
Vive la France! Le Café du Marché (est.1986)

As we read about De Gaulle and his pivotal speeches to galvanise resistance (we'll gloss over his saying "Non!" when Britain sought to join the EEC) even the most patriotic Brit can succumb to pro-Gallic feelings and decide to search out French cooking. This isn't the kind of whim that can be satisfied by a visit to smart French restos like Atelier Joel Robuchon; Alain Ducasse at the Dorchester; or the newcomer Brasserie Joel at the Park Plaza. What is needed is somewhere old-established, probably old-fashioned, possibly a little eccentric. Thankfully London has plenty of such

These old-timers have been quietly going about their business for decades rather than years. Their menus are couched in old-fashioned language, this is not the place to seek out Asian spicing, foams, or moody fusion concepts. **Le Café du Marché** is hidden away behind Charterhouse Square. The French connection with this patch of the City of London started in 1371 when it was a Catholic monastery "La Grand Chartreuse" – hence the Charterhouse. There are three strands to Le Café – downstairs at the front there is a relaxed brasserie/wine bar called Le Rendezvous; upstairs there is Le Grenier du Café which serves as a private room as well as serving as a restaurant; downstairs at the back is Le Café du Marché.

Le Café du Marché has an unfussy interior and busy bustling waiters and waitresses. The menu aims to be inclusive (the French system of "tout compris" has many advantages). Two courses cost £27.50, three courses £33.85. There are some supplements (on dishes that

deserve them such as lobster risotto; foie gras; or the côte de boeuf). The menu here should be classified under "very French", a ham and parsley terrine with sauce gribiche has a melting texture and rich flavour; the soft roes on Fougasse, à la Dijonnaise are delicious; there's a well made beetroot tart Tatin. Main courses include a "plat du jour" of roast rabbit served without a shred of irony on a purée of carrots; a Navarin of lamb; a majestic dish of poached chicken with aioli. The wine list combines some sound cheaper bottles – a Marsanne white and a Luberon red, both £18.50 – with some smarter bargains, there's both a Pomerol and an Amarone priced under £50. As you'd expect in such an establishment the attention to detail is good – plenty of good baguette, an elegant green salad, classic puds.

It's not a difficult formula – classic French Bourgeois cooking; old-fashioned presentation; traditional service – but for those occasions when you feel a wave of affinity for the French and France, Le Café du Marché is a very good option.

Charles Campion 18 June 2010

L'Atelier de Joel Robuchon, 13-15 West Street, London WC2H 9NE (020 7010 8600 www.joel-robuchon.com)

Alain Ducasse at the Dorchester, 53 Park Lane, London W1K 1QA (020 7629 8866 www.alainducasse-dorchester.com)

Brasserie Joel, Park Plaza, Westminster Bridge, London SE1 7UT (020 7620 7272 www.brasseriejoel.co.uk)

Le Café du Marché, 22 Charterhouse Square, Charterhouse Mews, Smithfield, London EC1M 6DX

(020 7608 1609 www.cafedumarche.co.uk)