

A Taste of Modern Europe

Text: Fransje van Riel
Image © Le Caprice



It's Friday lunchtime and busy at Le Caprice. But then, it always is.

I've been coming to this delightful restaurant for about 20 years, albeit with several long years in between each visit (with the most recent being just before its refurbishment in 2011). Glancing over the long, sweeping black bar and modern black and white art-deco-reminiscent interior, I am happy to note that its unique ambience has been fully retained.

Le Caprice has been one of London's most consistently successful eateries since its opening in 1981, and that's saying a lot in a place where beautiful restaurants are a dime a dozen.

Serving a mixture of modern British and European cuisine, Le Caprice has always been known for attracting an affluent clientele. Frequented by celebrities, businessmen, entrepreneurs, and, of course, ladies who lunch, the venue is still going strong 34 years on.

The interior consists of brasserie-style chairs arranged around white-clothed tables that provide the canvas for some really great food, while the walls are decorated with original framed images by legendary British photographer David Bailey.

Part of the Caprice Holdings Group, which also boasts restaurants such as Daphne's and Scott's, Le Caprice is open all day from 12h00 on weekdays

and Saturdays, and offers Sunday brunch from 11h30 and Sunday dinner from 17h30. There is à la carte and bar dining, as well as a set menu for pre- and post-theatre dining, served from 17h00 to 18h30 and again after 22h15.

And on top of that, it has a completely separate vegetarian menu.

We decide to start with a glass of Champagne. As we sip the French bubbles, our waiter returns bearing menus offering familiar dishes such as a burger with club sauce, dill pickle and *pommes allumettes* (matchstick chips), as well as the more exotic. Think roast guinea fowl served with spring peas, lovage and sautéed morels. And, despite the frequently changing menu, there's always the much-loved Thai-baked sea bass with fragrant rice.

Studying the vegetarian menu, my eyes quickly skim over the starters. A few years ago, after tasting a spoonful of the most delicious soup my niece had ordered, I decided there and then that, on my next visit to Le Caprice, I would have soup as my first course.

Then for mains...decisions, decisions. The problem with being a vegetarian at Le Caprice is not that there are too few dishes to choose from (which is generally the case in most other restaurants), but almost too many. The homemade ravioli

sounds delicious, but then so does the Treviso salad with artichoke, blood oranges and *fior de latte* (mozzarella). Nibbling on crusty French bread, it is with some lingering indecision that I eventually opt for the latter, along with a glass of Sauvignon Blanc.

Le Caprice's director, Jesus Adorno, arrives at our table to enquire if all is in order. With that level of personal attention, it is not surprising that he has been awarded the honour of Best Front of House by GQ Food and Drink Awards.

Our starters arrive. The first mouthful of the cauliflower and truffle soup has me convinced that Le Caprice serves the best soup in the world. Scatterings of shaved truffle provide a luxurious flavour without being overwhelming. And considering the very reasonable price tag, it is a most generous portion.

Head Chef Andrew Mclay's salad is impressive too. The textures of the various ingredients are perfectly matched.

After somewhat reluctantly waiving dessert and opting for just coffee, our verdict is out. With its chic Mayfair location, elegant character, unsurpassed level of service, and really great food, Le Caprice remains one of London's most stalwart restaurants *par excellence*.

For more information visit www.le-caprice.co.uk. ■