
LE CLOS

CAFÉ-RESTAURANT PROVENÇALE

20 South Second Street • Fernandina Beach, Florida • Telephone (904) 261-8100 • www.leclos.com

Hours: Monday through Sunday 5:30 – 9:30 PM

Little Slice of France on the First Coast

(Jacksonville Magazine)

"In the main dining room at Le Clos in Fernandina Beach, corks are popping and diners are laughing. In the smaller room, conversation bubbles like the sparkling wine being poured at one table. Combine classical French Provençal cookery and the seaside quaintness of Amelia Island, and you have the magic of Le Clos ("The Enclosure").

Owner/Chef Katherine Ewing's cozy restaurant is located in a restored bungalow near the city's yacht basin. Ewing holds degrees in pastry and cuisine from Cordon Bleu and the Ritz-Escofier in Paris, ensuring that the quality of the food equals the charm of the atmosphere.

From the pork and chicken liver pate finished with cream, cognac, and parsley to the chocolate gâteau with crème Anglaise, the offerings are uncompromisingly French. With each entree, Ewing's menu suggests appropriate accompanying wines (with lamb shanks, perhaps a hearty Burgundy; with the sea scallops, a sauvignon blanc).

Le Clos is petite and cozy. Diners are seated in either a smaller side room with four tables or the larger room with more than a dozen tables. Both rooms are tasteful and understated, with salmon walls and white trim matching the snowy table linens. Candlelit tables add a dash of amoré, while background music includes scatterings of pop and jazz (Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Steve Tyrell). Each dish here is prepared in exquisite fashion and presentation is emphasized. Every offering, from entrée to dessert, looks ready for a magazine cover. Indeed the food is almost too pretty to eat, but we managed to clean our plates anyway."

Southern Living

Best Place for Dinner: Le Clos

"Chef Katherine Ewing earned degrees in pastry and cuisine from Le Cordon Bleu and trained at the Ritz in Paris before opening her restaurant in a small cottage near the Fernandina Harbor in 1997. Each item on the menu brings a taste of France to Fernandina. Order the seared Hudson Valley duck breast with mushrooms, a crème brûlée, and a cup of espresso, and you may find yourself humming La Marseillaise."

Off The BeatenTrack - Amelia Island

(Wall Street Journal, Travel Editor Andrea Peterson)

For terrific French fare, head to the intimate dining room at Le Clos. The menu features fresh fish dishes, a stellar steak au poivre and knock-out chocolate cake.

Catherine Enns Grigas
(Water's Edge Magazine)

The French have a gift for serving the most delectable food from the most unlikely places. In limestone caves, the smell of mushrooms sizzling in melted butter wafts down winding corridors that lead to a restaurant carved out of the rock in St.-Hilaire. Ancient convents, medieval castles, tiny farmhouses and every available space on any plaza or sidewalk can be a place to sit and savor.

Little wonder, then, that Le Clos, whose French name means walled vineyard, could produce such simple pleasures in a tiny circa-1906 cottage tucked away on Second Street in Fernandina Beach.

The restaurant's French pedigree comes from chef-owner, Katherine Ewing. While her roots are in Florida, her culinary training came from Le Cordon Bleu and L'Ecole de Gastronomie Francaise in Paris. Her own cuisine, however, is not so haute as her background suggests.

Her cooking leans toward the luminously unfussy flavors of that area in the south of France where we wish we could all spend a year: Provence. Lacking that, a trip to Le Clos is the next best thing. The restaurant is open only in the evenings, so we reserved a table well in advance of our Friday night visit. It was good planning, because Le Clos fills up quickly on weekends. By the time we arrived at 8 P.M., the little house was fairly bursting with diners. While the dining room is an open space, the restaurant still feels like a house. In one side room, a large group of customers, some seated together on high-backed benches, enjoyed the evening around a large table. In the main room, tables are put together as needed and diners cordially offer to squeeze in if there's not enough room to pull out a chair. It is close quarters, to be sure, but that adds to the cafe` feeling of the place.

Red walls, white tablecloths and fresh flowers provided a rather elegant backdrop, and we loved the cast of flickering candlelight that supplied most of the dining room's lighting. Jazz standards from John Coltrane and Ella Fitzgerald played in the background.

The menu is not large at Le Clos-just four hors d'oeuvres choices and nine entrées. All have French origins. Some are typically Provencal, using tomatoes, garlic and olive oil. What can be said of all of them is that they are prepared in the best of French tradition-the freshest of ingredients paired with finesse.

We began our meal with Escargots Bourguignonne, figuring a foray into French cuisine wouldn't be complete without a taste of snails. It was a classical preparation-snails cooked in butter that had been flavored with plenty of parsley and garlic on an escargot plate, with a crispy roll served alongside.

The Crabe Farci is probably French in name only, but it doesn't matter because this was a crab cake beyond compare. Whole lump crabmeat, blended with just enough bread crumbs and diced red, yellow and green peppers to hold a shape, had been sautéed and garnished with a fresh pineapple relish and ultra-thin slices of marinated cucumbers. A small salad of baby field greens was the perfect piquant foil to the sweetness of the crab relish.

Although the menu at Le Clos is small, we found the choices difficult. The fresh fish that evening was Chilean Sea Bass with buerre blanc, that wonderfully buttery sauce that is the signature of French chefs. We decided to stay with the Provencal dishes, though, and ordered the restaurant's two most popular entrees, Coquilles St. Jacques a la Provencal and Jarret d'Agneau a la Provencal.

Of course, that meant bypassing some other dishes that seemed equally entrancing, such as the Confit de Canard and the Salade Le Clos, a toss of baby greens, warm goat cheese, olives and crudités with a balsamic vinaigrette, which also comes with shrimp and we said "no" to the Moules Marinieres and Frites. That's something I find difficult to do, as my husband learned on a recent trip to Paris when I convinced him that we should stop for mussels and fries on the way to dinner.

As we observed plates of food being brought from the kitchen, we questioned our choices again. Each dish seemed to hold a garden of earthly delights: huge pink shrimp in the scampi dish; plate-size steak au poivre accompanied by a cone of frites. A small menu, yes, but each dish looked impeccably prepared.

Needless to say, we weren't disappointed. The Coquille St. Jacques a la Provençal was five exceedingly plump Diver sea scallops seared so that their tops were crisp and golden. Inside, they were warm and moist. A light sauce of shallots, herbs and extra virgin olive oil, combined with a touch of cubed tomatoes, accented the succulent sweetness of the scallops. Fettuccine, lightly dressed in garlic and butter, came with the scallops.

The lamb shank braised with tomatoes, onion and garlic was a simple dish, a version of French home cooking reminiscent in its own way of pot roast. But we could see why it holds a place as the most popular dish at Le Clos. The lamb meat was falling-off-the-bone tender. Creamy potatoes au gratin accompanied the lamb.

The desserts at Le Clos are a trio of choices...Crème Caramel, Gateau au Chocolat with Crème Anglaise and Meringue with Fruits. We dove into the chocolate cake, a thick wedge of dark chocolate thinly iced in chocolate and swimming in a swirl of vanilla and chocolate crème Anglaise. The meringue was a sweet white crown served atop a mélange of chilled berries.

The small wait staff at Le Clos was just right for the restaurant-attentive without being at all pretentious. The wine list has a number of standard choices for both domestic and French wines. For the connoisseur willing to spend \$150, the restaurant has the outstanding Chateau Cos-D'Estournel, St.-Estephe 1995. That was one choice we didn't have to question.

After such a dinner, we were almost startled to step off the porch stairs of the house and find ourselves in Fernandina Beach. Maybe Le Clos isn't Provence, but it's close.

(Menu & Prices Subject to Change)

Dining with Tolf

(Florida Trend Magazine)

In between my never-ending searches for restaurants to put on the best lists, I look for simpler, smaller spots that are doing something special, maybe even unique, to brighten up our dining-out whirl. Here is one of my latest discoveries:

Le Clos - 20 s 2nd St., Amelia Island - 904-261-8100

Whenever I want to tickle my French memory bank, I head for a delightful 1906 cottage a few feet from Fernandina Beach's famous shrimp docks. That's where Le Cordon Bleu graduate and Ritz of Paris alum Katherine Ewing holds forth, blending a peerless liver pate, creating classically inspired escargot bourguignonne, serving seared diver scallops with herbs, shallots and tomato on a bed of linguine, fish of the day delivered fresh daily, shrimp steeped in garlic-chive cream with feta and red-yellow pepper confetti bedded down with seared spinach, and marinated hanger steak sporting roasted shallots and gorgonzola. The coup de grace is the French chocolate cake with creme anglaise. Dinner entrees range from \$18 to \$25 and are served Monday through Saturday. Prices at Le Clos reflect the level of cuisine. With beverage, tax, and tip, count on about \$50 per person.

The wine list at Le Clos is highlighted by champagnes and sparkling wines, choices in Ports, Sherries, and other Aperitifs are available.

The Best Romantic Escapes in Florida

Step into this charming little yellow and white cottage for a truly delightful romantic dinner. Candles grace the tables in this dimly lit, intimate room that is painted deep red with white trim. The framed menu hangs on the back wall and nightly specials are inscribed on a blackboard. Cuisine here is pure Provencale. Come for the escargot, the pate, the coquelles St. Jacques, the tender seared duck, and the braised lamb shank. French wine lovers will find the inspired list a true pleasure. Dinner Mon.- Sat. 20 S. 2nd St., 904.261.8100

JacksonvilleMag.com

Cari Sánchez-Potter

... Le Clos (20 South 2nd St., 261-8100) a French restaurant housed in a petite restored cottage on Second Street. A white picket fence and flowering vines creeping up to the rooftop set the stage outside. Inside, warm salmon-hued walls, flickering candlelight, and soft jazz tunes provide the backdrop for a poetic meal oozing with romance. The two small dining rooms buzz with happy conversation enhanced by a wine list highlighted by champagnes, and other sparkling wines. Patrons lean forward the older, well-heeled set but unpretentious attentive service makes any amorous couple feel at home. Tables are snugly spaced but the hearty buzz of diners and clicking of glasses makes it so the diners at the table next to yours cannot listen in on your conversation.

The menu at Le Clos is focused on classically-inspired Provençal fare. This is French comfort food at its best, expertly crafted by the restaurant's French-trained chef and owner Katherine Ewing. Each delicious morsel of escargot arrives at the table swimming in its own bubbling pool of garlicky parsley butter that deserves to be sopped up with warm slices of chewy baguette. The succulent Colorado braised lamb shank is falling-off-the-bone tender and its savory broth surrounds a creamy pile of au gratin potatoes. Daily fish specials are local. If the flickering candlelight and impassioned dishes aren't enough to incite l'amour, seal the deal with the gâteau au chocolate cake swimming in a pool of delicate crème Anglaise. It doesn't get any sexier than that.