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Lucie

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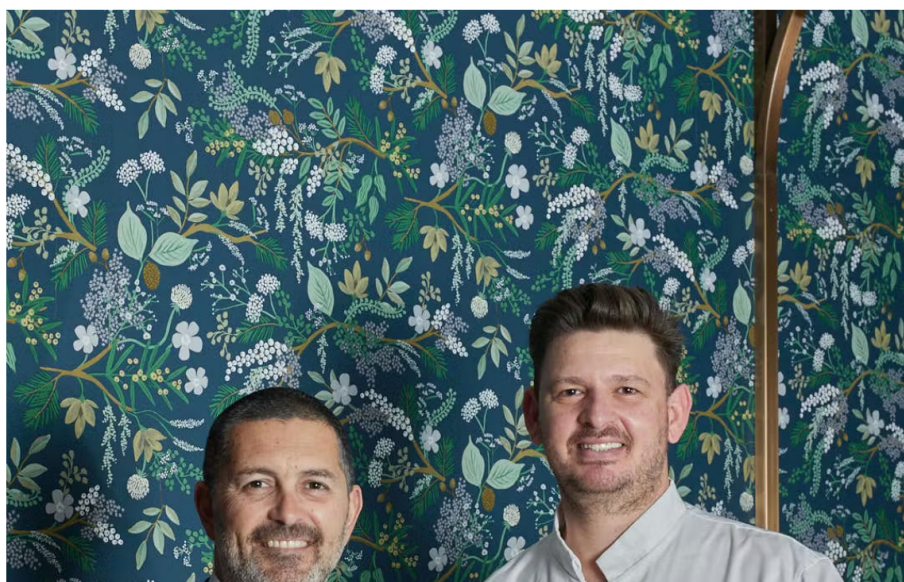
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Designed to pay homage to France's grandest culinary traditions, Lucie is also, quite simply, a place inspired by home. Generations in the making, it's a fine-dining spot that radiates with the warmth of a grandmother's love — for family and food.





Owner Yannick Bigourdan is no stranger to Toronto's restaurant scene. Over the course of his career, so far, he's opened Splendido, Notta Bene, The Carbon Bar, Amano Trattoria, and several other popular spots. Still, Lucie is his most personal project. Not only is this Bigourdan's first French restaurant, it also borrows its name from his beloved grandmother.

"Growing up in the south of France, my parents were also in the restaurant business so they were never at home," he explains. "Most of the time I was at my grandmother's. ... I was there every lunch, every dinner."

Made with farmer's market finds — from fresh meat to produce, cheese, and more — Grand-Mère Lucie's cooking was "earthy, rustic and simple," says Bigourdan. Her dishes nourished a small boy, and his passion for food.





At Lucie, Bigourdan has harnessed his grandmother's gift for hospitality and channeled it into an elegant space where Michelin-style cuisine leaves guests in awe — even before they take a bite. You won't find Lucie's dishes on the menu but "her spirit is here," adds Bigourdan.

Brought to life by Vancouver-based CHIL Interior Design, the room is modern and warm, with none of the characteristic stiffness common in shrines to haute cuisine. Peppered with floral motifs (in homage, no doubt, to grandmas everywhere) and what Bigourdan calls "French moments," the room tells a story at every turn.





The lyrics to 1973's "Paroles, paroles" brighten one corner while a chain-link art piece depicting actors Alain Delon and Jean-Paul Belmondo greets guests by the front door. Around the corner, Canadian visual artist Daniel Mazzone has captured musician Serge Gainsbourg in his signature style — using historical fragments of paper to create a mosaic-like portrait that's as intricate and luminous as stained glass.





At Lucie, the team “wants to bring a little extra to the experience,” says Bigourdan, describing the Champagne cart that’s rolled over to each table to welcome guests. “We try to be playful yet elegant,” he adds. Glass of bubbly, or cocktail, like the floral Provençal, in hand, guests are presented with their menus. “We want people to relax and just enjoy the experience.”

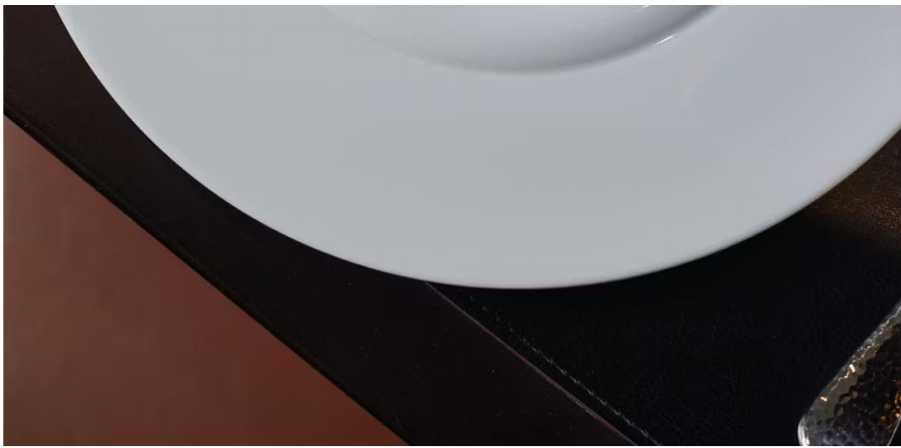
Predominantly comprised of French bottles, the wine list “matches the elegance of the food.” The team offers both regular and premium wine pairings with its tasting menu.

Entrusted with translating Bigourdan’s vision to the plate, is executive chef Arnaud Bloquel. “I wanted a modern French cuisine. The cuisine of the top restaurants in Paris today,” explains Bigourdan. “For that, I decided to go and hire in France.”

In Bloquel, he’s discovered something of an enigma. A remarkably talented and skilled culinary technician, Bloquel seems to possess the soul of an artist and a refreshing lack of ego. He may count time at Paris’ Atelier Joël Robuchon and a semi-final performance at the prestigious Meilleurs Ouvriers de France competition among his many accomplishments but they don’t seem to have gone to his head.

On the Table d’Hôte, eight-course Tasting Menu and five-course Bar Tasting Menu, chef shows off his affinity for playfulness alongside his Michelin-level training. Arrestingly gorgeous, dishes at Lucie are precise and painstakingly assembled. Crafted with flavour and texture in mind, they combine ingredients and preparations in delightful ways.





La Soupe du Barry is so unlike any soup you've likely encountered as to nearly warrant an entirely new name. Occupying the epicentre of a vast, immaculate dish, its verdant leek custard appears garnished with a delicate cracker and three twee dollops of caviar. The velvety cauliflower cream is poured tableside — a trick the team revisits frequently, to add pomp to each course and make use of the kitchen's glut of adorable mini cookware.

It's a shame to disturb the dish but slip a spoon into the custard, catch some of the soup, and you'll create a mouthful as memorable as the original Lucie's most beloved recipes.





Embellished with edible flowers, beetroot ravioli and a drizzle of Cognac and tarragon emulsion, Atlantic prawn tails are another gem among the appetizer round.



Mains, meanwhile, include La Sole, which finds rich Nantua sauce — made here with mussel reduction — chaperoning an artistically-presented piece of fish, with Buddha's hand and parsnip lending intrigue.



A dish with deep roots in French cuisine, Le Pithivier is, as Bigourdan calls it, Beef Wellington “à la Française.” Here, a core of tenderloin is layered with foie gras and chanterelle mushrooms, then wrapped in buttery, golden puff pastry.

With à la carte only available at lunch, sweets are part of (nearly) every guest’s time at Lucie. “We wanted dessert to be fully integrated in the experience,” says Bigourdan.

It’s a good thing, too, because chef Bloquel’s exquisite sweets aren’t to be missed. Taking their name from their predominant flavour — Le Citron, Le Pecan, etc. — these desserts are simple in name only.





La Noisette is a craquelin-topped ball of choux pastry hiding a heart of chilled vanilla ice cream, and sporting a jaunty square of thin chocolate. Doused in warm hazelnut praline chocolate sauce (tableside, natch), the hat melts down to hug every delectable curve.





Grounded by passionfruit gelée, 66% Valrhona chocolate mousse is simultaneously lifted by the fruit in sorbet form. A diaphanous sugar shell adds another layer of joy to Le Chocolat.






At Lucie, guests are invited to experience “a very ambitious food program.” Yes, it’s an ideal backdrop to birthdays, anniversaries, and life’s grander moments. It’s also, as Bigourdan says, a place “to celebrate great French food” surrounded by a team that’s wildly passionate about each and every detail. Could she see it, Grand-Mère Lucie would be beaming with pride.




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