



DINING
Restaurants

WHERE'S THE BEST BEEF IN PARIS?

By Alexander Lobrano

The French have always loved beef, so it's not surprising American-style steakhouse restaurants are suddenly taking Paris by storm. Parisians almost invariably come to the table as demanding connoisseurs, however, so the meat-and-potatoes formula that works a charm in the U.S. or the U.K. often has to be tweaked to suit French tastes. When it comes to a meaty feast in France, the main difference is that while the English-speaking world goes into a swoon over tender beef, the priority of Paris beef-lovers is character, or a distinctive signature flavour. The French also prefer more *mâche*, or texture, in their meat, finding the soft-as-butter steaks beloved of the English-speaking world a little bit insipid.

The provenance of beef on Paris steakhouse menus usually varies more than it does in other cities, too. The breeds of French beef you're most likely to see mentioned on a Paris menu are Aubrac, Blonde d'Aquitaine, Charolais, Limousin, Montbéliard and Salers, with the French having a particular affection for Aubrac, Charolais and Salers. Otherwise, you'll come across beef from Argentina, Ireland, Galicia in Spain, Bavaria in Germany, and Britain, and occasionally Australia, Japan and the United States.

Where the beef is sourced depends upon what gastronomic experience a given restaurant is seeking to offer. "Great beef has a lot in common with great wine," says star butcher Hugo Desnoyer. "Like wine, beef offers a powerful experience of the *terroir* (land) where the animal was raised," explains Desnoyer, who runs two of the most prestigious butcher shops in Paris, and who has also just opened a butcher-shop-restaurant in Tokyo. At the tiny table d'hôtes (communal table) restaurant



Desnoyer runs in his butcher shop in the silk-stocking 16th *arrondissement*, he serves exclusively French beef, and the cut he recommends, as the quintessential French beef experience is a *faux-filet* steak, almost the equivalent of a sirloin cut, from the Limousin. Why? "Cooked medium-rare, this superb meat is juicy, full of flavour, mineral rich, and has a lot of sexy texture," says Desnoyer. Not surprisingly, you have to book well in advance to snap one or two of the dozen or so places at his table d'hôtes.

Meanwhile, *Au Boeuf Couronné*, one of the last of the great carnivores' caves that once dominated La Villette, the quarter where Parisians traditionally went for a meat feast, because the city's slaughter houses were once located there, is experiencing a renaissance since the opening of the new Philharmonie de Paris concert house. This delightfully fly-in-amber restaurant is just a ten-minute walk from the Philharmonie, and

the service from staff wearing immaculate white aprons is friendly and alert. The regulars always go for the roasted marrow bones with Guérande sea salt and toasted bread, or maybe the onion soup with a cap of cheese melted on a crouton, and then one of the legendary cuts of beef, *le pavé des maridataires*, *le chateaubriand des bidochards* or *la côte de bœuf* (rib steak) for two. Note, too, that this is one of the rare restaurants that still serve a proper *tête de veau* (calf's head) with *ravigote* sauce, and that the profiteroles are excellent.

Following a stylish renovation that's revealed the huge charm of its dining room, *Le Moulin de la Galette*, which occupies a 17th century windmill in Montmartre and is one of the most popular restaurants in Paris, has also just unveiled a new menu that privileges outstanding beef from Scotland, the U.S., and Argentina, which is cooked on a Spanish-made Jospier grill. Start with some



escargots, terrine de foie gras de canard or house-smoked organic Irish salmon, and then go for the beef, the Argentine cœur d'entrecôte is exceptionally good. This restaurant is a good choice for meat-lovers dining out with spouses, partners or friends who prefer fish or fowl, too, since scallops in Maltaise sauce, cod roasted with thyme, and wild duck with cabbage are also on the menu. And don't miss the chocolate mousse or the organic lemon meringue tart for dessert.

In a similar vein, another delightful restaurant that's a superb destination for meat lovers but which also makes those who prefer fish or vegetables happy is the very popular bistro Le Bon Georges in the heart of the very stylish 9th arrondissement in the centre of Paris. Owner Benoit Duval speaks perfect English for having once worked for the French branch of America's famous Campbell's Soup Company, and he's a warm and attentive host at this handsome pair of dining rooms with antique signs and bentwood chairs. Duval's treat for meat lovers is the remarkable beef raised by farmer Alexandre Polmard in the Meuse region of Lorraine in eastern France. Polmard's specialty is Blonde d'Aquitaine beef, and his meat is so sought-after that you have to call ahead and reserve a Polmard côte de boeuf (rib steak) with Benoit in advance. Otherwise, start with the watercress soup with goat-cheese topped croutons or razor shell clams in garlic sauce, go for the beef or the fish of the day, and don't miss the Barvarois aux marrons for dessert. Vinophiles should be aware that Benoit also has a terrific wine list.

In the Porte Maillot neighbourhood where many business travellers find themselves the recently opened Le Boeuf Maillot is an excellent choice for a relaxing meal on your own or an easy-going business meal with a colleague. At this friendly restaurant decorated with antique metal signs, chef Ludovic Schwartz, who trained with Joel Robuchon, has created an appealing high-quality comfort-food menu that delivers a solidly good feed. Choose one of the good value formulas at 28 euros or 35 euros, and then decide on your beef from an international offer that includes France, Ireland, Bavaria and the US.

All cuts of beef come with a selection of sauces, including Chimichurri and Béarnaise.

Further proof of the trendiness of a good steak in Paris right now is the miniature chain



Opposite page: Au Boeuf Maillot; Clockwise from top left: Le Boeuf Maillot; Le Bon Georges; Le Moulin de la Galette

of steakhouses created by chef Akrame Benallal, who won two Michelin stars for his eponymous restaurant in the 16th arrondissement, which will be closing soon, and who now has several Atelier Vivanda steakhouses. He also just opened a branch of his steakhouse concept in Hong Kong. In Paris, the one that's most agreeable is the address in the Marais, a popular neighbourhood that's always needing more good restaurants. Benallal's restaurant on the busy Rue des Archives is run by chef Anthony Grange, who was formerly sous chef to Laetitia Rouabah at the venerable Saint-Germain-des-Prés bistro Allard. The 35-euro prix fixe menu has made this place a hit, and it offers not only American Black Angus steak, hamburgers and côte de boeuf Holstein, but delicious duck terrine to start, wonderful garnishes like dauphinois or darphin potatoes, and some excellent desserts, including orange water-flavoured flan with jasmine ice-cream.

ATELIER VIVANDA
82 rue des Archives (3rd), 01 42 71 407
www.ateliervivanda.com

AU BOEUF COURONNÉ
188 ave Jean-Jaures (19th) 01 42 39 44 44
www.boeuf-couronne.com

LE BOEUF MAILLOT
99 ave des Ternes (17th) 01 45 74 10 57

LE BON GEORGES
45 rue Saint Georges (9th) 01 48 78 40 30
www.lebongeorges.com

LE MOULIN DE GALETTE
83 rue Lepic (18th) 01 46 06 84 77
www.lemoulindegalette.fr

LA TABLE D'HOTES D'HUGO DESNOYER
28 rue du Docteur Blanche (16th), 01 46 47 83 00
www.hugodesnoyer.com