

## DCDining.com Reviews

Musings from Don Rockwell

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### Adour, St. Regis Hotel, Downtown

Posted on [June 14, 2011](#) by Don

I couldn't get ahold of [Adour](#) on the phone, so I decided to take my chances and try for a walk-in reservation. When I got there, I was told they were fully booked, so decided to sit at the bar outside. Although my bartender (who has worked this bar for many years) told me I could order off of Adour's regular menu, something just didn't seem right about having such lavish cuisine at such a clubby bar, so I decided to order one small course, and then to return another time for a more complete experience.

I ordered a glass of *2009 La Source Sauvignon Blanc* (\$11, imported by Laurent Givry of Elite Wines) to have with my *Bayaldi (Signature Cookpot) of Mediterranean Vegetables* (\$16).

At this point, I need to stop and go back to 2010 when I was invited by Alain Ducasse's publicist to join the chef for dinner at Adour. I almost always turn down media events, but this one I couldn't pass up. The evening of the dinner, I arrived at the hotel, figuring the entire dining room would be closed off for hundreds of journalists; yet, I was the first one there, and was told that the dinner was to be held at a single table in one of the back rooms. Oops!

So here I was, sitting right across from Alain Ducasse himself, at a table with about ten other people. I'm not one to be starstruck, but Ducasse is arguably the most famous chef in the world, and here I was getting a chance to practice my French with the gentleman (and a gentleman he was, too). This was a dinner to promote Ducasse's "[signature cookpots](#)" – lidded, ceramic vessels in which you cook the food and then serve it. And, although I never said anything at the time, I thought the cookpot courses we had on this evening were easily the weak links in the meal (I believe M. Ducasse might have thought so as well, as he politely excused himself and seemed to storm back to the kitchen after a couple of the items were served). It was a lovely meal, but quite frankly I didn't think it was up to Adour's standards – I was curious to try another cookpot dish now that it's 2011, and the kitchen staff has more experience using them.

As I sipped my wine in the bar, Adour's General Manager, Shaun Sleeper, came out to the bar and said hello – he had recognized me when I went up to the reservation stand and asked for a table (well, I *tried* to remain anonymous). He said the restaurant had just had a cancellation, and that a two-top had opened up. Would I like it? You bet!

So I was shown to a table in the back, and the restaurant was indeed quickly filling up. I felt like something "different" on this evening, and so I ordered a *Vegetarian Tasting Menu* (\$65 for 5 courses), and turned myself over to the kitchen – and also to the wonderful rising-star sommelier Brent Kroll for wine pairings.

Between the dazzling kitchen work of Chef Julien Jouhannaud and Pastry Chef Fabrice Bendano, both of whom came out and introduced themselves after dinner, this was an evening to remember, and Adour gets elevated back to the highest level in the donrockwell.com [Dining Guide](#). Yes, you can argue that since I was recognized, I got special attention, but I was also known during the meal with M. Ducasse, and I found that meal – other than

the company – somewhat disappointing, and I felt compelled to (at least temporarily) downgrade Adour in the Dining Guide (which I did); I'm glad it's now back at the top.

The meal went like this (after a little *amuse-gueule*, of course):

*Chilled Heirloom Tomatoes Gazpacho* with Compressed watermelon, basil, and fresh almonds (if you've never had fresh almonds, they are eye-opening)

*Path Valley Rainbow Beet Salad* with Goat Cheese Cream and Candied Walnuts

*Signature Risotto* with Porcini Mushrooms (an absolutely moan-inducing risotto based on the dish they serve at Louis XV in Monaco)

*Poached Green Asparagus* with Creamy Oregon Morel Mushrooms and Slow-Cooked Egg

*Strawberry Composition* with Marmalade, Jus, and Mint Ice Cream (an astounding dessert that shows off the talents of this brilliant pastry chef)

And of course, some *mignardises* along with the bad news.

Brent really showed creativity with the wine pairings (without going over the top, as so many young sommeliers do). He took chances, but stayed well within the bounds of good taste and normalcy. A side note about Brent: he's one person in this town that I've never heard a single bad thing about (there are many petty things said about people in this town behind their backs, so don't discount this as being insignificant).

Finally, I'd also like to mention an "extra" course that was inserted between the risotto and the asparagus: Shaun brought me out that cookpot of bayaldi, as a gift from the kitchen, and I have but one word that best describes it:

Wow. If you've seen the movie *Ratatouille* (and who hasn't?), you'll remember that the ratatouille presented to Anton Ego wasn't a true ratatouille (which is long-cooked, and something of a stew); it was, in fact, a *bayaldi* which is a variation of ratatouille (and looks something like [this](#)), and it's this same dish which is currently being served at Adour in the signature cookpot. For \$16 off of the a la carte menu, you can go grab a seat at the bar outside of Adour, have a single glass of that \$11 Sauvignon Blanc, and experience for yourself the same capitulation that made Anton Ego gasp and drop his pen.

This dish is lights-out good!

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