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Versailles

A renewed French connection on the Avenue

MARY KATE HOGAN



Photographs by Bob Capazzo

With the face of Greenwich Avenue changing so much in recent years, it's a comfort to witness the rebirth of Versailles, a bistro and patisserie that has been a popular meeting spot for thirty years. The French favorite recently relocated just a few doors down from its original, cozy-slice-of-Paris location. Versailles's brunch and lunch menu and decadent, freshly baked desserts have enjoyed a loyal following, but the new draw is the full dinner menu prepared by executive chef, Jean-Pierre Bagnoto.

To sample the revamped Versailles, I invited some longtime Greenwich residents and Versailles veterans to join me: my father, mother and husband. (At the risk of aging us, we remember the days when Rogers was among the restaurant's neighbors.)

The atmosphere in the new dining room is elegant and inviting: red walls adorned with modern art, a contemporary chandelier hanging from the tray ceiling. Perhaps most noteworthy are the old-fashioned, automatic kitchen doors, leather-covered and inset with round windows, custom-designed to mimic the ones from the movie *Ratatouille*.

Like the updated decor, the well-edited dinner menu appealed to me right away. "It's not so huge that it takes a week to decide," my mother noted. Though the menu features some classics—like a foie gras terrine and a steak tartare that my editor says is second only to one she sampled at a famous restaurant in Nice—there is also a modern approach to the cuisine, such as the arctic char with root vegetables.



The newly renovated space is fresh and chic yet still familiar and inviting.

If you have a light appetite, one of the luscious soups and a salad would satisfy for supper. We tried the delicate fish soup served with croutons and a sinfully good aioli, and the cream of homard, which has a pure flavor and is not too heavy or trumped up with sherry as some lobster soups tend to be. I would order either soup again, but the fish was my favorite. Among the appetizers, the tuna tartare is a visual treat, diced pink fish arranged in a floral shape with endive, lettuce leaves and radishes as petals. Happily, the taste rivals its looks: super fresh and well complemented by a ginger mayonnaise and a dollop of caviar. The house salad with radishes, carrots and fresh greens is dressed in a light vinaigrette with a hint of sweetness from pomegranate.

After the first course, the initially attentive service seemed to lag. But before I could truly categorize it as slow, a waiter appeared and whisked away the lingering plates. The waiter was helpful in guiding us in our selection and the main courses arrived promptly.

Though the menu lists just six entrées, tried-and-true bistro dishes such as cassoulet and coq au vin were among the nightly specials. We seized the opportunity and ordered both. Layered with exceptional ingredients, the cassoulet is the stuff of food fantasies: leg of duck topped with a crackle-edged slab of pork that is sinfully delicious, along with homemade chicken sausage, all paired with white beans, carrots and tomato in a savory broth with a side of whipped potatoes. There's an \$8 charge for plate sharing, and in the case of the cassoulet or the coq au vin—both sized to feed a small army—this fee makes sense.

The authentic coq au vin will please enthusiasts as the chicken is flavorful, the sauce rich and the carrots cooked perfectly with a slight crunch to them. For a lighter entrée, I love the arctic char, which is laced with a lemony sauce and accompanied by chopped root vegetables over a bright bed of spinach, a colorful counterpoint to the fish. The roast beef fillet is as tender as you might expect, paired with a crisp mix of cooked vegetables (ratatouille), small roasted potato slices and a parmesan crisp.



Bas Armagnac & plum soufflé with vanilla sabayon

Though the extensive dessert options were calling my name, I didn't want to pass up the fabulous fromage selection. Our waiter tempted us with an array of cheeses arranged on a huge tray, including a Camembert, a chèvre, a blue cheese and a Reblochon, which comes from the second milking of the cow. The cheese plate served with crackers, apricots and grapes is ideal for those who prefer a savory end to the meal.

We never miss the chance to try exceptional desserts. Pastry aficionados will be dazzled and possibly daunted by the choices: more than twenty desserts on the menu. The three we sampled were exceptional. Opera, an almond sponge cake with coffee, layers of mocha and chocolate ganache will appeal to coffee lovers. Trio, a chocolate sponge cake, vanilla and layers of three kinds of mousse: white chocolate, dark and milk, hit a high note. And the Bavarian Pear Tart, topped with Bavarian cream with caramel icing, was pure bliss.

While the sweets still play a starring role at the restaurant, the refined dinner menu and lively, comfortable setting are sure to attract a fresh crop of Versailles fans.

Versailles

339 Greenwich Avenue
203-661-6634
versaillesgreenwich.com

Cuisine: French

Hours:

Mon.–Wed. 7 a.m.–6 p.m.

Thurs.–Sat. 7 a.m.–7 p.m.

Sun. 7 a.m.–6 p.m.

Find out more about this restaurant, visit

