

## Title:

Eating Well in Paris: Second Stop at Chez Tante Alice

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## Summary:

Eating out right in Paris: in this second installment of my new series of articles, I introduce you to Tante Alice, a fine restaurant which deserves a place in the pantheon of French provincial cuisine. Yummy!

## Keywords:

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## Article Body:

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## Life after Chez Georges

In an article written earlier on the 'Eating well in Paris' theme, I described the grandiose experience I had at 'Chez Georges'. The owners of Chez Georges carry the French cuisine flag with pride, and their number is outstanding.

After such a gratifying meal I was wondering who could rise to the challenge of getting my taste buds as excited. Rescue came in the form of a dinner invitation by my partners in crime, Angelo and Vinni.

"To Tantalisis!" was their battle cry.

Tantalisis... or not

Tantalisis. With such a name I didn't know what to expect really. Tantalisis does not mean anything in French. It sounded like a coined word, made up maybe to don some Nouvelle Cuisine joint. To me, Nouvelle Cuisine means product puffery, very little substance, and high dollars. Not so promising. Yet I rallied their flag, thinking they would know better.

Arriving at the scene I realized I had erred in my linguistic assumptions:

Tantalís wasn't at all -- Tante Alice it had always been.

Now, Tante means aunt in French, so Aunt Alice. Alice is one of those names which girls used to receive in the 1930s, but which very few people dare giving their offshoot today. Aunt Alice brings back pictures of the old relative from the boondocks adorned with an unlikely (and unsightly) moustache, but endowed with a golden motherly heart. The kind of aunt who used to serve you and your friends delicious home-made berry jam on large slices of fresh bread at the end of a mid-summer day.

Outside and inside

There we were, at Tante Alice's door. From the outside, the place makes a favorable impression. The building is modern, the restaurant sign above the door is drawn in a classic font, in a deep burgundy red. The street environment is nice, with numerous clean-looking stores. We are in the Southern section of the 10th district, about 10 minutes on foot from Place de la République.

Patrons entering the place face the wooden bar. The decor appears tastefully simple. The abundant use of wood and the Vichy-style tablecloth reminded me of a Normandy inn. Though the restaurant room isn't that large, tables are far enough apart from each other that you may be comfortable having a private conversation with your better half or love interest.

We were welcomed by one of the two owners of the restaurant, and speedily led to our table. There is a second room upstairs, which I was told is used at lunch time when the neighboring businesses' staffers invade the place. It was about 7:30 pm, and at this time the first floor operated at 80% capacity. The noise level was very acceptable, local patrons were quiet.

Ordering

As we sat down our hostess handed us over the menu and asked whether we wanted to start with the aperitif, the lightly alcoholic beverage which French people usually consume right before lunch and dinner to open up their appetite. I ordered a Kir Royal, a mix of blackcurrant cream and champagne. The owners of Chez Tante Alice offer their own version of a mint cocktail, which my friend Vinni ordered.

Tante Alice's menu is simple, with a selection of 5 to 7 fares per section. Every dish on the menu spells French terroir cuisine, viz. traditional cuisine from the countryside. For appetizer I opted for a dish of pan-seared cepes (boletus). My entree would be a refined delicacy: a pan-fried steak of duck

liver.

While we sipped on our aperitif, our second hostess came to take our order. She was the chef, and she lent herself amicably to our questioning. The lady is of good advice.

Did we want wine? Yes please, a half-bottle of a light red Reuilly or Chinon -both wines are from the Touraine region- to accompany our entrees. The chef pointed out that the one we had picked was the most expensive, and we might want to re-consider. A very honest attitude worth mentioning in a business known to rake in hefty profits on wine orders. We chose to stick to our half-bottle of red Chinon though.

Here comes the food

We had plenty of business to discuss about with my friends, so we didn't keep our eyes on the watch. It was probably for the better since Tante Alice has a rhythm of its own. You should not expect record-breaking serving speed. Food is prepared on order, so everything takes a bit of time. My appetizer came in just when I was starting to be hungry.

Smell and sight are the first senses you use to evaluate your meal. Fresh cepes should have a very strong earthy odor and taste. Indeed they had. And their look was mouth-watering. My serving was voluminous, something of a surprise. Go to a restaurant in the French countryside and for the same price you would pay in Paris, they serve you three times the quantity of food. The portion I was eyeing was worth every dime I would pay for it.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. My cepes were savory, with rich tones of earth and wood. They were pan-seared to a light black, and as juicy as they should be. A sip of light, fruity red wine helped them go down in style. What a satisfactory start!

The entree

Our entrees came by not too long after we had wiped our plates clean.

The pan-fried steak of duck liver is a French countryside delicacy. Recipes vary from chef to chef, but basically the cook dips the raw duck liver in flour, pans both sides in oil for less than a minute (the steak may not be burned); then sets the pan-fried steak aside, throws away the oil, pour a bit of raspberry or balsamic vinegar in the pan, and reduces it; then adds a base and a nut of butter, and brings this sauce to a short boil. The sauce is then spread over the

steak.

If prepared correctly with excellent ingredients, the steak of duck liver melts in your mouth. So much so you don't even have to chew it. Its refined taste can easily be overpowered, so it is served with light sides such as artichoke hearts, mango chutney, raisins and cooked apple slices, or dried plums.

Tante Alice's chef has a very good hand, and her fried steak of duck liver lived up to expectations. Its taste was delicate, and it melted on the tongue with no chewy parts. The Chinon was a good choice to accompany it. Some people will prefer a white wine such as a Gewürtztraminer (a wine from Alsace), a Loupiac or a Sauternes (Southwest and Bordeaux wines, respectively).

Dessert and check please

To end up this satisfying meal on a cool note, I ordered 3 scoops of vanilla and coffee ice cream. The menu describes the vanilla and coffee flavors in such terms your curiosity cannot but be titillated. I was not to be disappointed: the coffee really tasted like coffee (not like licorice), and the vanilla had a very rich natural flavor. I had a double espresso to top it off.

The check came to about €35 per person (\$43), wine included. For such an evening feat, this price was very reasonable. The after-meal was perfect, no digestion problem. The products were fresh, and both our hostesses granted us the right amount of attention during the meal.

Chez Tante Alice is a restaurant I can recommend without any second thought.

Where?

Chez Tante Alice

31-33 rue du Château d'Eau

75010 Paris

Tel: 33 (0)1 42 40 62 34

Lunch and dinner