

PARDON MY FRENCH

By Judith Hurrell

Hereford beef, Cheshire cheese; I do my best to support the homeland. But when it comes to restaurants, I'm secretly très unpatriotic. Call me a traitor, but I've never been a fan of Le Rosbif and secretly prefer French or Modern European restaurants.



My latest faux-pax came when I came across The Albany on George Street, St Albans. While gazing wistfully at the menu, I spotted a great offer that's available from Tuesday to Friday evenings; £15.95 for two courses or £19.95 for three courses. Mon Dieu! I booked a table for the very next evening.

The chic restaurant was perfect for a family soirée; service was efficient yet unobtrusive, allowing us to enjoy our meal while the waiters topped up our Vin Rouge. (The light yet fragrant Syrah Grenache Saint-Cirice VdP du Gard Rhone France 2006.)

For starters I chose Salmon Gravlox – raw slivers of salmon cured in a fresh salt, sugar, and dill dressing. My date chose a cosmopolitan Albany Charcuterie Board, featuring cured meats from both Spain and Italy. Our guests chose a Pea Soup, with a French twist, thanks to a soupçon of truffle cream, and a Risotto of Mediterranean Vegetables & Smoked Cheese, which was smooth yet al dente. The main course was equally delicious; a tasty Bream with Saffron and Chili Risotto for me, while my date had a Lamb Rack on a mouthwatering Tapenade Mash,



which he says was perfectly cooked, though a steak knife would have been welcomed. Our guests' seasonal Mushroom and Garlic Tart was very generous, but the pièce de résistance was the Poached Smoked Haddock with Poached Egg, Spinach & Creamed Potatoes – melt-in-the-mouth and generously proportioned: we were all très jealous.

I'll definitely be back to this restaurant par excellence. And if the patriots complain? I don't give a crêpe.