

A new find on the left bank

19 Jun 2008 by Nick Lander/FT

By the end of dinner all four of us had managed to leave our hearts at Itinéraires, which opened in April just off the Boulevard St-Germain in Paris's Latin Quarter, albeit for very different reasons.

One friend from San Francisco did so the moment he tasted his bowl of gazpacho, which he promptly declared 'as good as any I've ever eaten', the result, the waitress told him subsequently, of a combination of heritage tomatoes, fennel, basil and a little garlic. His partner waited until the end of the meal before declaring himself charmed by the service, while my wife [that's me, folks – JR] left impressed not just by the food but also by a fascinating wine list. This included a wine she had never drunk before, a Cabernet Franc from Menetou Salon in the Loire, an unusual wine whose provenance and flavour were capably explained by another waitress.

What caught my attention was the respect all the waitresses (and all the waiting staff here are women admirably led by the chef's wife, Sarah) have for the bell. While she was taking our order our waitress heard the chef press the bell to signal that food was ready to be taken to customers, apologised for the interruption and promptly went off to deliver this before returning seconds later to complete our order.

How chefs communicate from behind their small kitchens in restaurants such as Itinéraires is a major challenge. The interior manages to be both modern and comfortable with the added advantage, as a corner site, of considerable natural light from two large windows. But there are only two tiny counters on the far wall that access the kitchen: from one the waitresses collect the food while to the other they return the dirty dishes. A slim waist and an athletic disposition should be in any aspiring waitress's cv.

Itinéraires also manages to get round the clutter that soon accumulates around any table by printing its eclectic wine list but dispensing with a written menu. Instead, five blackboards are astutely placed around the room so that no-one has to twist around to see what Sylvain Sendra, its talented chef, has to offer. And for 34 euros for three excellent courses it's a great deal.

The other impressive first course was what was described as 'an oyster cocktail' on the board but our waitress referred to as a cappuccino of oysters when she delivered it. Served in a cocktail glass, the oysters had been puréed and then mixed together with fresh peas before being topped with a mound of crème fraîche and a straw. It was fun, delicious and cool on a warm summer's night [however hard it is to believe - see [this thread](#) on the forum].

The two meat dishes on the menu were an oft-seen beef cheek with mashed potatoes and a much more unusual 'souris' of lamb, cut from close to the foot of the animal, that had been caramelised with honey, cooked very slowly and served with a pea purée. The two fish dishes that night were a fillet of pollack (every chef's favourite now cod is rare and expensive) with a compote of aubergines and a squid ink risotto topped with clams.

The only way we could decide who should get the four desserts - Sendra's version of a lemon tart, a rich chocolate ganache, summer fruits with a mint sorbet and a rice pudding with caramel ice cream - was to place them in the middle of the table and eat them with as little restraint as was socially acceptable.

Itinéraires' charms lie in the very different reasons it offers to return. Sendra's skills with the less expensive cuts of meat and fish; an interior that is more than comfortable but has not had too much spent on it so that prices are reasonable; and waitresses who greet all their current regular customers with enthusiastic kisses. Do book well in advance to avoid disappointment on any score.

Itinéraires, 5 rue de Pontoise, 75005 Paris, tel 01.46.33.60.11

restaurantitineraires@orange.fr Closed Sunday and Monday.