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## Restaurant review: Madeleine's Petit Paris in Northvale

JANUARY 3, 2014, 11:45 AM

BY UNG, ELISA

THE RECORD



The team behind Madeleine's Petit Paris in Northvale — chef Gaspard Caloz, wife Madeleine and their son François

### Photos: Madeleine's Petit Paris in Northvale

Madeleine Caloz was missing.

And I noticed her absence right away. The petite, effervescent 69-year-old had spent all night welcoming customers to her Madeleine's Petit Paris in Northvale, but her pixie dust seemed to have paused for a moment.

Until the world's smallest Santa Claus appeared in the doorway, ringing a bell. Who says the man always has to be Santa? Madeleine Caloz's chef husband, Gaspard, joined her for a round of Christmas caroling, starting with the French "Petit Papa Noel." Declared Gaspard: "I'm going home with Santa tonight!"

There is still much merriment inside this Bergen institution, which opened as a banquet facility in 1995 and became a full-fledged restaurant in 2000 after the Calozes sold their Chez Madeleine in Bergenfield. Sure, Madeleine's French and Continental menu is a throwback. And where else do you still get a palate cleanser between courses and your leftovers occasionally wrapped in foil packages twisted into the shape of a swan?

With last year's sale of the Saddle River Inn and the impending closure of the Chef's Table

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in Franklin Lakes, Madeleine's is the last French holdout run by an old-school chef. In this case, it's 67-year-old Gaspard, a Swiss native who moved to the United States in the early 1970s to become executive chef of Manhattan's landmark Tavern on the Green. As he approaches retirement, Gaspard Caloz says he now mostly does the shopping and the prep, not the cooking. But his kitchen still serves precisely executed Grand Marnier soufflés. And you'll enjoy all of it in a graceful, flowery dining room with leisurely service, punctuated by the affable personalities of the couple and their 35-year-old son, François.

François has a few plans up his sleeves — we'll talk about them in a bit — but first, a question. Is Madeleine's menu old-school or classic? I might choose the latter, especially after ordering the wild mushroom Napoleon (\$11.50). Its deep and meaty flavor had us fighting for the last bits, while another appetizer, the mundane-sounding "warm mussels" — turned out to necessitate more bread to mop up the white wine/garlic sauce (\$10.50). Sole meunière was generous with both its portion size and its characteristic lemon-brown-butter flavor (\$30.50). The coquille St. Jacques — drenched in a vermouth cream sauce — transports you back to an era when dishes were unabashedly rich, with no apologies (\$11.50). Same went for two nightly specials — pork schnitzel, rustically topped with two fried eggs (\$20.50), and a peppery crab cake Louisiana (\$22.50).

Other good dishes would have been elevated to the same level with a little more attention to detail. By the time the crepe Madeleine arrived at our table, its smoked salmon had gotten a little tough — though it was still a bargain as part of our \$32.50 three-course prix-fixe meal (its selection changes every two weeks). We would have preferred a little crispy skin on the duck confit à l'orange (\$32.50) and a more crackling sugar top on the crème brûlée (\$7.50). The pomme frites on our steak au poivre (\$35.95) could have used a little less salt.

But those were really minor points; our only real clunker was the seasonal bûche de Noël, which we selected as part of our prix-fixe dinner and turned out to be no better than a mass-produced supermarket cake. Now that the holidays are past, better to stick with the scoops of robust chocolate mousse (\$7.50) and the big, puffed soufflés (\$15, meant for two).

Speaking of soufflés ... Let's go back to François and his plans. The son initially wanted to become a chef like his father, but he wound up being trained in hotel and restaurant management, both at Johnson & Wales and in his parents' native Switzerland. He's the reason Madeleine's is not headed the same route as its peers — he's eagerly taking over the family business as his parents now spend more time in Florida and eye retirement altogether.

Don't count on anything fusion or foam or newfangled at the Petit Paris. Actually, now that Madeleine's is the last of a breed, François Caloz wants to go even more French, shifting away from his father's Continental style. In the next year or so, you can look for more dishes such as coq au vin, quiches, beef bourguignon and, yes, even more soufflés. His parents say François' enthusiasm makes their long hospitality career worthwhile. "He's the only reason I come to work every day," says Gaspard Caloz. "We did the foundation; now he's looking toward the future."

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### Madeleine's Petit Paris in Northvale \*\*\*

416 Tappan Road, Northvale

201-767-0063 madeleinespetitparis.com

Food: French/Continental, classically prepared.

Would be good for: Elegant French dinner.

Dress: "Elegant casual," say the owners.

Reviewed: Jan. 3, 2014.

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