



John Mariani, Contributor
Publisher of Mariani's Virtual Gourmet

Dining Out in Paris By John Mariani

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AU PETIT TONNEAU

20 Rue de Surcouf

+33 1-4705-0901



Every Parisian has a favorite neighborhood bistro, and in the area near Les Invalides, Au Petit Tonneau is mine. Typical in its simple décor—small, narrow, with red-checked tablecloths, vases of flowers, old tiles, a little shelf of books, a blackboard menu, and a jolly staff—this 80-year-old wonder makes old-fashioned fare that never seems old-fashioned at all. You never have the feeling the kitchen, now under Chef Vincent Neveu, is just coasting or neglecting any aspect of its ingredients or preparation, from a sweet onion tart *confit* (below) on flakey *pâte brisée* with a generous shower of black truffles (20€) and a *poêle* of woodsy *girolles* mushrooms (20€) to a *blanquette de veau* (24€) so rich and aromatic that I was reminded of the first example I ever ate in Paris, fifty years ago.



Bass came with a lovely herbaceous *sauce vièrge* (24€) and a hint of curry. Desserts were very traditional—a tangy lemon *tarte* (*below*) and a not-too-sweet *tarte Tatin* of caramelized apples.

According to Paris food writer Alexander Lobrano, “Obliged to sell by poor health, Au Petit Tonneau’s chef owner Ginette Boyer was determined to sell to a woman, because she hoped to preserve the legacy of the *cuisine menagère* (home cooking) that had won her a devoted following of local regulars through the years. In the end, Arlette Iga, a client of the restaurant, decided to buy, and she’s respecting Boyer’s wishes by serving the type of uber traditional French comfort food that’s become nearly extinct in Paris.”



There is a polished brass plaque on the wall (just above the banquette in the photo above) that tells you Jules Maigret, the gourmand detective in many of the Georges Simenon novels, dined here often, if fictitiously, just as Sam Spade did at John's Grill in San Francisco in *The Maltese Falcon*.

By the way, there is at least one other restaurant in Paris with the word “*tonneau*” (barrel) in it, but the one on the Rue de Surcouf is the only one that matters.

There is a 37€ fixed price dinner offered in addition to à la carte.