

Love & live in style

28



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Hush, hush darling boy

Rest your soul and let women take over

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Loretta Caponi: sheets as fine as antiques



Snow dining at Le Montagnou

It's a gem, really, a gorgeous, super-modern Swiss chalet in bleached pale pine with magnificent views in all directions of the jagged mountain tops around Faraya that are imposing even when they're without snow. It's spacious inside, with high, high ceilings and sturdy beams, and given that one whole side of the dining area is dominated by large glass doors that lead out onto a wooden terrace, also full of that spectacular sunlight you only get up in the mountains: you can even eat outside if you don't mind bundling up.

Inside, everything is clean wood and slate-like stone, rather classical in a stripped down, essentially contemporary kind of way, with the odd medieval or hunting object thrown in, tastefully though, like the sleek suit of armor, complete with thick-handled sword, in the entrance hall.

Downstairs is a private room that can be hired out for parties, with a large open fireplace - where food is cooked - with comfy sofas and a stereo system and in easy reach of the restaurant's wine cellar, where caves can be rented out by guests who want to bring their own selection of wine.

Le Montagnou also has its own, very sound wine selection, mostly foreign, and the bottle of Château Vieux Prezat Medoc 2001 that we had was served perfectly, at just the right temperature, and was so good that my dining companion has been daydreaming about it ever since: its well rounded tones sat very well with the Flamenkuche, a traditional wood-baked Alsatian-type pizza we started with, which was topped with creamy cheese and smoky *lardons* and was really very good.

This is a great restaurant for a romantic dinner but it's also good during the day, and is child-friendly too, though mostly for older kids who can handle multiple thin-stemmed glasses without too much fuss. Still, my young kids adored the food, and went mad for the cheesy margarita pizza they shared and the mushroom soup, which was perhaps one of the best I have ever tasted, truly. Served in satisfyingly heavy soup tureens, and cooked down with shallots, white wine and cream, it was thick, and perfectly sumptuous, something to come rushing off the slopes for, definitely.



All the ingredients here are shipped over from France, including two tons of cheese at the beginning of the winter season after the cows have been eating grass all summer, so the taste is richer and more finely nuanced than it would be, say, during the winter, when the cows are fed mostly on hay. This was certainly the case with our cheese fondue, which was a mixture of two cheeses (they wouldn't say which), but no kirsch, and was powerfully cheesy, in a very good way, and extremely pleasing indeed.

Everything on the menu is hearty – there's even wild boar roasted on a spit – and highly tempting (and probably more so after a bout on the slopes), and so we indulged ourselves with some *magret de canard en cocotte*, a creamy thinly sliced duck concoction with honey and soya sauce that the kids went wild over, and have been asking for ever since. This was swiftly followed by the *pierrade de viande*, which is just plain fun: you cook thin slices of beef and vegetables on a hot slab, and then eat them with an array of sauces, including a stunning homemade

mayonnaise that tasted exactly like something I once had, and liked very much, in Vienna.

This should have been the time to stop, but someone mentioned chocolate fondue, and there was no way we were going to say no to that. The chocolate was Valrhona and was supremely rich, creamy and dark. We dipped in pieces of kiwi and strawberry, banana and apple and by the end of it (which came far too quickly) we were all covered in chocolate and basking in the glow of a lovely cocoa buzz.

The thing with Le Montagnou is that it provides stylish dining with a lot of substance: the food is good but it's also fun to eat, even if you are tempted to eat far too much; and they do seem to really care about the ingredients and how the food is presented. We loved it and will definitely be back.

For reservations, tel. 09.341441 or 03.776577.

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