



Bistro Justine

Certain buildings must be cursed. For whatever venues that overtake certain spaces, they would surely be doomed, like a determined dead zone, only to be replaced the next month, by yet another hopeful enterprise. This was the case of the small Outremont space that Bistro Justine has overtaken.

Bistro Justine takes over the space that was previously Le Renard Goupil, which didn't last long. Frankly after that, I thought it was over for good. Not only because of the curse, but also because it was clearly too small to accommodate most businesses. Long before I was aware what everyone was talking about, I could here Justine's name in every conversation, in every part of town. The buzz is loud, and before it starts ringing in my ears for good, I had to see what would be so daring to fill the space.

Bistro Justine is a minimalist, mini space and mini-priced French bistro. Only 24 rustic, wood chairs and tables, the dining room ends on a square dark wood bar, opened on the kitchen where Philippe Brault, owner and Maitre D, serves and takes care of, well, pretty much everything. Alone to serve at Justine, Brault mastered the art of service in Paris for more than a decade before deciding to move to Montreal, three years ago.

"I opened many renowned restaurants in Paris," says Brault, "like the George in the upper floor of the George Pompidou Center. This is my baby! You see, I also own a high class catering services that I exported with me to Canada." Being his baby quite literally, as "Justine" is the named after his firstborn. For him, Justine is a meaning combination of Joy and Conviviality.

Back in Paris, Mr. Philippe provided catering services for Karl Lagerfeld from Chanel, for fashion shows from Kenzo and many more. While targeting the same kind of clients in Montreal for his catering, Mr. Philippe found himself yearning for a different clientele, one that is closer to the everyday Montrealer. A place where clients can come in just to enjoy a glass of wine.

Sitting down with friends we started by having a look at the menu, printed on a modest sheet of brown paper, and written down on a blackboard. The menu consists of simple French classics for prices so low you won't believe your eyes. The card starts with five different first courses (\$5) including pot de foie gras, melted goat cheese on mesclun and smoked duck on salad with Quebec blueberry dressing. I do not recommend the mushroom feuilleté, it is relatively small and tasteless compared to the other choices.

A variety of salads can be ordered as a first or main course. (\$5 or \$9) As for the principal dish, I ordered a filet mignon AAA with gratin d'aupinois and crystallized tomatoes for only \$14.00, while my guests opted for Cod Brandade, a tasty dish consisting of mashed potatoes and frayed cod, clocking in at \$11. The Coq au vin on the menu, is a top choice rooster and has been marinated in red wine for several hours.

Every night, for a reasonable 26 dollars, Mr. Philippe chooses three to five different bottles of wine that he personally suggests at each table. And what's better than a nice selection of cheeses from the region to accommodate your wine for only 4\$ each? Personally, I always preferred the sweet part and for \$4 that night, we had the choice of espresso crème brûlée, chocolate truffle, pear and cassis soup or apple pie, all homemade. The menu changes every two weeks and is inspired by the season. With winter coming, Mr. Philippe told me that soon it would be comforting hot meals taking over the menu.

Let me tell you that we experienced a superb meal, fitting in a fantastic tiny budget. The crowd seemed a bit older than we expected, but as the night when by, we realized that it was only a question of timing. In the end, Bistro Justine showed me wrong; this French bistro can't be cursed, even if the building was. In fact, maybe the curse has been inverted, and now instead of always being empty, Justine finds herself constantly filled with satisfied Montrealers. - M.O. **Location:** 1268 Van Horne Avenue, Montreal, QC
Phone: 514-277-2728

Area: Outremont

Cuisine: French

Cost: \$\$\$ (Within Reach)

Hours: Mon. to Fri.: 8:30am - 10:00pm; Sat.: 4:00pm - 10:00pm

Payment Info: Master Card, Visa, American Express