

## Three new places in Paris

10 Jul 2012 by Nick Lander/FT

The news on this Bastille Day for those who enjoy eating out in France appears to be encouraging.

The last election saw the departure of a teetotal President, an acute source of chagrin for the country's winemakers, while the country's new cabinet has no place for those who once introduced the 35-hour week that forced so many restaurateurs across France to curtail their opening hours.

And now from Paris comes the news of three exciting new openings. While Les Jalles and Semilla are very different in style, they are both, unusually, open seven days a week - a boon for those who wish to enjoy a weekend in this city when so many independent restaurants remain resolutely closed. And Albion in the 10th arrondissement joins two other favourites, **Chez Michel** and **Chez Casimir**, in not only offering excellent food, but doing so within easy walking distance of the Gare du Nord.

Certainly, nothing could have looked more Parisian chic than **Les Jalles** as we staggered in with our suitcase. There was a liveried doorman on the outside; a modern take on an Art Deco interior inside; and, most encouragingly for two hungry travellers, two wide openings into the far wall that allowed excellent views into the kitchen.

To the left stood a smiling young chef in whites peeling potatoes while in the main kitchen stood Magali Marian, dressed in black, who, with his partner Delphine Alcover, opened Les Jalles following their success with Bistro Volnay nearby. While the latter draws its vinous inspiration from Burgundy, Les Jalles derives its name and the bulk of its wine list from Bordeaux.

But with this association came the first of two sources of disappointment. The kitchen produced some excellent food: a ravioli of goats' cheese with broad beans and leaves of crisp lettuce; a ceviche of bream with lime and cubes of artichoke; a cocotte brimming with monkfish and potatoes; and a fillet of cod with colourful, summery vegetables. Only a heavy, bland cherry clafoutis disappointed. But with a menu on which three of the six main courses were fish, it was difficult to find a suitable mature red or white wine to accompany our food, particularly when both of the two white wines we initially ordered were out of stock.

But what marred this meal more than anything else was Alcover's determination to control the dining room rather than to manage it. Only she was allowed to greet the customers; seat them; take their orders for food and wine; open the bottles; and pour the wine as well as prepare our bill, for which, as she was in the bar upstairs, we had to ask three times. There is no doubting Alcover's determination - I watched her give the same poor waiter a terrible telling off twice - but this very rigid, and very French, approach to dining-room etiquette is not in the customers' best interests.

A more relaxed, friendly approach is the leitmotif of New Zealander Drew Harré and his Cuban/American partner Juan Sanchez at **Semilla** on the Rue de Seine close to their ever-popular restaurants Cosi and Fish. And yet, thanks to an extremely clever association, they still manage to maintain the same high culinary ethos.

Having stripped back the interior of a dilapidated restaurant, installed steel beams across the ceiling and an open kitchen, these two restaurateurs have recruited Eric Trochon, a teacher at the highly regarded Ferrandi professional cookery school. Last year Trochon passed the highest professional exams to become a Meilleur Ouvrier de France.

As the Mexican maîtresse d' handed me my menu at 1.15 pm, I watched Trochon scurry in, change into his chef's jacket with the distinctive red and blue stripes around the neck and quietly lead and encourage his young brigade. The two-course, 19-euro lunch menu included a plate of three starters – a broccoli soup, beef carpaccio and two walnut biscuits – that was followed by an outstanding main course: a precisely steamed fillet of cod lying on diced, sautéed, buttery strips of endive and topped with passion fruit. This was a relatively simple dish that, contrary to expectations, worked very well, combining freshness, acidity and exciting colour.

Fish was once home to the British chef Mathew Ong, who, with New Zealand restaurateur Hayden Clout, has moved on to convert a former *tabac* into an extremely exciting wine shop and restaurant (pictured above). Their use of glass in the large front window and front door, in the floor that affords a bird's eye view into the wine cellar below, and in opening up

the windows along the wall that overlooks a small garden make **Albion** an extremely attractive place to sit.

Their combined skills make Albion an exciting place to spend an evening in, too. While Clout oversees a wide ranging and well-priced wine list, from which we drank a Domaine des Lises 2010 Crozes Hermitage from Alain Graillot's son, Ong produces a small but well balanced menu whose highlights included a confit of salmon with a salad of daikon radishes; a risotto of peas and asparagus; and sweetbreads with girolles and Corsican liver sausage. Most intelligently, those normally very expensive fraises des bois - tiny, delicious wild strawberries - are here served as a parfait for 8.50 euros.

And all of this was delivered with wit. The baguettes stand proudly in a bright red bucket while a bottle of wine acts as the counterweight for the outer door to the lavatories. Albion and Semilla exude fun, an ingredient sadly missing from our evening at Les Jalles.

**Les Jalles** 14 rue des Capucines, 75002, tel 01.42.61.66.71 [www.lesjalles.fr](http://www.lesjalles.fr)

**Semilla** 54 rue de Seine, 75006, tel 01.43.54.34.50

**Albion** 80 rue du Faubourg Poissonnière, 75010, tel 01.42.46.02.44 [www.restaurantalbion.com](http://www.restaurantalbion.com)

**Chez Michel** 10 rue de Belzunce, 75010, tel 01.44.53.06.20,

**Chez Casimir** 6 rue de Belzunce, tel 01.48.78.28.80