

On Monday a group of us gathered for a quick trip to south of France for a late Bastille Day celebration. Any excuse for French cuisine is a good one.

After enjoying glasses of Chardonnay, we sat at table for a real feast. And it came very quickly,

Our first course consisted of two terrines. The first was from foie gras. The livers were marinated in Port, garlic salt and pepper overnight. They were baked in a slow oven for about 45 minutes and chilled.

The second terrine was made from pork. It was pork ground with fat back and onion and mildly seasoned. It was baked, weighted and chilled.

There were slices of each served with toasted baguette rounds, lightly tart cornichon and spicy Dijon mustard. The foie gras was rich and deep and a beautiful rosy pink. The pork was full and tender. The two together were really wonderful and a great way to start a meal.

Choosing wine for foie gras can take several paths. Sweet whites work as do crisp whites and sparkling. Ours was a rich fruity red - Domaine des Rozets Coteaux du Tricastin. This blend of Grenache, Syrah and Cinsault from the southern Rhone proved to be a great choice. It balanced well with the terrines and the spicy accompaniments.

Wine number two was a blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay from the Loire - Domaine du Salvard Cheverny. It had a nice fruity crispness but the edge was softened by the addition of some Chardonnay.

The course was mussels done "sailor's style." That is to say steamed in white wine with garlic and parsley. They were served in bowls with a big chunk of rustic bread to get all the luscious juices.

The glistening black shells and the bright orange meat looked great. The taste was mighty good, too. Somehow all the bread went away.

Our third course was billed as "French fry salad." That's what it was - lettuce and potatoes. But it was more than just that.

The French are big on potatoes. Find a potato and likely a meal will break out. It's not unusual to find a paper cone of potatoes served with dressed greens.

Instead of making traditional "pommes frites" or "pommes soufflé," we used Yukon gold potatoes that were first roasted and then quartered, seasoned with garlic and parsley and then baked. That's what we do every day for our oven-roasted potatoes.

Now we went one step further. We cut the quarters onto smaller pieces and fried those. While hot we seasoned them with a dressing made from olive oil, red wine vinegar and cracked mustard. The potatoes were placed on top of fresh Boston lettuce dressed with olive oil, salt and pepper.

According to the diners, the result was outstanding. The potatoes had a full rich sweetness that made them almost meaty. For a simple salad it was so good.

Along with this course we had a Rosé - Domaine Lafond Tavel Roc-Epine Rosé. Interestingly this wine was a blend of the same grapes as the first. It had plenty of body and a deep color. It was so nice with the salad.

The main course was wild striped bass "Mediterranean style." Filets of striped bass were placed over a sauce made from tomatoes, green olives, capers, lemon and garlic. Then it was drizzled with olive oil before baking. Lightly steamed haricot verts were served along side.

The fish was outstanding. It was very tender. As is often the case, a sauce makes a dish. It's certainly true in the French tradition. This sauce was exceptional. The flavors and colors were so vibrant. It was a winner without the fish.

The wine chosen for this course was Domaine de Couran Coteaux de L'Ardeche Marselan. Marselan is a relatively new grape that is a cross between Grenache and Cabernet. It produces wine with medium body, deep color and a pleasant fruitiness. It worked well with the fish and tomato.

Our last course consisted of fruits and cheese. Rich triple-cream Brie was paired with peaches, melon and blueberries. The wine was a great bottle - Chateau d'Arche Grand Cru Classé Sauternes. This is a classified growth Sauternes from Bordeaux.

The wine was deep in flavor and color – a rich gold. The flavor was long and complex. It had a sweetness but its body ruled overall. This was a great experience.

Our quick visit to France was a good one. It's really nice to experience the food and wine of another place and still be able to stay home. You can do it, too. Prepare it yourself or ask your favorite chef. You'll have a fun time either way.

On another subject a reader was disturbed by my comments last week. I regret I was not clear in what I said. When I suggested that a diner try something the way a restaurant designed the dish, I was referring to not being overly picky or staying in a rut with always having the same thing.

I did not address an aversion to a particular food or dietary concerns in any way. Nor was it my intention to do so. I have discussed those in other columns.

Dietary concerns are real. I have some myself. Here's how we handle those at Jimmy's.

Our point of sale computer system that we set up has a screen for each food type – lunch, dinner, soup, salad, etc. The first button on each screen is not a food. It says "Allergy." When a server selects this button, a list of options comes up such as gluten, dairy, shellfish, etc. Preparation modifiers also appear such as no salt, no butter and others. There is also an open keyboard available for details.

Every food product also has an allergy button. So there is a second opportunity to alert the kitchen to a need.

Jimmy's regularly prepares gluten-free meals for several customers. We have heart patients that come to us because we cater to their requests. We prepare items not on our menu most every day.

As for not liking something, there's a list of sides and other substitutions. We do it all the time.

So if a guest prefers cheese grits and fried green tomatoes with their filet of beef rather than roasted potatoes and asparagus, that's what they get. That's a request that most restaurants would find difficult to accommodate.

Sorry for the confusion. Please keep reading.