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L'Atelier des Chefs: Bistro Classics

A cookery course that teaches French rustic cuisine with elan in Central London



IMAGE :1 of 3

Liam Plowman

1 COMMENT

THE BRIEF

Bistro Classics is a two-hour course which does what it says on the tin. The cooking is, broadly, "French rustic" but don't expect anything this elegant the next time you knock on the door of a Normandy farmhouse. After all, this course is led by Andre Dupin, whose CV takes in Chez Bruce, Claridges and Clapham's Four0Nine, so this is French home cooking avec elan. Top pastry chef James Campbell and fine dining chef Andy Press also teach courses at L'Atelier.

The L'Atelier des Chefs brand began in Paris in 2004, the brainchild of brothers Nicolas and Francois Bergerault, who wanted to re-ignite French urbanites' love affair with cooking. The London atelier has been open for just over a year, and carries with it the hands-on philosophy engendered by its Parisian forebear. The atmosphere is relaxed and fun, the social aspect is emphasised almost as much as the food itself. The ingredients used in the courses are good but not difficult or

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expensive to acquire so the dishes are fairly easy to make at home.

ON THE MENU



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sauce, thinking these things to be part of an obscure art which I couldn't hope to understand. As I found out, literally anyone can do it and I will be making these again at home. The same goes for the decadent starter, which could well make an appearance next Valentines Day.

One of the most appealing aspects of L'Atelier des Chefs is that you get to dine with your cohorts. You make the starter, then you all eat it together on a long communal table. Then you go back in the kitchen and cook the main course, eat that together and so on. You can also wash down your food with some delicious wines at a reasonable extra charge.

Our starter was an unctuous tower of glazed apple, watercress, boudin noir (sounds nicer than black pudding, doesn't it?) and pan fried foie gras. Not a bad way to begin.

The main was a crisp confit duck leg, on a bed of puy lentils with truffle-infused balsamic vinegar. The least interesting course but decidedly rustic.

The pudding was a verrine of citrus fruit with sabayon; the sabayon necessitating the use of a blow torch, which always livens up proceedings.

Finally (although we started making them before anything else, to allow chilling down time) came chocolate caramel truffles.

QUALITY OF EXPERIENCE

It was great to work so closely with a professional chef, who was surprisingly laid back and personable compared to what we are led, repeatedly, to believe some of his fellow star chefs are like. The tuition was informal, fun and inclusive – everyone got a chance to try their hand at parts of the prep and cooking.

To have the secrets of a perfectly globular, melt-in-the-mouth, cacao-dusted chocolate caramel truffle laid bare was a true eureka moment. I would never have previously entertained the idea of making truffles, or indeed caramel

Live Q&A with Jane MacQuitty: Fri, 1pm

DINNER TONIGHT

Monday: Roquefort tarts
Tuesday: dill and ginger chicken
Wednesday: roasted squash soup with sage
Thursday: quick French apple tarts
Friday: sweet and sour ribs with potatoes

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Downstairs is a cookshop which is perfect for lovers of "kitchen porn". You can buy any of the implements or gadgets used in the classes.

TOP TIPS

Use a stainless steel pan when making caramel. If you use a dark, non-stick pan, it will be very difficult to judge when the sugar has turned into the clear bronze slick that you're after.

With soft herbs like basil, start with the point of your knife beyond the pile of herbs and then slide the knife away from you through the leaves, using as much of the blade as possible. This way, no matter how delicate the herb, you'll cut it cleanly rather than crushing it.

Take the batteries out of your smoke alarm before you flambee apples in calvados, as it's a hot, smoky affair. Put the batteries back in after eating and before the calvados kicks in.

COURSE DETAILS

L'Atelier des Chefs run about 120 classes a month, covering a huge array of cookings styles from sushi to French classics to gastropub grub, vegetarian and many more.

The charging structure is essentially £36 per person per hour. L'Ateliers des Chefs courses are aimed at time-crunched Londoners, so you could spend just £18 on the half hour "Cook, Eat and Run", a creative and fun way to spend a lunch break with friends or colleagues and also on offer at the time of writing (2 people for the price of 1). The longest courses are 4 hours, including the Grande Cuisine Master Class, which comes in at £144 per person.

L'atelier des Chefs, 19 Wigmore Street, London W1U 1PH (020 7499 6580; <http://www.atelierdeschefs.co.uk/>)

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