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Connecticut Dining

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GREENWICH

Versailles Adds a Meal (To Eat Before Dessert)



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW SULLIVAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

MORE Versailles, long known in Greenwich for breakfast, lunch and dessert, now serves dinner. Below, *coq au vin*.

By PATRICIA BROOKS

SINCE 1980, Versailles in Greenwich has been a local institution, for croissants or a full breakfast in the morning or a cafe meal at lunch. But since Sept. 14, when this patisserie-cum-cafe moved a few doors down Greenwich Avenue to a slightly larger space, it has served dinner as well. Its business card attests to its versatility: Boulangerie — Patisserie — Bistro Café.

Versailles still serves the best, most authentically French pastries around. Witness its dessert menu, with photos and detailed descriptions of as many as 25 different pastries — your choice for \$9 each. Will it be a ladyfinger

sponge cake with fresh raspberries trapped in a Champagne mousse, glazed with raspberry gel and topped with fresh raspberries? Or maybe you'll have a passionata cake, intensely flavored passion fruit and raspberry mousse in a ladyfinger sponge cake soaked in Kirsch, with fresh raspberries. Or how about a Saint Honoré, three caramelized cream puffs filled with deeply rich chocolate pastry cream and vanilla-whipped Chantilly cream, all on a base of puff pastry? I have tried all three — they are exquisite — and the last is large and rich enough to serve two.

While it may be tempting to order dessert on arrival, there are other, appealing dishes to sample first. At a recent leisurely dinner I succumbed to



hot seared foie gras in a black currant and port reduction. I could have savored more of the superb liver, but its

skimpy portion at least left me room for the main course, a plateful of delectable gluten-free quinoa linguine (perfectly al dente). Tumbled with roasted shrimp, edamame beans and fresh asparagus, the pasta was cuddled in a luscious pesto cream sauce.

You would expect a French cafe to turn out an excellent coq au vin, and Versailles does this classic with élan. Just as satisfying was the tangy fresh goat cheese tart made with figs, toasted pine nuts and lemon rind.

At a lively lunch (noisier than dinner), the food was just as accom-

plished. The kitchen has a light touch with salads, whether it's mixed greens with mustard and lemon vinaigrette, Parmesan salad with lemon, garlic and white anchovies, or a light rocket (arugula) and endive salad with apples and toasted pine nuts in a French blue cheese dressing. But two soups, mushroom and a traditional onion bubbling with onions and Emmenthaler cheese, were both appropriately robust for a cold December day.

Lunch entrees, several in slightly slimmer portions than those served at dinner, also demonstrated the skills of

the chef, Jean Pierre Bagnato, and his staff, in dishes like roasted Arctic char with grilled asparagus salad, and crispy duck confit with a poached duck egg and salad. Grilled lamb skewers (five generous ones) came with sautéed vegetables and, like the other entrees, a hillock of French fries.

If you are browsing Greenwich Avenue early, I'd also recommend breakfast at Versailles. The sweet rolls are delicious and so are the blueberry pancakes, almond brioche French toast with fresh strawberries, and pecan waffles with lemon syrup.

Versailles

339 Greenwich Avenue
Greenwich
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versaillesgreenwich.com

DON'T MISS

THE SPACE Tucked in the rear of a small shop (which has a display case of pastries and several tables lining one wall), a medium-size dining room has a cozy bistro look with warm red walls, white wood trim and wood floor. Even at its busiest (lunchtime), conversation is still possible. Street level; wheelchair access.

THE CROWD Many couples of varying ages. Wait staff varies, from friendly and helpful to brusque and seemingly harried; a few bussing staff members are woefully undertrained, delivering entrees without clearing appetizers and not knowing who gets what.

THE BAR A full complement of drinks is available from the service bar, in a corner of the dining room. An impressive all-French wine list offers many regional

choices, with bottles from \$30; by the glass, \$9 to \$21.

THE BILL Breakfast entrees, \$9 to \$14. Lunch entrees, \$10 to \$21. Dinner entrees, \$27 to \$29. Pastries are \$9 each. All major credit cards accepted.

WHAT WE LIKED Versailles blueberry pancakes, pecan waffles, almond brioche French toast; mushroom or onion soup, rocket and endive salad, Parmesan salad, mixed salad, hot seared foie gras, fresh goat cheese tart; quinoa linguine, wild mushrooms and lobster risotto, coq au vin, roasted Arctic char, grilled lamb skewers; almost any pastry, especially the Saint Honoré, trio cake, lemon tart, passionata cake, casino, Champagne mousse cake.

IF YOU GO Breakfast: 7:30 to 11 a.m. daily. Lunch: 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Brunch: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Dinner: 6 to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Closed for dinner Sunday. Reservations suggested. Metered parking along the street.

RATINGS Don't Miss, Worth It, O.K., Don't Bother.