

Scoff! Out

Le Magasin Aux Vivres, Metz

Margaret Kemp

With the launch by Nicholas Sarkozy of Pompidou Centre Metz, a sprawling satellite of the Paris gallery, the city is set to become the hot new weekend destination. Not a lot of people know Renaissance man François Rabelais (1494-1553) lived in Metz, or that he said 'appetite comes with eating – thirst goes away with drinking'.

Metz's 16th-century Citadel is now a chic hotel/restaurant, recently transformed by Christophe and Delphine Defossé, minutes from the Pompidou. The restaurant, with menus from €39-€105, is punctuated with Paul Flinckinger's wacky artworks.

Chef Defossé, the only Michelin star 'in the village', is loved/hated in Metz for deconstructing their local signature Quiche Lorraine. 'I've developed wild fantasies around quiche since I came here,' he admits. Defossé's main ingredient is Breton langoustine, traditional lard translates to agar jelly cubes, then bacon, Comté cheese, white wine and fresh herbs are incorporated. 'Eliminating eggs and cream makes it light, a sprinkle of parmesan in the pastry base gives the crunch. I add baby vegetables and tuiles of Comté, placing each element separately on the plate.

This chef asks questions of the classics, answers them with innovative variations on themes, and even if you don't approve of his meddling you'll salute his chutzpah. Try the triple glass dome of cucumber jelly topped with Aquitaine caviar, basil-marinated mackerel and girolle mushrooms. Defossé roasts lobster with Szechuan pepper, sauces it with hare jus, pairs it with confit of slow cooked potatoes, purée of herbs and an 'Escoffier revisited' ragout of snails. He has ways of interpreting Lorraine suckling pig with truffles and crushed potatoes. From the thick wine book, sommelier Thomas Vimbert suggests Oury Schreiber Cuvée Maréchal Fabert 2008. Desserts include Paris-Metz, a tricolour macaroon sandwiched with crème fraîche and fresh raspberries.

Margaret says a diner who counts calories is like a bedfellow who looks at their watch.

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