

LIFE IN THE F.A.B. LANE

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

The word *brasserie* actually means brewery, but it's come to mean a French restaurant—often a big, bustling place with fresh shellfish stands outside—that serves beer and wine, plus food. In Paris, it seems there's a *brasserie* on every block, but Atlanta has been without one since *Brasserie Le Coze* at Lenox Square closed to accommodate the Neiman Marcus expansion. That void in Atlanta's dining scene has been filled once again by Fabrice Vergez with the opening of F.A.B., an acronym for French American Brasserie, in the Southern Company building.

Step inside F.A.B., and you may feel like you've left Atlanta. In the main dining room, huge windows draped in white lace and red velvet visually break up white walls. White linens pop against dark wood tables; mirrored walls separate booths and crystal chandeliers cast warm light. The spacious room had me feeling *déjà vu*—I was reminded of the grand *Café de la Paix*, where I once relished a truly fabulous dinner in Paris—until I looked up at the ceiling. Neither gilded in gold nor adorned with painted murals of angels floating among clouds, the ceiling at F.A.B. is white, save a large lighted cut-glass panel near the bar. A row of what looks like streetlights creates a sense of the outdoors even while inside. Up a grand spiral staircase to the second floor, the décor transitions into something a tad more informal with black-and-white photos of old-time movie stars on the walls, and lace curtains on café rods across the bottom half of windows that offer a better-than-street-level view. Up another floor, the walls are covered with framed retro French-themed posters. Then it struck me: F.A.B. is French in the way that *Cracker Barrel* is American. It is, but in a kitschy, theme-specific way.

While F.A.B. was under construction, Executive Chef Kaighn Raymond, a Culinary Institute of America graduate with more than 12 years of experience in Atlanta restaurants, trained under Chef Eric Ripert at *Le Bernardin*, an internationally acclaimed four-star seafood restaurant in New York City. The result for F.A.B. is a menu that features favorites



Escargots à la bourguignonne

PHOTOS/SPARK ST. JUDE

from *Brasserie Le Coze* alongside new dishes.

On a recent Wednesday, after fighting basketball traffic on the connector, getting a table at 6:30 p.m. was a snap. The room filled as the evening progressed.

Though author Mireille Guiliano contends that French women don't get fat, dieters are cautioned against trusting that all menu offerings at F.A.B. might help them stay thin. Butter is a key ingredient in most dishes, and large serving sizes are definitely American.

Bread is a way of life for the French, and so it should come as no real surprise that hard rolls are the first item delivered to the table. Bread refills are free and readily available, an offering that's increasingly rare in better restaurants. Butter is also free, but there's no complimentary specialty-of-the-house bread topping; rather, a variety of options from garlic confit to salmon rillettes is available for \$2 to \$8.

French accent, must have an incurable sweet tooth. Based upon his recommendations, we ordered the butternut squash soup du jour and the butternut squash gnocchi. I've enjoyed chocolate desserts with less sugar. The soup tasted like pumpkin-pie filling. The gnocchi itself was a nice al dente, but the dish seemed coated in cinnamon sugar. To be fair, although I was unable to finish either dish, my husband slurped them down with glee.

My favorite selection was escargots à la bourguignonne. This classic dish with earthy flavor was prepared to perfection. The tender and flaky sautéed skate wing



Profiteroles with pistachio ice cream, toasted pistachios and bittersweet chocolate

Our server, a friendly fellow with a

DINING ESSENTIALS

FRENCH AMERICAN BRASSERIE

30 Ivan Allen Jr. Boulevard
404-266-1440
www.fabatlanta.com

Hours: Mon.–Thu., 11:30 a.m.–10 p.m.;
Fri.–Sat., 11:30 a.m.–11 p.m.

Reservations: Accepted by phone and online form; also accept walk-ins

Dress Code: Business casual

Cuisine: French American

Alcohol: Full bar

Cost: Entrées \$12 to \$42

Credit Cards: All major

Outdoor Seating: Patio

Parking: Valet for \$5

and moist and juicy chicken in the *coq au vin* proved that meat, whether from land or sea, is in good hands in this kitchen. Both dishes greet the palate with a complex blend of flavors. The skate was topped with capers that offered a hint of sour, while a side of spinach added a bitter note. The *coq au vin* picked up a fruity flavor from the wine in its base and saltiness from the bacon.

Topped with pistachio ice cream, toasted pistachios and bittersweet chocolate sauce, the profiteroles are any pistachio lover's dream. The tangy Meyer lemon crêpe accompanied by pomegranate tapioca and pine nuts is a refreshing, bright finish to a rich meal.

The menu at F.A.B. may not boast the sort of contemporary dishes that you may find in Paris, but its traditional French dishes may satisfy a craving when a flight overseas isn't an option. **SP**