



Written by
Nick Lander
12 May 2018

Paris - 11 favourite restos



May and June must be two of the best months to be in Paris. The days are long. The weather can be anything from good to very good. The produce is often at its best – peas, broad beans, asparagus, wild garlic, heady gariguette strawberries – this is the time to be in the City of Light.

And because the days are at their longest it is almost possible to enjoy lunch and dinner and still walk back to wherever you are staying in the twilight. But which restaurants should one go to? Here is a list of my top 11 current recommendations starting, because this is Paris, with the most expensive and the most unforgettably situated.

Pavillon Ledoyen www.pavillon-ledoyen.fr

Everything about this restaurant (pictured right) reeks of Paris. Its location at the eastern end of the Champs Elysée; its historic eighteenth-century building on the edge of a park; even its name

taken from a famous traiteur of yore.

To this Yannick Alléno has added his own culinary magic: an intricate soup comprising principally sea urchins, a fricassé of lobster with Chinese cabbage, a fillet of venison most impressively served with an anchovy sauce and a tartlet of cardoons. With wines it will cost about €250 per person.

Le Taillevent www.letaillevent.com

This restaurant, in a townhouse built in 1852 by the Duc du Mornay, was converted into a restaurant in 1946 by André Vrinat and was for many years the only three-star Michelin restaurant where a restaurateur, his son Jean-Claude Vrinat, rather than a chef was in charge.

Today, in the protective hands of the Gardinier family (once owners of Ch Phelan Ségur) and with chef Alain Solivières in the kitchen since 2002, this is a restaurant for classic dishes with a twist: lobster with a tomato jelly, turbot with peas and wild garlic, and a rich chocolate soufflé. The wine list is fantastic.

La Tour d'Argent www.latourdargent.com

May and June this year also offer wine lovers an extra opportunity – the chance to be served by David Ridgway, the restaurant's longstanding British sommelier, before he retires, as he is threatening to do, in August. He has been here since 1981!

The restaurant was created by the late Claude Terrail and now run by his son, André. The bottles on their extremely extensive wine list are kept in cellars down below alongside the Seine, and the kitchen's handling of pressed duck (ours was number 1,160,300) has long made this Paris landmark extremely famous. Today, under chef Philippe Labbé, the food is far more modern than it once was and the lunchtime prix fixe at €105 per person including service should be an added attraction.

La Scene Thélème www.lascenethelème.fr

The opening shot on this restaurant's website of a young woman in a gorgeous eighteenth-century black costume with braided hair carrying an enormous whisk gives an insight into this place's split personality, as a theatre that converts into a serious restaurant after the performance.

The brief menu is the creation of chef Julien Roucheteau; the young and very energetic front-of-house team is under the watchful eyes of Frédéric Pedrono (ex Ledoyen). The overall atmosphere is one of a relaxed but ambitious establishment. Roucheteau seems to have a distinctive way with fish and, on a more basic level perhaps, his bread rolls and the cheeses from his cheese trolley are truly memorable.

Café Pouchkine www.cafe-pouchkine.fr

Paris has always cultivated the image of a city for anything sweet so it comes as little surprise that Alexander Dellos, the creator of Café Pushkin in Moscow, has converted what were the offices of Orange on the Place de la Madeleine into the magnificent Café Pouchkine.

This rabbit warren of artfully decorated rooms is now the place for breakfast; savoury food, under the direction of chef Alain Ducasse (albeit at some distance); as well as for anything and

everything sweet. For as long as there is not a Café Pushkin in London, this is the place to head to for any lover of sweet things.

Willi's Wine Bar www.williswinebar.com, **Juveniles** www.juvenileswinebar.com and **Ellsworth** www.ellsworthparis.com

There must be something in the mesoclimate above the small intersection between the Rue de Richelieu and the Rue des Petits Champs. It is in this small neighbourhood that three of my favourite restaurants in this city are to be found (and a survey in 2016 estimated that there were over 40,000!).

The grandfather of these three is Willi's Wine Bar opened by the ever youthful Englishman Mark Williamson over 30 years ago. Drawn to Paris by Steven Spurrier at Cave de la Madeleine, Williamson and his former business partner, Tim Johnston, opened Willi's as a place for wine lovers with good food attached, a role that it has maintained to this day. Williamson also owns Macéo, a more formal restaurant, next door.

After their split, Johnston went all of 300 metres round the corner to open Juveniles, more of a wine shop with no more than a dozen rather cramped tables, all of them served by the smallest kitchen imaginable. Then in January 2014 Margaux, Tim's vivacious younger daughter, and her talented husband and chef Romain Roudeau took over the day-to-day management leaving Tim to handle the wine side of their business and free for the occasional lunch.

It was with Johnston that I paid my first visit to Ellsworth on the other side of the rue de Richelieu. It was raining hard when we arrived but we were beguiled by the warmth of the welcome from American Laura Adrian, whose partner Braden Perkins divides his time between the kitchens here and their more formal restaurant, Verjus.

Tan Dinh 60 rue de Verneuil, Paris 7eme, +33 1 45 44 04 84 (no website)

The premises may be slightly down at heel but this restaurant is nevertheless a gem. Run by brothers, **Robert** and Freddy Vifian, it is distinguished by a menu that is authentically Vietnamese while its wine list is not only wholeheartedly French but also comprises many of this country's top producers (many of the bottles are stored in cases en route to the lavatories in the basement).

Trout roe with prawn crackers, cold pancakes with duck and kumquats, and homemade noodles with chicken and cucumbers were the edible highlights of our last meal. The wine list is hugely impressive but it is the list of burgundies that is probably unrivalled.

Eels www.restaurant-eels.com

This former couscous restaurant in the 10th arrondissement was taken over by two friends nine months ago. Front-of-house Félix Le Louarn and chef Adrien Ferrand met in catering college and together have created a popular location for really distinguished cooking and a warm welcome.

Eels, a source of fascination for the chef (and for me) invariably feature on their menu but as only one of four starters and four main courses. But everything is commendably modern, including the wine list. With an open kitchen, it offers is plenty to watch as well.

Quinsou www.quinsou.business.site

This small restaurant in the 6th arrondissement, opposite the Ferrandi cooking school, is now the home to the talented chef Antonin Bonnet.

Having cooked at The Greenhouse in London and Le Sergent Recruteur in Paris, Bonnet has now settled here in a restaurant whose location allows him to walk his two daughters to school every morning. And a happy chef produces happy food, as dishes of brill, pigeon and an apricot dessert that were the stars of my meal demonstrated. A sign behind the bar that reads 'WORK HARD & BE NICE TO PEOPLE' ensures that the front-of-house staff share the same ethos as Bonnet's talented kitchen.

Bon appétit!