

It All Starts With Butter



Some things are worth the wait: a Birkin bag, that trip to South Africa's wine country, patio season. Other things include the opening of a highly anticipated restaurant, as is the case with Ici, a brand new establishment from Jean-Pierre + Co. – a culinary partnership between Chef Jean-Pierre Challet (ex-chef at the Windsor Arms) and his partner, Chef Jennifer Decorte.

The French food resto, located on the cosy Harbord strip, has been a hot spot to watch – and wait for – for over two years (former city councillor Joe Pantalone initially blocked Ici's liquor licence, then renovation issues hampered opening night plans).

With streamlined furniture, lush velvet curtains and mood lighting (in the form of dim lights and plenty of candles), the quaint restaurant – which seats only 24 – instantly transports a diner to the Left Bank in Paris. The open kitchen only enhances the French feel. What's atypical for a restaurant, claiming to serve Cuisine Nouveau Classique, is the pretension

– staff are welcoming and warm-hearted from the second you walk in the door.



Nothing on Ici's menu is disappointing (and we do mean nothing). Standout dishes include the melt-in-your-mouth perfect lobster bisque, a savoury lorette salad and goat cheese tart as well as the boeuf bourguignon and beef tartare. A trip wouldn't be complete without tasting Chef's sublime Grand Marnier soufflé (there are literally no words to describe how perfect and smooth this dessert is). Even when the dish needs a "little extra love" it's blow-your-mind incredible, proving to be worth the wait – and then some.

There are no starters or appetizers – instead, everything on the menu can be ordered full-size or as a portion (which encourages sharing and is perfect for those wanting to dine lighter).

The wine menu is small, but there are lots of French vintages on offer and knowledgeable staff can help you pair the perfect wine to your meal of choosing.

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Ici, located at 538 Manning Ave., has two seatings from Wednesday to Saturday, starting at 5:30 p.m. Reservations are a must. Try for a spot near one of the two windows. For more information, visit www.jpco.ca or call 416-536-0079. – Sarah Kelsey