

A taste of France in Edinburgh thanks to former Claridges chef

Steve Allen, executive head chef for Cote, has brought back a selection of classics to the menu for the popular, 15-year-old chain, which boasts a busy restaurant in Frederick Street, Edinburgh, for the Autumn season.

Allen, former head chef for celebrity chef, Gordon Ramsay, at Claridges, has designed the recipes with comfort and nourishment at their heart.

And Allen also wants diners to enjoy an escape from the everyday, without breaking the bank, a real bonus in these tough times.

So, what is in the Autumn selection? It includes Brittany-style galettes and croques which are now available until 5pm for the first time. For example, the mushroom and egg galette is a savoury crepe from northern France, freshly-made with buckwheat flour and billed with sauteed spinach, a creamy mix of wild oyster and king mushrooms, and topped with a free-range egg.

And the ham and comte galette is filled with thick-cut, Suffolk-reared Dingley Dell ham, wilted spinach, bechamel sauce and aromatic Comte cheese.

The unique French toasted sandwich is made from sourdough bread and comes with a creamy, home-made bechamel sauce, Comte cheese and Dingley Del ham.

You can, of course, have a Croque Madame with a fried egg on top and each croque or galette comes with house frites or a side salad.

The extensive menu now also includes the quintessentially French steak tartare, a mainstay on the menu of many stylish brasseries.

There is a Cote twist. Raw beef rump, direct from the restaurant's in-house butchery, is dressed with a combination of spicy egg-yolk, capers, cornichons and Worcestershire sauce. It is accompanied by a sourdough baguette.

It is one of four newcomers to the starter menu in Edinburgh. The others include prawn gratinee, king prawns, chilli Provencale sauce, white wine, sourdough croutes and topped with rocket. It was my pick and I had to ask for a spoon to mop up all the sauce, it was delicious, and it worked wonderfully well with the fish.

My dining partner picked warm beetroot salad with black garlic aioli, pistacho, endive and sourdough croutes. It was delightful, the mix of flavours working well with the endive.

On to the mains now and seared sea bream with a red pepper and lemon sauce, braised lentils and tapenade plus Jerusalem artichoke risotto with champagne vinegar caramel, mushrooms and chiffonade spinach are two of the new additions.

Three classics have been tweaked. Tuna Nicoise is one of them and comes with a grilled tuna steak, soft free-range egg, French beans, anchovies, cherry tomatoes, baby gem, new potatoes, tapenade and mustard vinaigrette.

Poulet grille is another, with a creamy mushroom and thyme sauce, watercress and frites.

The third tweak is Poulet Breton, responsibly reared in Northern France, and the corn-fed half chicken is marinated for a deeper flavour and is served with watercress and creamy Dauphinois potatoes and your choice of sauce.

Sirloin steak was one of our picks, and the restaurant

recommends medium rare. The knife easily carved through the juicy meat. A delight.

It has been added to the menu to join cote de boeuf (a sharing rib-eye) along with rib-eye, fillet and steak frites, that is a minute steak, garlic butter and frites.

My selection was pan-fried Cornish monkfish with a Normande sauce, cider veloute, mussels, Julienne apple slivers, fennel and shallots. It's sweet but the flavours marry perfectly.

Two crepes, a cheese board and 11 choices tempt for dessert. The newcomer for Autumn is rum baba. It was listed as having 440 kcal so we indulged and we are glad we did. Rum-soaked sponge sitting on winter berry coulis and adjacent to vanilla creme fraiche topped with slivers of mint arrived. We loved it.

We also enjoy the atmosphere in the restaurant and it was good to see a disabled diner in a wheelchair near us. Cote was packed, by the way, a testament to the consistency of 80-strong who have never failed to deliver on our visits.

Hats off to the staff who are attentive, obliging and knowledgeable about the dishes on offer. Attention to detail is also of great importance at Cote and they do that well, including siting a hand gel dispenser outside the men and women's toilets. The breeds confidence.

One further point, midweek diners can enjoy a Prix Fixe menu of French favourites like steak frites and coq au vin, two courses £14.95 and three for £18.95. Prices vary by location.

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