



ONE-STOP STEAKHOUSE

LE RELAIS DE L'ENTRECÔTE ON THE MARINA WALK IN DUBAI'S FESTIVAL CITY SWEARS BY ITS REPUTATION OF A 'SECRET SAUCE' SPICING UP ITS ONLY MAIN COURSE OFFERING — THE STEAK, THAT IT SERVES WITH APLOMB

BY BRIAN SALTER

ANYONE WHO has lived in Dubai for more than a year very quickly discovers that the popularity of venues seems to ebb and flow with the tide. One moment the 'in' place to eat may be at JBR; the next it could be at Souk al Bahar. Right now, though, one of the hottest places to eat in town is along the Marina Walk at Dubai's Festival City.

Here you will find a veritable plethora of restaurants, some of them very new indeed. And one that is fast making a name for itself is Le Relais de L'Entrecôte — a French res-

taurant that has only one choice on its main menu: its unique steak fillet served with French fries and its famous 'secret' sauce, together with a salad.

The moment you enter the premises — reminiscent of a classic Parisian bistro with brass fittings, frosted glass windows, colourful tablecloths, dark-wood furniture and classic French advertisements framed on the walls — you are warmly greeted by a bevy of smart and friendly Filipina waitresses. Their French may be limited to

What we liked: Excellent service; good décor; great washrooms

What we didn't like:

No choice of first course

Price per person: Dh200

Contact: Le Relais de L'Entrecôte, Festival City Centre, Dubai, 04-2325444

end of the meal did the menu offer some choice, from a dessert list of fruit pastries, profiteroles, and other confections consisting mainly of ice cream, chocolate sauce, meringue, and whipped cream.

Despite serving only one main dish and offering a very limited selection of wines, the restaurant flourished. It became a Paris institution, whose patrons typically referred to it as 'L'Entrecôte', or 'L'Entrecôte Porte-Maillot'.

Le Relais de l'Entrecôte has now spread its wings and can be found in three locations in Paris, one in Geneva and in five additional locations operating under licence — three in Beirut, one in Kuwait City and one in Doha. Others are soon to open in Bahrain, Riyadh and Jeddah.

For starters, you get a green salad of lettuce topped with walnuts drizzled with a Dijon mustard vinaigrette sauce. My companion, who realised too late in the day that they only serve beef — something she does not enjoy — was given a double sized salad to chomp through. We both were amazed that something as 'simple' as a salad could taste so good.

Then came the main course. A 180gm fillet steak from New Zealand, cut into seven slices — the first four served straight away with French fries, and the remainder kept warm on candles and served to you when you are ready for more. The steak simply melted on the tongue. Very good indeed.

The restaurant is proud of its finely-cut fries, although I personally would have preferred it had they offered a 'fat-cut' option that is now becoming more popular in Europe.

Le Relais makes great

play of its secret recipe butter sauce that is glooped over the steak, tantalising its patrons to see if they can guess what goes into it. "Even we do not know," we were told more than once (it is flown in ready-prepared from Switzerland), although the Parisian newspaper *Le Monde* reported that it is made from chicken livers, fresh thyme and thyme flowers, full cream, white Dijon mustard, butter and water, plus salt and pepper. The Parisian HQ, however, has dismissed the *Le Monde* report as inaccurate.

The dessert menu has pictures of each of its of-

ferings to help you make up your mind what to choose. My companion had *Sévigné* — chocolate cake with vanilla ice cream, hot chocolate sauce and whipped cream — while I plumped for the *Vacherin du Relais*, consisting of three meringues, praline, ice cream, hot chocolate sauce and whipped cream made up into a tower that almost demanded you have a degree in civil engineering to be able to work out how to dismantle it. Luckily one of the Filipina waitresses came to the rescue and suggested a route map for its demolition. Many is the time, she told me, that gung-ho diners stab at the dessert and end up with a lapful of chocolate, or at the very least see the tower collapse into a pile on the table! Her instructions were spot on and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

I think the Group's motto sums it up: *Nous vous y attendons; vous y reviendrez*. Or to put it another way: We will serve you and you will want to return.

Absolutely!

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A BIG PLAY IS MADE OF THE SAUCE THAT IS GLOOPEO OVER THE STEAK, TANTALISING ITS PATRONS TO SEE IF THEY CAN GUESS WHAT GOES INTO IT



a well-rehearsed 'bonjour / bon soir / comment ça va?', but their service is immaculate. Here is a restaurant that obviously believes in training its staff well, and the results are impressive.

In 1959, Paul Gineste de Sours purchased an Italian restaurant in the 17th arrondissement of Paris, near Porte Maillot. He wanted to establish an assured market for the wines produced by his family's vineyards 50 kilometres northeast of Toulouse. In place of the previous Italian menu, he decided that the restaurant would offer the traditional French bistro meal of steak-frites as its only main dish, with no other option. Where most restaurants served steak-frites with herbed butter, Le Relais instead served the dish with a complex butter-based sauce. Not until the