

**RISTORANTE IL TEATRO**

## **Gourmet theatre on Saint-Jean Street**

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Photo: Renaud Philippe Le Devoir

Il Teatro restaurant has one of the prettiest terraces in Old Quebec for gourmet foodies.

Place d'Youville is one of the liveliest areas in Quebec City. In this unique space, nestled between the fortifications and Porte Saint-Jean, Le Palais Montcalm and Le Théâtre Capitol, you'll have a front row seat to the parade of seasonal walkers, skateboarders, skaters, shoppers and, of course, performers.

On a beautiful August evening, looking to spend some time on a comfy terrace and enjoy the lasting balmy weather, I invited my grandmother to join me for a meal at Il Teatro.

### **Famous ghosts**

This restaurant is part of Le Capitol's complex. Built in 1903 in a Second Empire/Beaux-Arts inspired style, this theatre has welcomed many great artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century to its stage.

Le Capitole was classified as a Heritage Site by the government of Quebec, then designated National Historic Site of Canada in the 1980s. Ristorante Il Teatro opened its doors following a careful restoration that was done in 1992.

We are seated at our table on the terrace of this architectural beauty. It's getting a little cooler, so we start with *zuppe*, vegetable for grandmother Lucille, and lobster bisque for me.

To continue – perhaps inspired by Trenet, who graced this very place with his presence in 1993 – we decide to have... *la mer*! A seafood aficionado, my grandmother orders the walleye, whereas I decide on the seafood linguine.

To compliment our sea-inspired selections, a supple, not very tannic wine with subtle “mineral” notes is the perfect choice. We order *L'Enfer des Balloquets*, a Robert Perroud Brouilly.

### **Chants and enchantment**

My guest enjoys *La minestra*, with its rich bouillon comprised of at least half a dozen vegetables. But I must admit that the bisque wins this first round, hands down. While stirring this appetizing orange potage, my spoon encounters... an entire lobster claw! This wonderful surprise, in an already delicious bisque, is an excellent hint at the rest of our meal.

As we finish our soup, performers start to set up their instruments on a small outdoor stage. We are intrigued.

The wine is good, as is the ambiance. My grandmother, who is a tried and true Montrealer, does not visit Quebec City very often, so we make the most of our evening and do not see the time go by... we are happy to see our main courses arrive, created by Serge Gagné, who has been the restaurant's Executive Chef since its opening.

My *linguine di mare* lives up to its name. In a delicious tomato sauce, spiced to perfection, I am delighted to discover large shrimp, mussels, tender and fleshy scallops, as well as a few choice pieces of lobster. Bliss! The presentation could be a little more sophisticated to do justice to this excellent dish.

Meanwhile, my guest is fully satisfied by her filet of sautéed walleye with onions, candied asparagus and cherry tomatoes. The fish is firm and tasty, perfectly set off by the cooking juices created by the tomatoes, olive oil, herbs and the grilled lemon wedge garnishing the plate. Once again, a successful dish that could also benefit from a slightly different presentation, to make it more pleasing to the eye.

### **Curtain Call**

The performance has begun: a vocal + guitar duo proposes smooth jazz standards that add an aura of distinction to the atmosphere. A few tables over, we suddenly see a leaping flame: a client has ordered the *crème brûlée*, which inspires us to enquire about the desserts.

Although my grandmother is not hungry enough for a sweet finale, I order the *torta di limone*. With its generous lemon filling topped with a superb Italian meringue, its colorful fruit and flamboyant coulis, my plate has all the exuberance of Dame Alys Robi herself, at the top of her form! A curtain call that is truly fitting for a meal in this cabaret hot spot, don't you agree?