

Good Old Days

With a Solid Menu, Le Périgord Recalls Heyday of French Cuisine in New York

Summer has descended upon New York. This means restaurant choices become limited and something of a crapshoot. Outdoor cafés and al fresco gardens are especially tempting this time of year, but often serve poor quality fare. Hot weather influences many restaurants to close for vacation, and business doldrums in general cause numerous permanent casualties. Consequently, the annual summer fallout results in slim and chancy pickings.



**SHELDON
LANDWEHR**

Be that as it may, I am tickled pink to report that this season the respected French restaurant Le Périgord remains open throughout the entire summer for weekday lunch and dinner as well as weekend dinners. Owned and nurtured by Georges Briguet, this welcoming, highly acclaimed restaurant by all rights should be wrapped in pomp and circumstance.

Despite its Midtown East location, its sophisticated French cuisine and its lineage, Le Périgord offers a refreshing, quietly dignified approach to dining out that makes it one of the most reliable restaurants in Manhattan. Given the quality of its special warm-weather menu choices, efficient servers and upbeat atmosphere, one wishes it was located in a city where warm days abound year-round.

Le Périgord makes its home in a luxury apartment building. Its elegant environment is fundamentally calm and relaxing, the surroundings assembled with shaded wall sconces shedding soft light in the formal dining room. Well-spaced tables may reduce intimacy but add to the ambience. They are smartly shown off sheathed in spotless, starched white cloths and are set with lightly scented fresh roses and sparkling stemware. Oversized booth banquettes, surprisingly comfortable upholstered French chairs, padded carpeting and a cold buffet station tempting with fresh morsels of shrimp, whitefish, asparagus, celery root and more, make for an all-around equitable milieu.

Each week during summer, Le Périgord's bill of fare emphasizes correctly seasoned, silky textured cold soups: tomato and melon, gazpacho, sweet pea, creamy vichyssoise and the

Le Périgord
405 E. 52nd St.
(at First Avenue)
212-755-6244
www.leperigord.com

Three-course summer lunch, \$20;
dinner, \$30

★★★ (out of four)

like. A more than satisfying cluster of refined and earthy appetizers and cool crisp salads presage the delights to come. Abundant catches of the freshest fish are flown in from Europe.

Main courses entice dog-day palates with creative recipes utilizing John Dory, turbot, Dover sole and dorado, along with New England lobsters prepared out of the shell in inventively gratifying concoctions. Menu highlights offer signature dishes such as the much recognized beef Wellington, the skillful roasted chicken and the kitchen's elaborate prized duck. In deference to the season, the chef gives preference to requests for vegetarian meals.

Given the quality of meals here, desserts easily could be anticlimactic. Instead they satisfy without dazzling. Light, delicate chocolate soufflés win raves and so do most of the cakes, tarts and exhilarating fruits.

For such a chic restaurant, the wine list is predictably extensive, heavy with classic French vintages and champagnes with many offered by the glass.



Summertime Charm: At popular Périgord

In addition, the list of after-dinner drinks is likewise exceedingly large.

Le Périgord is reminiscent of the good old days of fine dining. Carefully prepared food with French underpinnings, including good-looking presentations in an inviting high-end climate make this a winning alternative to suffocating afternoons or evenings in haughtier city joints or second-class summer mediocrities. ■

Sheldon Landwehr is the senior dining critic of New York Resident. Please send responses to features editor Sara Bonisteel at sarab@resident.com.