

Nothing's wrong with Gallic classics, writes **Bob Hart**



▲ **Co-creators:** Michel Bonnet and daughter Amelie have established C'est Bon together.



▶ C'est Bon

396 BAY ST, PORT MELBOURNE
Ph: 9646 2296

Lunch Tues to Fri, dinner Tues to Sat. Licensed. Expect to pay \$55 a head plus wine for three courses, \$25 fixed-price two-course lunch.

▶ **Puff piece:** a dome of puff pastry tops the soup du jour.

▶ **Lucky duck:** (main picture) the impeccably roasted canard à l'orange.

▼ **Bound over:** goat's cheese mousse wrapped in a film of prosciutto.

▼ **Perfect match:** (bottom) a Georges Duboeuf Beaujolais was ideal for the lamb kidneys.

Pictures: DEAN CAMBRAY

THERE are no surprises at C'est Bon: even the name is quaintly predictable. This is no bad thing.

Because good French bistro food does not need to be reinvented or wildly embellished. It is what it is.

All too often food is seen as a fashion item in this country: victims feign horror at the discovery of, say, a '60s or '70s dish on an '06 menu. Why?

The French, believe it or not, still eat onion soup and chicken liver mousse, and are still prepared to address coq au vin and/or canard à l'orange, if pressed.

Good food is timeless, and if somebody sneers the next time you express enthusiasm for a semi-dried tomato, I suggest you stick a couple of them right up their nose. A drizzle of EV olive oil, you may find, assists this manoeuvre . . .

But back to C'est Bon where I lunched last week with a member of the local constabulary who was eating incognito, of course. He had been there before and had found it, um, arresting.

My meal began as meals often begin in rural France — with soup du jour of a rich, house-crafted stock to which fresh vegetables had been added, along with a hint of white truffle oil.

It arrived in a lion's head bowl topped with a golden dome of puff pastry which I demolished before wolfing down the boldly-seasoned soup and wrapping things up with a chabrol — the addition of a splash of red wine to the last of the soup with which it is swirled around and swallowed. Wonderful.

My mate was interrogating a goat's cheese mousse wrapped in a film of prosciutto and served with walnut pesto and toasted brioche. He found it blameless; I agreed with his verdict.

Feeling at one with the past, I then



try

Simple French bistros serving good, honest food have been a part of Melbourne since the 1960s. Here are a few more:

- ▶ **Bistro Thierry**, 511 Malvern Rd, Toorak. Ph: 9824 0888
- ▶ **Libertine**, 500 Victoria St, North Melbourne. Ph: 9329 5228
- ▶ **Sel de la Terre**, 74 Toorak Rd, South Yarra. Ph: 9866 2744
- ▶ **Le Petit Bourgeois**, 330 Waverley Rd, Malvern East. Ph: 9571 0909

tangled with a crisp, golden duck à l'orange, impeccably roasted and draped with a Proustian, Grand Marnier-powered sauce.

A deliciously layered timbale of sweet potato and red cabbage was an unfamiliar, but welcome, embellishment.

The strongish arm of the law, meanwhile, was punching kidneys — besotted with sauteed rognons d'agneau (lamb kidneys) in an extravagantly rich and gamey Beaujolais sauce.

The dish, obviously, was a perfect match for our 2004 George Duboeuf Beaujolais-Village at a sensible \$32 (\$7 a glass), as I discovered after filching an organ and plunging a chunk of baguette into the wondrous sauce. To achieve this, however, I had been forced to apply a choke-hold to my mate, which was necessary but distracting.

Pudding ticked more of the same

boxes: for me an individual tarte tatin of caramelised apples on puff pastry, and for the hungry rozzar a platter of fine, French cheeses.

Now this place, owned by the enchanting and wildly efficient Amelie Bonnet, is a co-creation with her gifted and deliciously eccentric French father Michel — his 18th Australian restaurant.

MICHEL, a veteran chef based in Queensland, visits regularly to work alongside youthful Thomas Routhieu, a talented Frenchman polishing his craft, to our betterment, in the colonies.

So, I suggest you rush along to C'est Bon. It is not essential, however, to take an officer of the law.

In fact, Michel, who tends to ride his large motorbike at improbable speeds, may prefer that you don't . . .

