

COUNTRY CUISINE

A French Bistro Cuisine That Genuinely Shines Bright Throughout the Seasons...

Café Les Baux

by Baron Corso de Palenzuela



Chef Hervé Bochart, owner of Café Les Baux, Millbrook, NY



Interior view of Café Les Baux, Millbrook, NY

photos: Baron Corso de Palenzuela

From the moment you enter Café Les Baux to the moment you depart you will feel enriched by the delights of French Bistro Cuisine as created by Chef Hervé Bochart. His many years of experience in prestigious French restaurants in his native France and in the US have refined his finesse for cooking game, beef, poultry, and fish with a distinctively French sensibility. This small charming eatery nicely tucked in on Church Street in Millbrook, NY is an irresistible and impressive gem. Neither bells nor whistles—just straightforward down-to-earth excellent cooking is what you'll find here in a very hospitable and cozy ambiance.

Since the restaurant opened five years ago in this beautiful town, Chef Bochart has been giving Millbrook a sit-down history lesson on the breadth of wholesome and authentic French Bistro Cuisine, to the great satisfaction of its loyal patrons and all who venture in to try the tasty food served here. As a frequent diner at Les Baux, I have found all the appetizers, entrées, and desserts refreshing, delicate, and properly prepared. As always, once I was seated at my table by my waitress, Jill Benchice, I knew I was in for a real treat. The wonderful aromas emanating from the kitchen are inviting. And the wait staff is friendly, quick, and competent, making dining a real pleasure.

It's hard to pass up meals that Chef Bochart serves, because they consist of favorite French classics that have withstood the tests of time: they are known for their unique flavors and true authenticity. Real culinary magic is at work in the kitchen at Café Les Baux. All meals begin with baked French bread and a plate of Niçoise olives. One of the tantalizing appetizers is the Escargot au Pernod: Six large snails, individually housed in plate sockets, are well-seasoned and dressed in a tasty Pernod wine and butter sauce, creating an immediately wonderful sensation on the palate. Fresh and luscious escargot of this caliber should be enjoyed with a house Chablis or Chardonnay. Another classic starter dish is the Moules Marinières: This dish is served in a deep bowl with a bountiful amount of fresh and tender mussels, which are laced in a *brodo* of wine, parsley, shallots, scallions, and herbs, so delicious you'll want to lift the bowl up to your lips to sip that

savory broth to the last drop. The kind of cooking coming from Chef Bochart's kitchen is textbook perfect.

If you prefer lighter fare Les Baux has a tried and true French Gratinéed Onion Soup—another classic of French Bistro Cuisine. This soup is wonderfully prepared with all the necessary ingredients to awaken the lifeless and warm up the spirit, especially on a cold wintry day: It begins with a soulful concoction of beef and vegetables broth, to which is added a blend of sautéed onions, a little butter and mustard, gratinéed Gruyère cheese, and croutons, all oven-heated to become the delicious classic soup.

Another favorite is the hearty Croque Monsieur: a hot sandwich of ham and melted Swiss Gruyère on lightly buttered special homemade bread. It comes served with French fries or green salad. This sandwich has been called the King of Bistro Cuisine, and it packs a hearty punch. Try it with the good German Bit-burger beer. Les Baux also features the queen of all pressed French sandwiches: the Croque Madame on toasty bread, with creamy béchamel, paper-thin slices of ham, and crusty and overwhelmingly melted Gruyère. The Madame is crowned with her traditional fried egg. It also comes accompanied by green salad or French fries.

Café Les Baux also offers really fresh fish and seafood dishes, which can be found listed on the blackboard menu. Try the fresh daily specials of either Trout, Grouper, Salmon, Cod, Monkfish, and other fish, which are served with delicious sides throughout the week. Just bring along an appetite big enough to nourish your lust for great healthy eating.

There is a rich inner life for French cuisine that flows from the kitchen of Chef Bochart through the small friendly bar to suffuse the dining areas with a feeling of true bistro buzz. Dine in any of the two dining rooms, which explode with a cherished warm gentility, and you know why this bistro is so inviting. The rooms are painted in a warm rust hue with wainscoting, and the windows are adorned with attractive saffron-colored linen curtains. Impressionistic paintings hang throughout the eatery depicting French café society. Booths and tables are comfort-

ably appointed and beautifully set with white linen tablecloths. Each room has a seating capacity for about twenty, with overall capacity about forty. The small bar area has seating for about six.

My dinner entrée recently was a Steak Frites: the tender and juicy sirloin was not only succulent but sublime. The steak was perfectly grilled on top and bottom, and tastefully caramelized and crispy around the edges. When I bit into it, it had a pink, juicy cooked interior overflowing with great flavor. The Steak Frites is served with Green Peppercorn Sauce on the side and a mountain of crispy French fries and salad. Les Baux also prepares a fabulous Carré d'Agneau. Here is a favorite dish that is often served on holidays and other festive occasions throughout France. The tender eight-chop, medium-sized rack of lamb, prepared by Chef Bochard, is beautifully presented with garnishes; it is cooked medium-rare in a tasty mustard-wine sauce, and served with Potatoes au Gratin and Haricots Verts. Try this super-delicious entrée accompanied by a Pinot Noir or a Red Burgundy.

Café Les Baux offers a small but impressive selection of French wines from various appellations, such as Chateau Puy Blanquet, Bordeaux 2001. Here is a great wine that goes well with beef and game, and the Pully Fuisse 2005 is an excellent accompaniment with seafood and fish. The restaurant also has a smart selection of international wine names, such as an Argentinian Pascual Malbec and a Chilean Mont Gras, Merlot or Carmanère. If you prefer beer, try a Kronenburg, a light-bodied beer from France. Or the Bitburger lager from Germany with a soft-ened hop flavor is smooth and refreshing. Both beers are excellent with a tasty Salade Niçoise with Grilled Fresh Tuna, or The Beef Burger (Steak Haché), a truly sizable, mouthwatering, and juicy meal, any way you want it, with lots of fries.

The enticing dessert menu at Les Baux features typical French fare. I ended my meal with the classic Tarte Tatin, a sweet and luscious memorable treat "to die for," so unbelievably delicious that upon finishing what I had on my plate I immediately wanted more. The Crème Brûlée, another classic from France, is a rich creamy dessert with a caramelized crusty top that can be enjoyed with endless cups of French espresso coffee.

Café Les Baux is a place in the Hudson Valley to experience a culinary facet of a grand culture that has given so much to the world of gastronomy. Considered by locals as their premier eatery in the area for top quality and original French Bistro Cuisine, Chef Hervé Bochard's classic dishes can be enjoyed in cozy, genteel surroundings. Les Baux may be a small restaurant with a small staff, but it is big on flavors. And what makes dining at Les Baux so enjoyable is greatly due to the culinary savoir faire of Chef Bochard and his deep understanding of French

gastronomy. The enormous talent he has and his passion for the delectable food he cooks will always delight us. Those of us who venture to Les Baux bistro in Millbrook will reap a harvest of warm hospitality, delicious food, and great wine.

Café Les Baux is located at 152 Church Street, Millbrook, NY. It is open for lunch and dinners Saturdays and Sundays from 11:30 to midnight, Wednesdays through Mondays from 12 to 10 pm and closed Tuesdays. For reservations or more information, call 845 677-8166.

Rating ****

Baron Corso de Palenzuela is an international food, wine, beer, and chocolate critic, a chef and connoisseur who has written extensively on international wine and cuisine. He travels both abroad and in the US seeking new culinary experiences. He resides in New York, Virginia, and Spain, and can be reached at 845 706-1244.



Exterior of Café Les Baux, a classic French bistro on Church Street, Millbrook, NY



Moules Marinière at Café Les Baux, Millbrook, NY



Bar at Les Baux, Millbrook, NY

photos: Baron Corso de Palenzuela