



CAFÉ CHEZ MARIE is a stunning fun experience!

My readers will recall my review last week of that secret Japanese steakhouse, *Totoraku*. I had been asked by a long-time friendly reader if I would take him there since he could not get Chef Kaz to let him in, and we did have a wonderful dining experience. *Steve Saltzman* told me that night that he was co-owner of a café with his wife, Marie, and I had to laugh because just that morning my ex had told me about her new favorite lunch spot, the selfsame café. Annabelle said that she and her husband had been frequenting a wonderful little café restaurant which serves delicious “Cuisine Traditionnel Francaise, Moroccan & Americaen” food in a setting which was so charming that it breathed ‘*joie de vivre*.’ I made a date with her to visit it the next day. Coincidentally, Steve and his wife, Marie, were in Paris that week and they sent me a trio of pictures of the incredible food being enjoyed by them at *Le Grand Vefour* (also

my favorite) during their three hour lunch with Exec Chef Guy Martin.

CAFÉ CHEZ MARIE (10681 Santa Monica Blvd...(310-475-2949, metered street parking \$2 and validated garage next door for \$4.50) is located one blocks *east* of the massive Mormon Temple up on that hill (what my New York friend used to call, *Frank Sinatra's house.*) The café restaurant is in a small French Normandy cottage there, and has been named an L.A. City Cultural Historic Monument #319 by the city. **It features an utterly charming environment** - an enchanting outdoor garden patio with a stone wishing well, a cozy indoor dining room with beautiful beamed ceilings and a wood-burning fireplace; there's also an upstairs "Family Room" hideaway which I have not yet seen. Steve told me that this cottage has been there since 1935, and he found it one day some 20 years ago when he took an office in the complex. The woman who had a sandwich shop on the site told him she wanted out, and he impulsively bought the place. Then he took his wife Marie there...and suggested she organize it as a French-Moroccan-American restaurant, something which celebrated her North African heritage and did not exist anywhere in town. They redid the décor, inspired by the historic Parisian St. Germaine des Pres, and opened it some twenty years ago, on January 24th, 2000...and it has propagated and grown in popularity ever since.

Here I'm going try your patience for a moment by telling you about the culture of *cafes* around the world. Their menu tells how a conqueror called *The Grand Turk* brought coffee to Paris at the end of the 17th century, and the very first restaurant ever was opened to enjoy the new drink. The beloved café, *Le Procope*, in 1686 became a “*home away from home and work*” for all, including Benjamin Franklin, Voltaire and Napoleon Bonaparte. Over the next three centuries the café became a refuge from daily life where people could be alone without the pressures of everyday life...a meeting place where friends and strangers could share a meal or a glass of wine with conversation and camaraderie. **So be it, even today.** *Café Chez Marie* is in the spirit of those fabulous French places, many of which I have visited, like *Les Deux Magots* and *Café De Flore*.

What makes this wonderful little café so special, apart from the exquisite setting, is one of the finest, most interesting menus I have seen in years. Truly. I have visited Tangiers and have a real predilection for exotic Moroccan/African food...and here was my opportunity to enjoy it close to home. On that first morning, I ordered a Moroccan omelette (\$17.95) which came with fruit and toast. The exotic ingredient was the Merguez (lamb) sausage, with sauteed scallions, bell pepper, cilantro and Harissa, an exotic spice blend with pepper and cumin. My ex raved about their salads and we shared a ***Mangue et Noix*** (\$17.95), fresh sliced mango, roasted beets, blue cheese, hearts of romaine ,

with home-made candied walnuts. I noted for next time the ***Moroccan Salad*** (\$17.95) marinatd artichoke hearts on a bed of couscous. ***EGGS AND OMELETTES, CREPES AND TARTINES, SALADS AND SANDWICHES...and ASSIETTES.*** The latter are the main courses....and I know I will be working my way through them in coming weeks, starting with an ***Assiette de Charcuterie*** (\$22.95), with a country pate, artisan cured meats, mousse pate de canard (duck), Brie cheese, cornichons, caramelized onions, and dried Moroccan olives with a French baguette. ***Shrimp Provencal*** (\$24.95), ***Chicken Tagine*** (\$22.95) ***Fillet of Salmon*** (\$24.95), and here is a guaranteed winner, ***Poulet Dijonnaise*** (\$22.95) oven-roasted chicken breast with a creamy Dijon mustard sauce, mushrooms herb de Provence, roasted potatoes and steamed veggies. Wow. There are two pastas, ***Penne*** (\$17.95) and ***Alfredo Fettuccini with chicken*** (\$17.95) Desserts are as delicious as the rest of the menu...***Creme Brulee*** (\$7.95) and then there is a ***Baked Apple a la Mode*** (\$11.95), where else do you see this fabulous item?..a baked apple with cinnamon and sugar, vanllla ice cream and Chantilly. As far as I know, they are the only place in town to serve authentic *Crepes Suezette*. You should know by now that their wine list is as unique and exotic as the rest of their menu. Yesterday my buddy Steve and I went for a late lunch and I ordered the first and only Mergeux Burger in the world, a creation of *Café Chez Marie*, a prime lamb patty seasoned with the traditional Mergeuz ingredients of Ras el Hanout, a house-made

complex mix of 18 Middle Eastern spices, served on French brioche, with aioli (garlic mayonnaise) and a dollop of that spicy delicious Harisa. I loved the ample burger, took half home for dinner that night.

But here is the capper for this rave review...their *Valentine's Day in Paris* menu, a three course champagne dinner: Friday, February 14th, with a first seating from 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm, and a second seating from 8.00 pm to 10.00 pm. Cost is \$75.00, tax and gratuity not included, and it includes a glass of champagne. It starts with Hors d'oeuvres...and a choice of one--a savory Potato-Leek Soup, varied Pates, or a Green Salad, and a choice of three entrees...*Boeuf Bourguignon* (braised beef ragout over a pasta pappardelle; *Salmon en Papillote* (baked in parchment paper), or *Coq au Vin* (skow-roasted chicken.) A choice of desserts---a *Chocolate-Strawberry Crepe, Crème Caramel, or a real winner...a Poire Belle Helene..*a poached pear in a red wine sauce and vanilla ice cream.I will see you there, I am sure.

At present they are not open for dinner, open every day and closing about 3-4 pm, but our waiter Henre, a charming Dutch guy, told me that dinners are being discussed seriously. I know that I would frequent it often if they did that.