

# Where to DINE Now: Lucie

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**R**estaurant **Lucie** proudly receives its 2024 Michelin Guide Recommendation.

Things change. It was not too long ago that the restaurant scene in this city was pleasingly plump, congenial, easy-going. Restaurants were defined by cuisines and costs. Dining out was clear-cut. And then menus sought a new terminology: Fusion. French restaurants wanted pasta dishes on their menus; Italian restaurants had a sushi section; restaurants offering traditional menus with which Toronto was quite secure, took us on a world cruise with stops at exotic ports. And then, buckling under the weight of extreme confusion, there was a crack in the crust of our part of the earth, and the Michelin man rode into town, stars a-blazing. Things change.

And so it came to pass that money flowed like bottles of Dom Perignon, designers created unique dining arenas that took our breath away and built interiors, the likes of which had heretofore been seen only in photographs from the world's capitals. Executive Chefs ordered white designer jackets. A class system emerged.



Classic Martini with Olives at Restaurant Lucie. Photo by Restaurant Lucie.

Is this a positive or negative turn for the restaurant industry? Can Toronto support all the new Michelin's without an enormous increase in tourism? Time will tell.

In the South of France, a hotbed of Michelin Stars, an absolutely perfect restaurant called **L'Oasis de Napoule**, begged Michelin not to give them a second star. "I want customers every day," he said, "not just on their Birthday," and he successfully kept them at bay by having only one tiny bathroom.

This suddenly comes to mind on entering **Lucie**, a newly minted 2024 Michelin Guide-recommended restaurant with a unique design. Cool. A large rectangular bar, surprisingly empty, fills almost the entire room. In front, a group of men who have clearly come "from the office" stand, drinks in hand, enjoying the end of the day. We are ushered to seats at the bar—from where I quickly un-usher myself. The stools seem unusually tall, and I am not. For me, this is a precarious perch which, in my experience, requires me to be lifted on and off. We prefer the quiet dining room to the right of the Bar. I am with a friend, and it is his Birthday.



Arbre de Mignardises. Photo by Restaurant Lucie

Our menu is titled: *Le Comptoir de Lucie*. Chef de Cuisine is listed as **Arnaud Bloquet** and the cuisine at Lucie is French to the core, a reflection of charming owner **Yannick Bigourdain**, and in memory of his grand-mère. Now, Martinis ordered, we settle in comfortably on the leather banquet, and admire the gold-tooled leather table top. Conservative and classic, the room matches well with the style of the diners in the downtown business core.

Our servers are kind and take the time to explain all the nuances and details of the menu. Canapes are arranged on the leaves of a bronze tree, and look so adorable, it is a shame to eat them. In no time we have denuded the tree and enjoyed the one-bite nubbins of flavour.

Introducing our second course, our server asks, "Do you know what is an Amuse Bouche?" as a clear glass egg is served and the top whisked off with a flourish. The lovely aroma of its foamy contents intrigues us. A few spoons and we are all smiles at the flavours we've enjoyed.



Le Foie Gras. Photo by Restaurant Lucie

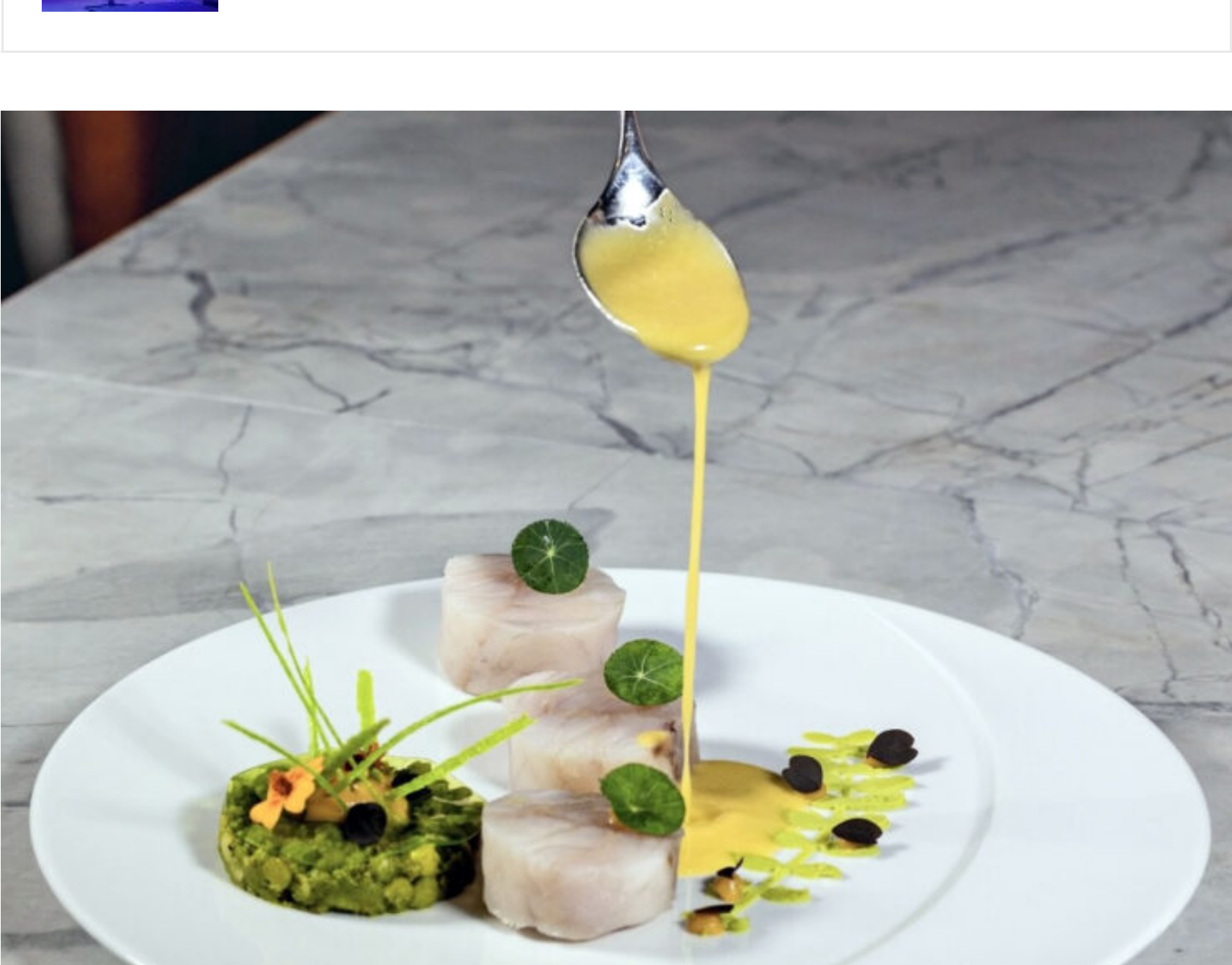
It seems that in Michelin-blessed restaurants in this city, the trend is for servers to work in teams. Interesting that by design, each course comes via a new server with a new personality, as a new vignette. I liken it to another act in a play. Yes, it has been said that restaurants are the new theatre. *Le Foie Gras* is a lovely slice of Hudson Valley Foie Gras, perfectly seared and embraced by fresh green tarragon emulsion and frivolous edible flowers. To protect the precious contents, a lacy pastry honeycomb covers the plate.

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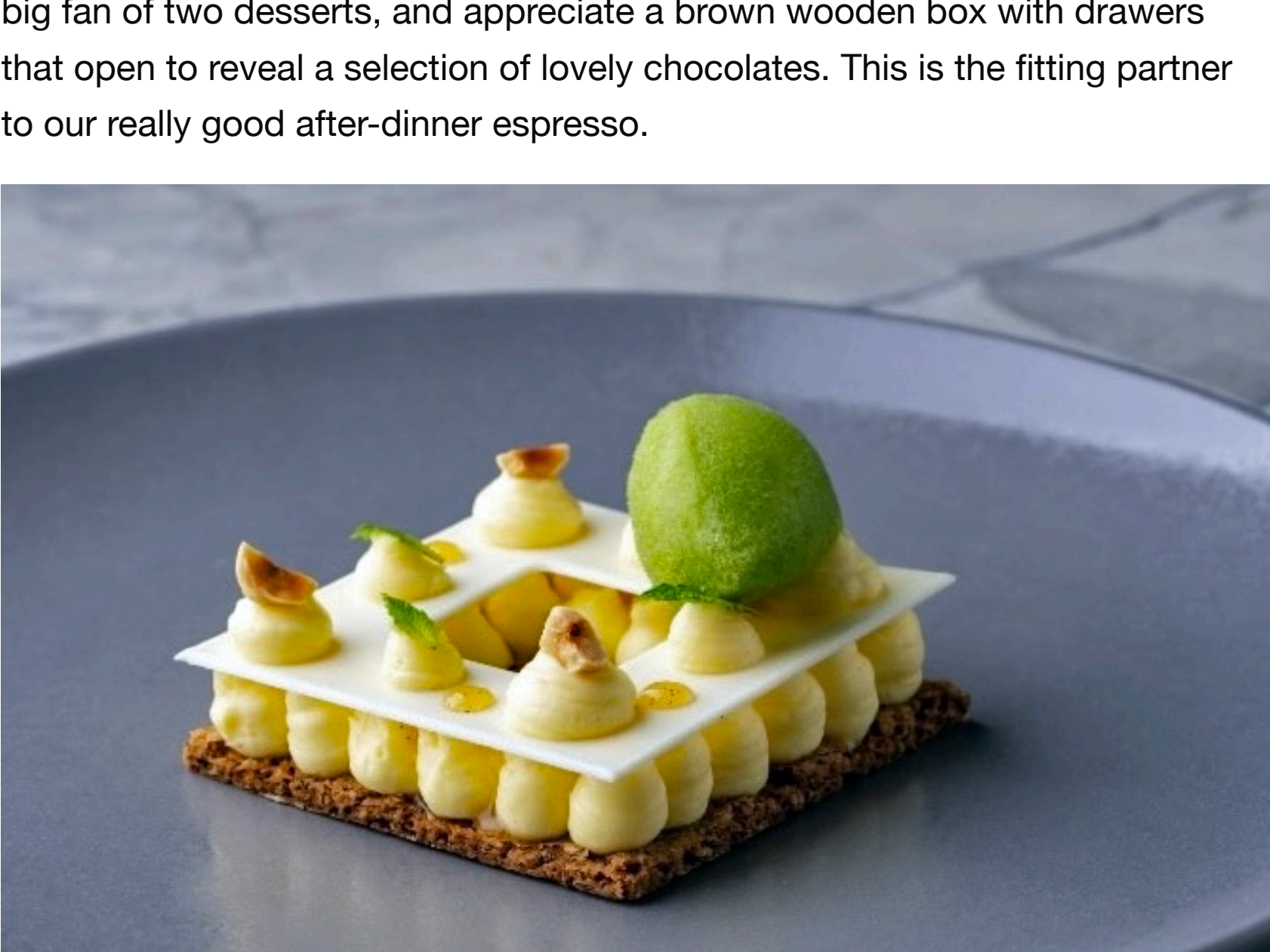
**Laissez les Bons Temps Rouler en Louisiana**



Les Saint-Jacques. Photo by Restaurant Lucie

Introducing our main course, our server points out the cooking method, the sauce, the garnishes with such enthusiasm and pride. *Les Saint-Jacques*, a trio of nicely seared large scallops, enrobed in a lush sauce of my favorite mushroom, golden chanterelles, and almonds. A bit of acidity is in the form of Apple Cider Foam. The "foam" component seems to be a favorite of this kitchen, since it appears in two of the three dishes we've tasted.

The menu lists *Le Citron* as our dessert. I am excited, since lemon is my favorite dessert flavour. This delightful slice of Ivory chocolate, (I believe that is white chocolate) lemon and vanilla confit, and a side of mint sorbet is a pleasing end to an interesting dining excursion. But wait, there is more. I am a big fan of two desserts, and appreciate a brown wooden box with drawers that open to reveal a selection of lovely chocolates. This is the fitting partner to our really good after-dinner espresso.



Le Citron. Photo by Restaurant Lucie

Two jovial Spanish speaking men had taken the table beside us earlier, and as their meal ends, dessert comes with a lit birthday candle on the plate. As they take their photographs, I smile and say, "Happy Birthday."

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Sara Waxman, OOnt, is an award-winning restaurant critic, best-selling cookbook author, food and travel journalist and has eaten her way through much of the free world for four decades, while writing about it in books, newspapers and magazines. She is the Editor in Chief of DINE magazine.