

L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon – London



World's 50 Best
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About the Chef

In 1981, at the age of 36, Joël Robuchon opened a restaurant in Paris, which earned Michelin 3-star within three years of opening. He has also been awarded the “Chef of the Century” by the Guide Gault Millau.

In 1996, the master chef retired at the peak of his career. Since then he opened several casual dining restaurants, called “L’Atelier de Joël Robuchon”, in different parts of the world -- Paris, Monte Carlo, London, New York and Tokyo. His fine dining restaurant, The Mansion in Las Vegas, was rated as one of the top ten French restaurants outside France. From the recent introduction of Michelin guides in Vegas and Tokyo, he now holds the most Michelin stars in the world surpassing Alain Ducasse.



About the Restaurant

L’Atelier de Joël Robuchon in London was opened in September 2006, located right next to The Ivy, a celebrity hot spot. The restaurant has three floors: L’Atelier is on the ground floor; La Cuisine on the second; and a bar at the top floor.

L’Atelier, translating literally to “the workshop”, is situated on the ground floor. Robuchon’s culinary concept of L’Atelier is to prepare the best product in the simplest way possible, live in front of diners. Hence, L’Atelier has an open-kitchen concept – kitchen in the middle and dining tables along the perimeter, just like a sushi bar. Black and red colours dominate the whole floor. Big jars containing different ingredients are placed at many spots. What an original yet inexpensive decoration!





La Cuisine on the second floor is a fine dining area. Its menu consists of L'Atelier's menu plus a few more dishes. Although we did not dine at La Cuisine, we asked the restaurant manager to take us to have a look. Disappointingly, it does not look very appealing. We found the concept of L'Atelier more innovative and intriguing. Needless to say, dining at L'Atelier is less expensive than La Cuisine. The bar at the top floor is only accessible by diners.

About Our Meal

We both had the 8-course tasting menu (Menu Découverte). Our amuse-bouche was foie gras terrine. Although it seems a bit strange to have foie gras as amuse-bouche, the top quality terrine plus a piece of warmly toasted bread definitely stimulated our palate.



Foie gras terrine



Velouté of avocado on a vegetables fondant

Our first course was avocado on a vegetable fondant served in a transparent cup accompanied by fresh tomato on the side. I love avocado, but this avocado blended with vegetable gives a rather strange taste. Nevertheless, the tomatoes were remarkably fresh and tasty, combined with the thick vegetable soup, it reminded us of V8 vegetable juice. We noticed that there was a big decorative jar containing these lovely tomatoes. It would be nice if we could have the whole jar...

Our second course was a scallop cooked in its shell with lemon and seaweed butter. Although we ate 2kg of scallops at home the day before, we still found this scallop amazing. The scallop

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was grilled just right with a distinct seaweed aroma and the butter was rich but still kept the natural beauty of the moist scallop.



Scallop with seaweed butter



Frog legs, sweet garlic mash and parsley coulis

Our third course was two drumsticks of frog legs. That was our first time to have deep fried frog leg in a non-Chinese restaurant. The batter was crispy and thin; the poultry-like meat was absolutely delicious.

Our fourth course was the highlight of the night: a martini glass containing a poached egg sandwiched between a parsley cream at the bottom and wild mushroom on top; finished off with mushroom foam and a touch of finely chopped parsley. We were told to mix all four layers before eating to let the runny egg yolk soak into the other three layers. The result was one of the best dishes ever! It was astonishing that Robuchon could use these simple ingredients to create such a divine combination!



Egg cocotte topped with a light wild mushroom cream



Pan-fried sea bass with lemongrass foam and leeks

Our fifth course was pan-fried sea bass in lemongrass foam topped with stewed baby leeks. It was good but just could not compare to the previous course. The lemongrass did a good job to compliment the mild sea bass.

For our main course, there were two choices: quail stuffed with foie gras served with truffled-mashed potatoes, or calf's sweetbread with sprig of fresh laurel. The sweetbread was just mediocre, especially compared to the quail. The tender gamey quail along with the foie gras was another amazing gift from the chef. Quail and foie gras complemented each other brilliantly, confirming the living legend's culinary talent. Robuchon's signature side dish, truffled-mashed potatoes, was rather disappointing. We could hardly sense any flavour from the three slices of truffle on top.

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Free-range quail stuffed with foie gras and served with truffled-mashed potatoes



Calf's sweetbread with a sprig of fresh laurel

Chocolate mousse / White Chocolate ice cream

Finally, the first dessert: chocolate mousse topped with a full scoop of white chocolate ice cream crowned with a thin chocolate disk. The plating for the first dessert was very pretty and the creamy rich chocolate mousse was fabulous. I am not a big fan of white chocolate, but still liked the white chocolate ice cream. Those mini-shiny-crunchy balls on the side of the dish added an extra sweet touch to this wonderful dessert. The second dessert, pistachio soufflé, was even better. After mixing the airy puff with pistachio sauce, the delicate sweetness and light fluffy textures were simply dazzling.



Chocolate mousse / White Chocolate ice cream

Pistachio Soufflé

After having this 8-course menu, we were both completely full. Unfortunately or fortunately, the chef gave us a complimentary dessert consisting of five different tarts: *Passion Fruit*, *Chocolate Caramel*, *Lemon*, *Cinnamon*, and *Coffee*. We finished them all, very slowly and painfully out of politeness because we were just too full.



About the Service

We went there on a Sunday night. It was the quietest night to dine in the restaurant. Since there were not that many customers, the service was extremely friendly. The restaurant manager and our waitress talked to us throughout our meal.

Since the kitchen/waiters were in the middle and diners sat along the perimeter, it was a difficult job to serve customers. I would not be surprised that some accidents, such as spilling customers' drinks, happen from time to time.

Practical Information

L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon
13-15 West Street
London WC2H 9NQ
tel: 020 7010 8600

Open 7 days a week, both lunch and dinner

8-course tasting menu (Menu Decouverte): £85/person

À la carte menu: average around £10 per mini-dish; each person needs around 4-5 mini-dishes.

Useful Tips

- If you like casual dining and want to have some interaction with chefs/waiters, go to L'Atelier and sit along the perimeter of the kitchen. However, sitting along the perimeter is not practical for groups of more than two. There are few regular dining tables too if you want more privacy.
- It might be better to order à la carte menu instead of the tasting menu if you have more people and do not mind sharing.
- La Cuisine is more suitable if you want a more formal dining; but don't forget it is also more expensive.