

Our team goes undercover to suss out the latest and most talked about restaurants in town. {\$\$ affordable \$\$\$ moderate \$\$\$\$ expensive}

## SO FRENCH, SO GOOD

It may not sit in the glitziest part of the city, but Cocotte's brand of hearty country cooking fits right in with its unpretentious location.

### COCOTTE

No. 2 Dickson Road. Tel: 6298 1188

Enjoying warm bread rolls dipped in an apple cider cream sauce is an unforgettable treat, as I discover at Cocotte, a French restaurant located at the boutique Wanderlust Hotel. Yes, a review on a French eatery and I start by praising a way of eating bread and not foie gras. You'd think I had too much wine. But Cocotte is about such unfussy, homey fare (read: sous vide is a foreign word). And there isn't any goose liver on the menu. Head chef Anthony Yeoh—the At-Sunrice Culinary Academy graduate who was previously one of the Funky Chefs for hire—wants Cocotte to be a place for “simple food from a French countryside kitchen”.

It's a languid Tuesday night at the restaurant; a few tables are occupied by couples in quiet conversation. Maybe it's the location: perched on Dickson Road, the hotel counts tiny textile shops, hourly-rated budget hotels and kopitiam as its neighbours—not the address for targeting mid-market diners. We sit near the window, facing an alley occupied by tables from a nearby coffeeshop. Cocotte's décor, designed by Chris Lee of Asylum, is low key and a little quirky, reflecting its rustic spirit: faded paint spots blemish the walls, and wine crate covers serve as table tops. Don't expect cutlery settings by the staff; you grab what you need from an ice bucket filled with utensils, found on your table. We ask for a butter knife when the bread rolls come, but a staff tells us they don't have one, suggesting we use the dinner knife instead. It seems informality is the only rule here.

We start with the appetiser of Homemade Pork Rilletes (\$8), served with mustard and cornichons (tart pickles made from gherkin cucumbers). The pork paste is a little overpowering, but the mustard tempers its flavour. With its smooth texture, it passes the test as a good rilette, and spreading it on bread is easy.

Our visit is timely. We are informed that since a shipment of French Bouchot mussels (molluscs grown on ropes planted in the sea) just arrived yesterday, the Moules à la Normande (\$22) would be available. Being a fan of seafood, I order it. We are rather disappointed



by the dish's small portion when it arrives, but its lack of size is vindicated by the flavoursome, succulent molluscs, the piquancy of its apple cider cream sauce, and, of course, my little epiphany involving the bread rolls. And if not for propriety, I might have been tempted to take the pot of sauce in my hands and gulp down every single drop.

Cocotte also espouses communal dining: some main courses are available in portions for two to five persons. If it had applied this idea to the appetisers, it would also give the diner a choice of choosing a starter as a main course, by selecting a portion made for two persons. In my case, I'd pick those lovely mussels.

We order the Roast Pork Collar (\$27) and the Poulet Roti (\$43 for two persons) for our main courses. The latter is an organic, hormone-free chicken, marinated for two days and roasted with fresh herb butter, and available only as a whole. The staff advises that we may be ordering more than we can handle, but a colleague in our office was waxing lyrical about this dish after her visit to Cocotte, so we are very intrigued. We are informed that the chicken would take 45 minutes to prepare, but no matter. For the time being, we have our Roast Pork Collar to enjoy. Its fork-tender meat, drenched in a creamy, aromatic Dijon mustard sauce, slips off the bone effortlessly, while the accompanying crushed potatoes are savoury on their own.



Our Poulet Roti arrives in less than 45 minutes, and true to the staff's word, it's a generous size for a whole chicken. The meat has also been sliced into neat, small portions, which bear

ROAST  
PORK  
COLLAR



a clean whiteness. Biting into the luscious, tender flesh accented by a slight milky flavour, we swoon. There's also a sauce boat of Madeira gravy, but I find that the meat tastes best on its own, thanks to the subtle flavours imparted by the garlic and rosemary, which are stuffed into the chicken.

For desserts, we pick the Chocolate Souffle Cake (\$10) with Chantilly cream, and the Saint Honore Trio (\$10), a choux pastry hugging scoops of orange-chocolate, strawberry and vanilla

ice cream. The former doesn't impress, as it's a little dry, crumbling easily but the latter is a delectable mishmash of fragrant pastry and robust ice cream flavours.

Cocotte has charmed us, and it's a pity that not many have discovered it yet. But Singaporeans are willing to travel to odd places for great food, and if Yeoh carries on his good work, Cocotte would pack in the diners.

LIN WEI WEN

Food: ★★★★★

Service: ★★★★★

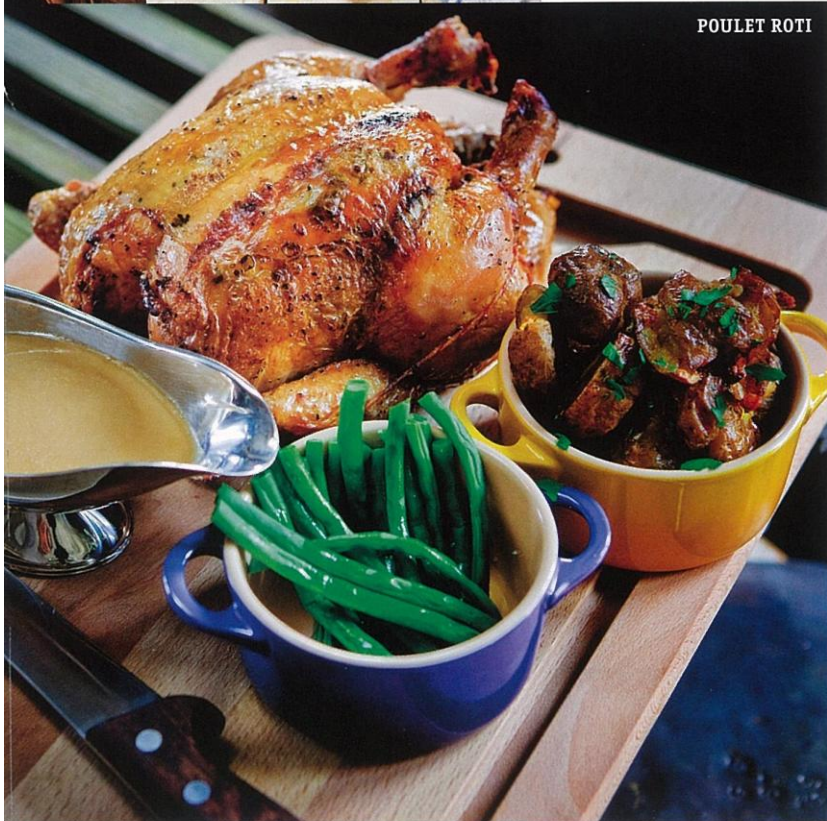
Ambience: ★★★★★

Price: \$ \$ \$ \$

## SET TO SHOW

Dining at this restaurant is like having a meal in the owner's home, the flavours are robust and the ambience convivial.

POULET ROTI



### ANGELO'S

111 & 113 Killiney Road. Tel: 6732 5113

There is a sense of déjà vu as we step into Angelo Sanelli's latest Italian restaurant, from the cosy, dimmed interiors, right down to the art on the wall (there's that one sketch of Sanelli and his wife Jayanthi, pictured against the rails of a ship). The restaurant, which occupies two ground floor shophouse units at Killiney Road, is divided into a dining and bar area. Sanelli's recently defunct restaurant, Mietta's, sported the same concept, which inevitably invites comparisons. And you can't help but think that this present location makes for better business sense for several reasons. Mietta's was located at Arab Street, where, due to its Muslim residents, halal food is practised. And that meant the travesty of not serving an Italian staple, prosciutto, on the menu.

With Angelo's, there no such circumscription (although we are puzzled as to why his current menu still doesn't serve prosciutto). Its proximity to the heart of town also makes it a more convenient dinner venue for the shopping and office crowd. Angelo's offers a semi-fine dining, more rustic type of cuisine—and at very affordable prices. He has trained his staff to be just as efficient and personable; the food is still old-fashioned Italian cuisine peppered with some modern renditions, all produced with quality ingredients. >