

Cognoscenti magazine

Because life is short

Le Garage
Amsterdam

There's something of a retro-80's feel about **Le Garage**, one of Amsterdam's trendiest restaurants. The décor is flashy indeed, with abstract art, oversized clocks, and splintered mirrors which reflect the dominant colors of black, white and "power" red to infinity, cunningly creating different perspectives in carousel-like lighting effects. Tables are set as closely together as at a street café—adding to the buzz—while vintage jazz plays in the background. Service was competent enough but very slow in this busy restaurant on the evening visiting **Cognoscenti Magazine** editors dined.



Artichoke tart with foie gras

A variety of multi-course offerings are presented on the restaurant's irreverent menu, including the "Formule 1" and the "Menu Garage." We tried both, embarking on a gustatory journey that proved fascinating if overall a little uneven.

The kitchen of Joop Braarkhekke and Alexander Kok is French with varied global influences mixed in for good measure. A tasty shrimp cocktail (modestly described on the menu as "the best culinary nostalgic dish ever"), featured small Dutch shrimp and was stylishly served in a blue glass jar. An artichoke tart with foie gras was well accompanied with edible flowers and baby endive leaves. A spring chicken and lobster dish ("another classic bestseller") was served with shavings of tender asparagus and four chicken wings over black risotto; the lobster was tough. On the other hand, a veal ribeye, matched with eel tempura, potato gnocchi, and crunchy green beans presented a fine set of texture contrasts. For desert, a "Hangop,"

or traditional Dutch yogurt dish, came with plenty of bright, fresh raspberries and strawberries.

Behind the bar they were pouring iced carafes of fresh sangria, but we opted instead for a Saint Emilion Grand Cru: the 1998 *Chateau Fombrauge*. This wine was deeply colored and well-concentrated, with ripe black fruit, black peppercorn, furry tannins and a rather short finish. The wine service was a bit ragged: the wine wasn't kept next to (or even near) our table, and the wines glasses weren't refilled regularly.

Le Garage offers a separate area for groups of up to 100 people for press lunches, wine tastings, and other private functions. Valet Parking is available as well—an uncommon luxury in Amsterdam.

Le Garage en Pluche, next door at Ruysdaelstraat 48, was designed by Cees Dam, who also did Amsterdam's opera house. It's more a night lounge than anything, but serves a variety of "street" foods including tapas.

This article was written by contributing editors to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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