

A recommendation had brought us to Broughty Ferry where we parked the car on the esplanade and wandered up Gray Street with its eclectic collection of pubs, art galleries and tanning centre to the canopied French restaurant near the top of the street. Café Montmartre is a very unpretentious-looking place, small and rather cheesily decorated. The Gallic theme is somewhat overstated; a throaty chanteuse trills in the background and white, rough plastered walls are decorated with those garish, mass-produced prints you can buy by the bushel for a few francs on the streets of Paris – the Moulin Rouge in the rain, a blurry Eiffel Tower.

However, while such decor might bring a smirk to sophisticates' faces, the effect is actually quite jolly, certainly different enough from the calculated tastefulness of so-called style bars to invoke a welcome sense of quaint charm. The menu, which is surprisingly extensive for such a small establishment, is not classical or rustic French but rather a good rendition of bistro cuisine.

As first arrivals on a Tuesday evening for a 7pm booking, we were shown into a tiny table for two in the top right hand corner. Three teenage daughters with their mum came in and were placed in the table next to us. I wondered why diners were not seated with more space and comfort on what would surely be a quiet mid-week evening, until such an expectation was confounded by the steady stream of customers who poured through the door over the next hour, quickly filling every single seat.

Run by husband and wife team Thierry and Anne Haddanou, Café Montmartre is very popular locally and worth even an extensive detour; by the end of the evening we certainly had no cause to regret our three-hour round trip. Open only for dinner from Monday to Saturday, it is definitely advisable to book. Anne is an accomplished chef while Thierry is an amiable front-of-house presence. A stunning, tall, French girl was waiting tables, but we were served by a local lass. The ravishing mademoiselle attended the family next to us, thus confirming an oft-recited, totally absurd theory of Robin's. "You see!" he declared triumphantly. He reckons management don't let gorgeous girls serve couples, in case the male flirts outrageously with the waitress, thus spoiling his girlfriend/wife's meal. I reckon that's tosh. It would take more than the sight of a goddess bearing bread rolls to kill my appetite and, frankly, if my darling thinks a waitress is fluttering

her eyelashes at him for any reason other than the desire for a tasty tip, then the poor, sad fool is simply to be pitied.

The menu gave us great pause; we were genuinely foxed by a delectable choice of starters. I hummed and hawed endlessly over oven-baked snails with shallots, fresh mussels, marinated goat's cheese and mushroom and asparagus vol au vents, sending the waitress away no less than three times before finally ending my drama of indecision. Forsaking petits pois, I opted for soupe de poissons (£5.95).

This arrived in a bowl the size of a tureen and was quite a feast, accompanied with crunchy croutons and a little dish of creamy rouille. The fish wasn't very chunky but it was a rich, thick broth with a deliciously mustardy tang.

A crêpe stuffed with salmon and bechamel and then baked in cheese (£5.95) was also tasty and frighteningly filling.

A North African influence announced itself in the main courses, with a couscous section alongside more traditional fish, poultry and steak selections. I was intrigued by *Couscous Royale* (£11.95) and wasn't disappointed. Perfectly steamed, fluffy couscous is accompanied by two homemade merguez, chargrilled chicken on skewers and a small but tender lamb cutlet. The meal arrives with a large sidebowl of vegetable bouillon and a side dish of harissa – a light chilli sauce. It's a fabulous dish.

Assiette de poissons Bascquaise (£11.75) was a striking, huge platter of monkfish, mussels and salmon cooked in wine and doused in the most vibrant saffron sauce – a meal which, thankfully, tasted subtler than it looked. We really didn't think we were up to the challenge of the dessert menu, but after

travelling so far we reckoned it would be churlish to refrain and I settled for a *crème brûlée* (£4.25). This was a classic version of my favourite dessert; a little pot of incredibly creamy vanilla appeared, topped by a crackling caramel topping, the burnt sugar aroma evoking memories of funfairs and toffee apples. A meringue sponge cake with apricot mousse in raspberry coulis (£4.25) was a spectacular creation, the massive slab of cake nestling in a two-tone slick of sauce,



LESLEY DONALD

the apricot mousse a smooth rejoinder to the incredibly tart coulis. The restaurant was now ringing with the lively, happy chat of the well-fed and although we had cleaned our plates we were reluctant to leave.

● **Café Montmartre, 98 Gray Street, Broughty Ferry** (tel 01382 739313). Three-course dinner for two, with wine (there's a wide price range of exclusively French wine, with house white and red from £9.95) approx £55. Smoking. No pipes or cigars.