

**July 2009**

## *Le Bon Goût*

### **Les Cocottes**

135, rue Saint-Dominique  
 75007 Paris

Tel.: no telephone (reservations not taken)

Métro station: Ecole Militaire (Line 8)

Name of chef: Philippe Cadeau

Type of cuisine: French and Basque

Days & hours of operation: Mon to

Sat 12 noon to 2:30 p.m. (open ½ hour longer for lunch on Fri and Sat) and 7:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. (open ½ hour longer for dinner on Sat).

Closed on Sundays and Christmas day.

Web site address: [www.lescocottesdeconstant.com](http://www.lescocottesdeconstant.com)

Credit cards accepted: Visa, MC

Price ranges - Tax and service included

Aperitif: Cerdon de Bugey – 7€

Starters: 7€- 12€

Mains: 12€- 25€

Cheese plate: Fromage Basque – 6€

Desserts: 6€- 9€

Set lunch: none

Set supper: none

Lowest price wine: red – 12€ for a *fillette* (50cl); white – 16€ for a *fillette* (50cl); wine by the glass – 3€- 5€



**Chefs Philippe Cadeau (left) and Christian Constant (right)**

Christian Constant, Michelin-star chef and owner of four acclaimed restaurants on rue Saint-Dominique, fondly remembers his mother's cooking. Perched atop one of the tall chairs that punctuate the dining area of Les Cocottes, he recently told us that it was she who taught him the traditions of southwestern French cooking in the kitchen of their home in the town of Montauban. From the age of around 8 years, he knew that he wanted to enter into the culinary profession. And because his parents insisted that he take violin, he incorporated the instrument into this childhood dream, deciding that one day he would call his restaurant "Le Violin d'Ingres." (Born in the same town as Constant, France's illustrious 19<sup>th</sup> century painter Jean-August-Dominique Ingres also had a passion for the violin. The French colloquialism "Le Violin d'Ingres" has come to mean "second calling.")

At the age of 14, Constant began working in a restaurant that was also a catering establishment and a delicatessen shop. There, he learned how to make *pâté en croûte* (a meat, game, or fish cooked in a crust), *vol au vent* (a light pastry shell filled with meat or fish), and *boudin de foie gras* (foie gras sausage). This latter dish he remembers fondly because it was specially prepared for the Christmas season and flavored with saffron.

Mr. Constant never took formal culinary training at a cooking school. Rather, he worked his way up the gastronomic ladder at many of the top restaurants in Paris: Ledoyen (where he started at the very bottom rung), Chez Les Anges, The Ritz, and Les Ambassadeurs. At this latter establishment, he worked as executive chef for eight years. By the age of 45, he decided that it was time to strike out on his own, and he opened his first restaurant, Le Violon d'Ingres, on rue Saint-Dominique.

As time went by, opportunities presented themselves to open more restaurants on the same block, when proprietors of shops or restaurants in the neighborhood retired from their businesses. Constant now oversees an "empire" of four restaurants, all within a few hundred yards of each other. Each restaurant has its own personality, with Le Violon d'Ingres operating as a deluxe *brasserie* (it currently has one Michelin star); Les Fables de la Fontaine, which specializes in fish dishes; Café Constant, which serves traditional *bistrot* cuisine; and Les Cocottes, which, according to Constant, serves "*la bonne cuisine française rapide*" (good French food, served quickly).

Les Cocottes is not a restaurant intended for diners who wish to linger over a meal in eternal conversation. Instead, it is designed for parties of two or three who wish to be served quickly, eat well, and be on their way. Thus, the restaurant is dominated by a long bar, complete with stools, where customers place their orders and are served. There is also dining at tables along the side wall, where customers sit on tall chairs.

Whereas the concept of Les Cocottes encourages people to dine quickly, the food served here is of unimpeachable quality. During a recent dinner there, I ordered a starter consisting of rocket salad. Without being asked, the waitress graciously provided an extra plate so that I could share the salad with my partner, who had declined to order an *entrée*. For the main course, I ordered the *pièce d'agneau de lait rôti, légumes de printanier* consisting of tender cuts of lamb, including liver and kidney, served in a casserole with sliced red bell pepper, peas, string beans, baby carrots, white onion, parsley, artichoke heart, and turnip, all in gravy. My partner ordered *fricassée de volaille, asperges et morilles*, composed of stewed chicken in a frothy sauce served in a casserole with asparagus, parsley, morel, and green peas. Both dishes were served in Staub casseroles that were attached to individual, magnetized wooden boards to prevent slipping. (The wooden boards permitted the waitress to serve the piping hot casseroles without getting burned.) We were delighted with the presentation, the quality, and flavor of these dishes and, for the rest of the evening, had difficulty imagining why we would ever want to dine anywhere else!

Thin-sliced country bread and baguette were served in a basket. We ate these with Ligurito Olio Extra Vergine di Oliva, an extra-virgin Italian olive oil that was served alongside in a bottle.

To accompany our meal we ordered a *fillette* of Gigondas, a red wine from the Rhône valley. Constant told us that his wines are supplied by Cave Augé, a wine merchant that has been based in Paris since 1850. The wines that he serves by the glass or by the *fillette* at Les Cocottes are packaged in a plastic bag that is seated inside a fiberboard box (popularly called a bag-in-box, or BIB). Mr. Constant asserts that customers are pleased with the quality of these wines and that the box format permits him to stock his wines easily and to pass on the lower cost to his customers. (He even serves these wines to guests at his home!) He declares that only the best wines need be stored in and served out of bottles, whereas wines that are consumed quickly – as is the case in his restaurant where he serves up to 200 persons a day – can benefit from the less-expensive storage format.

For dessert, I ordered the *fromage basque, confiture de cerises noires*, a firm, mild cheese, sliced thin and served with black cherry jam. It was initially disconcerting for me, an American who is used to ordering chocolate for dessert, to order cheese, but the black cherry jam promised to give the cheese an offsetting sweetness. It proved to be a delicious indulgence at the end of a fine meal. My partner ordered the *crumble pomme/poire* (apple and pear crumble) accompanied by a glass of Grenache, a spicy, berry-flavored wine soft on the palate.

The service was friendly and efficient.

The bill for two came to 109.50€

The restaurant is long and narrow with a floor consisting of smooth, light-colored, wooden planks. Seating is at high tables and at the bar, for which the stools have cushioned seats and backs. A cream-colored ceiling, sandy-colored walls, and a stone wall behind the bar impart a subdued effect to the dining room. Behind the bar stand shelves displaying Christian Constant cookbooks, bottles and boxes of wine, and Staub cookware.

Reservations are not taken here. We arrived shortly after the restaurant opened and were seated immediately. By 8:00 p.m. the restaurant was full of happy diners.