



## Justine Bistro à Vin

At first glance, Bistro Justine's sister restaurant, Justine Bistro à Vin doesn't look like much (think cute, but over-sized sweater clad sister). Inside though, the grey banquettes and earthy wooden tables give the subterranean room the familiar warmth of a typical bistro; but there's a difference: the prices are lower than most local bistros, while the fare is better. Judging by the nearly full house, Justine is already attracting a loyal following.

Scrawled in curve-y script on the blackboard, the house's wine specialties entice corkers and phils alike. It's easy to see how the restaurant attracts a crowd. With dinner entrées at Justine Bistro à Vin rarely more expensive than \$15, for a few hours even people of modest means can live like the other half without tripling their credit card debt.

Amongst Justine's more successful efforts is the mild and gently warmed goat cheese on toast, served on a bed of mixed greens. The bay scallops tartar, paired with roasted eggplant, offers both pleasure in its own right and a promise of good things to come. Having fun with a classic, a tuna Niçoise has a trend-setting sushi spin. The lukewarm cassalette of escargots was a near miss, though the succulent flavours of the creamy blue-cheese sauce managed to shine through.

The country-style French bread with its crackling crust proved irresistible, especially when service lagged between the appetizer and main course. The bread is especially good when dipped in the heady jus that forms the basis for a braised lamb shank (\$14.75), served with a generous mound of cumin-infused couscous: a nice juxtaposition of tastes. The AAA beef filet mignon with a dab of herb butter (\$15.95) made another fine main course. Cooked perfectly medium rare, as ordered, the tender filet is served with a steamy potatoes gratin.

The portobello ravioli (\$12.50), creamy, sweet, simple and exciting, comes dressed with flavoured oils -green herbs, sun-dried tomatoes and curry - and a little mound of melted leeks; its delectability comes from its careful preparation rather than the mix of ingredients. Other entrées on the short list include a crusty herb Cod fish & creamy Quinoa (\$14.50) and an "Old fashioned" veal stew (\$13.50).

The staffers at Justine seem to enjoy their jobs, and they've taken the time to thoroughly learn the menu. When they don't have an answer, they are quick to find one. There's also a lot to love about the larger plates, which generally feature more restrained preparations. Dessert offerings are worth the indulgence, whether it's the cheese cake with three kinds of fruit (all desserts are \$4.95), the tempting crème brûlée, or the Black chocolate truffle sampler. Justine Bistro à Vin is new and not flawless. Service is a little rough at times, as if the staff was still trying to get their bearings. Still, the place is running on all cylinders and seems ready for the attention. – J.R. **Location:** 4517 Rue St. Denis, Montreal, QC

**Phone:** 514-287-2552

**Area:** St. Denis

**Cuisine:** Bistro Fare

**Cost:** \$\$ (affordable)

**Hours:** Mon.: 5:00pm - 11:00pm; Tue. to Fri.: 11:00am - 11:00pm; Sat. and Sun.: 5:00pm - 12:00am

**Payment Info:** American Express, Master Card, VISA