



LA COCOTTE - A Gem in South End Green

La Cocotte is a relatively recent addition to South End Green in Hampstead. It is on the site of a really popular Polish restaurant which has been sadly missed since its demise. So, it is great to have a new unpretentious French restaurant in the area to take its place. It looks deceptively small from the outside but it is situated over two floors and inside feels quite roomy. The two floors have a distinctly different feel. On the ground floor you are in a French bistro, cosy and intimate and upstairs you are in a really modern space, airy and light with huge skylights.

On the evening we visited we were really impressed by the warm welcome and professionalism of the staff. We chose to go upstairs as it was a bright summer's evening and although the view is not particularly beautiful, it was nevertheless interesting to watch the bustle of South end Green. We were spoilt for choice when choosing a

starter. All starters including fish soup, snails and terrine are reasonably priced at around £6.50. I hesitated over the linguine with prawns in chilli, ginger, coriander and garlic and my companion considered the mushroom vol au vent before plumping for moules which arrived in a lovely, flavoursome broth which he mopped up with good, crusty bread. I finally decided on a spinach salad with bacon, roasted pepper, poached egg and an anchovy dressing thinking it would be less filling before my main course. However, the portions here are generous and beautifully presented. I managed to finish every delicious mouthful without too much effort! The choice of main courses is also very good and again very reasonable with the most expensive being £15.99 and that's with all the accompaniments you could want. There are side dishes but generally I would think you wouldn't need to add anything to the main dishes. For those with big appetites there are

some really substantial classic dishes like lamb shank with garlic and thyme served with parsley and garlic mash, spinach, rosemary and Pinot Noir jus. It looked awesome when it arrived at a neighbouring table. Cocottes are types of cooking pots used for casseroles and stews and you have the choice of a Pot au Feu which comprises marinated shin of beef in garlic, bay leaves and thyme cooked with carrots, turnips, leeks and shallots and served with cabbage stuffed with chicken and pork and a Fisherman's Stew in white wine, garlic, shallots, tomatoes, thyme and bay leaves and served with baby potatoes and petits pois. However, having had those substantial starters, I opted for a succulent sirloin steak with oyster mushrooms, pleurottes and ratatouille which was satisfying enough to stop me missing my usual frites which I could've ordered, of course, but needn't need at all. My companion chose a Barbary duck glazed with orange sauce with pommes Anna. He enjoyed his duck but had to ask for it to be well done as he has a real problem with duck that is too pink. Though the waiter did warn him it could make the duck a bit dry, they did comply and managed to produce a tasty duck with only the slightest tinge of pink. So, he was able to enjoy his main course, only complaining that he would have liked quite a bit more of the lovely orange glaze.

We just about had space for puddings. I nearly always have ice cream and so had a delicious vanilla ice with a pistachio ice which was not quite as good, being a bit powdery but this was my only quibble about my meal! My companion hesitated over caramelised apple clafoutis with champagne Chantilly and vanilla crème brûlée with confit ginger before choosing pear bread pudding with custard which was, fortunately, not too huge after all we had eaten. He enjoyed it but wished he'd tried the clafoutis or had had space for what would, we imagined, would have been a really good cheeseboard.

With our meal we drank a mellow Cote du Rhone and finished up with, as would be expected, excellent coffee. With service our bill for two was just about £80



and excellent value for money. An evening at La Cocotte is very satisfying with good food, excellent service and a warm ambiance. It is also open for lunch with the same menu and has an early evening special offer as well.

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