



## L'Idiot du Village | Inventive food in a colorful, intimate venue

**Location** Brussels **Signature dish** Escalope of warm foie gras with pepper and vanilla | \$\$\$

One of Brussels' best-kept secrets, this atmospheric restaurant, hidden in a quiet street, is ideally located between the shops of the Sablon and the popular Marolles flea market. In his small kitchen, co-owner and chef Alain Gascoin prepares imaginative dishes from local ingredients, keeping an eye on customers through a small opening, while Olivier Le Bret, his business partner, takes care of the guests.

Gascoin wants to surprise his clients: "They should not feel bored when they eat," he says. But that never happens here. The restaurant's name sets the tone, and the chef's creativity and sense of humor are reflected in both the setting and the food. The main room, predominantly blue, casual, and warm, features a large crystal chandelier. Thick red curtains frame the windows, while on the wall a painting of a dog with a human body, by the Belgian artist Thierry Poncelet, looks like an ancestral portrait. Gascoin is French and loves to adapt traditional Belgian recipes

and ingredients by preparing them in exotic ways. This creates a seasonal menu showcasing a wonderful mix of flavors. Thankfully, the escalope of foie gras with pepper and vanilla is offered throughout the year. It is perfectly cooked, even slightly crispy on the outside, and deliciously smooth inside.

Other highlights include carpaccio of sea bass and scampi, with lime and coconut milk; roasted lobster with spices or the lobster ball with green cabbage; roasted pigeon with mango and a touch of chocolate; and turbot with mussels.

Dessert favorites at L'Idiot du Village include iced meringue with salty caramel; *stoemp*, traditionally a potato-based dish, here given a twist to create a delicious dessert of red fruits; and the classic, delightfully thin apple tart served with ice cream. This is a place with real soul. **MF**

☒ The dining room is dark and cozy yet elegant.



## Aux Armes de Bruxelles | Belgian classics in an authentic brasserie

**Location** Brussels **Signature dish** Mussels marinières | \$\$\$

Located in one of the most touristic streets of Brussels, near the UNESCO World Heritage site of Grand Place, this 1921 institution offers simple Belgian dishes generously presented in a brasserie atmosphere. The Veulemans family, who owned the venue until 2005, started the trend of serving mussels marinières at the table in individual iron pots. Steamed in a broth traditionally flavored with onions, celery, and wine, the mussels are served with thickly cut fries. Locals take an empty mussel shell to extract the next one.

The extensive menu offers a fine assortment of Belgian classics, such as the famous croquettes de crevettes, which is North Sea shrimps served simply in the typical way, with a piece of lemon and fried curly parsley. Other favorites include tomatoes with gray shrimps, cheese croquettes, beef stew with Brussels gueuze beer, steak tartare, and *waterzooi*, a stew of poultry, fish, or lobster.

The restaurant is split into three rooms. The first, the emblematic art deco main area, features private wooden booths with seats covered in green leather; the second, often called the "Flemish room," is much brighter due to surrounding windows with stained-glass insets; the third room is narrow and more intimate. Waiters, impeccably dressed in white jackets, chat with the regulars, some of whom come every Sunday. Original patrons may regret the departure of the founding family, but the new owners have succeeded in retaining the authentic atmosphere.

You can try one of the numerous Belgian beers on offer; alternatively, the wine list has a "coups de coeur" section suggesting three different wines. For dessert try the flambéed crêpes with Mandarine Napoléon liqueur, prepared at the table. A gourmet show that never disappoints. **MF**

↑ *Waterzooi*, a Belgian speciality, made here with poultry.



## Comme Chez Soi | The flagship of Belgian haute cuisine

**Location** Brussels **Signature dish** Sole in a Riesling mousseline sauce with gray North Sea shrimps | \$\$\$\$

Set in a townhouse in the heart of Brussels since 1936, this elegant, Michelin-starred restaurant remains the top place to discover fine Belgian cuisine. Laurence, the daughter of celebrated chef Pierre Wynants and wife of current chef Lionel Rigolet, is there to welcome you. The main restaurant is designed in the Art Nouveau style with mirrors, wood paneling, and green stained glass. Customers may also dine in a private salon, or at a table in the open-plan, stainless-steel kitchen. Watching the choreographed ballet of chefs preparing the finest of dishes is highly recommended.

Rigolet, the fourth-generation chef, continues the restaurant's tradition of using the finest seasonal and luxury ingredients, imaginatively prepared and creatively presented. The menu showcases a mix of Wynants's signature dishes, clearly marked, such as salad of North Sea lobster with black truffles and potatoes and Rigolet's new creations. One of the most

exquisite dishes on the menu was jointly created by the two chefs: a potato mousseline with crab, shrimps, and Royal Belgian caviar with white oyster butter and chives. The five- and six-course tasting menus are new creations, bringing new flavors and spices: examples are breast of Landes pigeon with cubeb pepper and Guinness, chanterelles, and Romanesco flowers and roasted wild halibut, Gillardeau oysters, artichoke, and Taggiasche olives.

Before he handed over to Rigolet, Wynants was also the maître sommelier—and the wine list is mind-blowing. The wine cellar offers one of the biggest European collections of Bordeaux *grand cru* wines, including those from the Pétrus vineyard. Desserts continue the pampering: Rigolet's lime soufflé granita with mojito perfume is a real firework of flavors. **MF**

📍 The restaurant's beautiful Art Nouveau interior.