

La Vie En Rose at FRENCHIE

WINE BISTRO

BY LINDSAY MAHER
PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAZZ MARTIN

Mussels
in a white
wine broth



I have to be honest. When someone mentions French food, I think escargots, aged cheese and dishes ultimately too fancy for my palate. I spent high school learning the language, trying to understand the culture, still never swaying from my initial opinion of the country's cuisine. Fast forward five years to me wondering whether my dress was "nice" enough for a dinner at Frenchie Wine Bistro, a South End establishment that just celebrated its one-year anniversary.

Frenchie is nestled into the lower level of a brownstone building on Tremont Street, inviting with its name set in a white neon sign. My friends and I sought quick shelter from the blustery evening, and were immediately taken by the warmth of the cleanly decorated space, a minimalistic Parisian approach. Light wood tables stretch the length of the restaurant on one side, finished with a vase of vivid pink flowers, and on the other stands a bamboo bar that seamlessly becomes the chef's station. *In Vito Veritas* hangs in luminescence between wall mirrors that expand the feel of the room. I didn't need a sip of wine to begin gushing over how relaxed I already felt. A little goes a long way, they say, and they were absolutely right.

We were led to a corner booth that wrapped around the back wall, covered in floral wallpaper, and looking into the enclosed patio strung up with lights. That ease filled the rhythm of Frenchie, from the humorous banter between staff members as they waited for guests' dishes to the kind reception we received from our hosts, who welcomed us into the fold like old friends. Our server, Marcus, guided us through the menu, offering his opinions on favored meals and engaging with us about our common bond: a love for good food.

Our first course was a charcuterie board piled elegantly with fennel salami, Serrano ham, triple play cheese, buffarolo cheese and small slices of crunchy bread. We three split a bottle of champagne, the bubbly enhancing the beautifully sharp, lightly herbed and entirely divine pairings of meat and cheese. Triple play cheese is a unique blend of cow, sheep and goat cheeses; in other words, a creamy delicacy that I could have eaten the whole of.

It was a night of new experiences for sure. Our table decided to share a plate of mussels and the baby kale salad next, whose flavors I really enjoyed together. Butternut squash, pomegranate seeds and pumpkin seeds were alight with maple Dijon dressing, reminding me that salad is good. Scratch that: it's great. Recently, I've been on a mission to try more seafood, and the mussels, swimming in white wine broth and chorizio, were smooth and hinted at notes of savory sweetness.



Cheese and
charcuterie
board





Baby kale salad



Cheese and charcuterie board



Salt Encrusted Branzino



Hamburger Frites

We found co-owners Loic Le Garrec and Sandrine Rossi bustling around in between our courses, sipping a 2014 Medoc, whose wine Sandrine's family owns half of. They were seating guests, hanging up coats and ensuring that everyone was satisfied and taken care of. It's clear that Frenchie is their baby, a place they have worked hard to raise and allow it to stand on its own successful two feet. They were all smiles and laughs as they discussed their labor of love, humble in the midst of evident achievement.

Both Loic and Sandrine were raised in Paris, Loic a longtime member of the restaurant industry and Sandrine a longtime adorer of the French culture. Loic arrived in Los Angeles at 22 years old, eventually moving to Boston and opening his first restaurant, Le Petit Robert, in 2003. He had dreams to open a sister restaurant, and found himself competing for the space against Sandrine. Sandrine moved to Boston four years ago with her husband, who began working for a startup in the city. She was initially an engineer, then became increasingly interested in paying homage to her heritage and had hopes to open a restaurant of her own. The two were caught in battle, until the realtor suggested they meet. What came next was a shared dream, an ambitious partnership and, today, a neighborhood favorite.

It's easy to see why South End locals have been so excited by Frenchie, and as our entrees were brought to the table, I swore to my friends, glasses held high, that we'd be back again for this little nook of treasures. We picked at every plate, swooning over the mingled aromas of their hamburger and frites, boneless chicken and salt encrusted branzino. The meats were tender, the burger gracefully piled with cheese and housemade dressing, the chicken crisp and giving way to a smoky flavor, the branzino masterfully skinned by Marcus and simply delicious in its single ingredient—salt.

Despite how full we were, we were treating ourselves and had to try the dessert. We split the crème brûlée, the chocolate croissant pudding and, at Marcus's urging, the poached pear. The crème brûlée was so fluffy, a light pillow of custard that wasn't too sweet and had me wanting to lick the plate clean. I was intrigued by the chocolate croissant pudding for its name, but devoured its rich cake, slightly bitter chocolate sauce and sweet homemade vanilla ice cream that made the pair dynamic. And the poached pear, to me, tasted like winter: warm, spiced, blended with fromage blanc.

Despite the crowd that had amassed, we still felt like the only three there. The murmur of conversations and quiet jazz music kept us in the arms of relaxation, lulling us into a (stuffed) reverie that, to me, suddenly felt very French: casual, cool, content in hours spent among friends, among the comforts of locals all latching onto Frenchie's laidback approach.

"Thank you for believing in us!" Sandrine said to us on her way out. We are believers, but none of the responsibility lies with us. It's all on Loic and Sandrine, whose refreshing environment and clear devotion to their craft have put them on the Hotspot Radar already.



Poached Pear



Crème Brûlée