au Passage and Martin in Paris before opening Robert with partner Loïc Martin a year ago. Not far from Place de la République, in the 11th arrondissement, Robert is perhaps the most elevated of the lot. The atmosphere feels both elegant—notice the mix of wood and marble tables and a serious chandelier mid-room—and approachable with an open kitchen where chicken stock

can be seen bubbling for hours. You'll have choices to make, with three possibilities for each course that change weekly. A starter might be rabbit and ham terrine served with a "gribiche" sauce of cold egg, capers, parsley, chervil and tarragon, followed by a main of homemade pappardelle in a tender lamb ragout, while the sweet finish may be a white chocolate ganache over a seasonal fruit such as rhubarb with crushed olive-oil sablés for crunch.

Tues.-Fri., 12-2:30 p.m.; 2 courses, 22€; 3 courses, 25€; Reservations and drop-ins. 32 rue de la Fontaine au Roi, robert-restaurant.fr

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