

The Mouth

Giving the menu the bird

De Witte Uyl
Frans Halsstraat 26, 670 0458
Tues-Sat 18.00-01.00
Cash, PIN, credit cards

I'm never sure whether I want to watch a bird or eat it. I can gaze at an azure magpie outside my office window for hours (especially when I'm on deadline). And I don't snicker like a 14-year-old boy when someone tells me he just saw a couple of great tits. It's also true that on my computer is a list of almost every bird that's passed in front of my binoculars.

But sometimes that list of birds starts looking more like a menu: sage-grouse, ring-necked pheasant, wild turkey. And it makes me feel just a little bit guilty (and hungry).

So, during a very busy month when I haven't taken the time to watch the wild fowl, Partner-in-all-things-avian and I decide to go out and eat some.

De Witte Uyl (The White Owl) has been one of my favourite Amsterdam restaurants for a decade, long before I became a twitcher. Owners Annemieke den Uyl (who's not afraid to discuss her Marlies Dekkers undergarments) and Nick White, along with head chef Han Schuit, cook exclusively with organic meat, and, as much as possible, organic vegetables.

The candlelit restaurant, elegantly decorated with 1920s furniture and big vases of dark sunflowers and a flock of (sculpted) owls, manages to be intimate yet comfortable for a garrulous party of five like ours. It also offers a dozen dishes, plus dessert.



The vegetables are fresh and crunchy and the garlic and ginger lend a slight Asian flavour.

By Nanci Tangeman

There's no differentiation between starters and mains. You choose two dishes in any order, and a dessert, for a set price (€39.50).

I head straight for the birds on the menu. I start with boned quail (probably *Coturnix coturnix*, according to my bird guidebook) on wok-fried peas in a pot, with haricots verts. The vegetables are fresh and crunchy, and the garlic and ginger lend a slight Asian flavour. For my second course I opt for the duck special (probably a domestic Muscovy) served with a tinge of remorse.

My friends stick to sea and land. The scallops are plump, served on small pancakes with samphire (sea parsley) and puréed pumpkin and basil. The ravioli is homemade with powdered hazelnuts, which gives it an earthy flavour. Annemieke warns us that the lamb steak has a strong cumin taste. Two friends try it anyway: one would have preferred less cumin, but both clean their plates.

We choose red and white wine to match the collection of courses: Bodega Senorio de Cruces Albarino 2007 (€25) and Spice Route Pinotage 2006 (€35).

No birds for dessert, but I do get the chance to try to ID some rare Professor Grunschnabel ice cream flavours. With no guidebook to help me I guess incorrectly, but enjoy them anyway. The hazelnut mousse is a hit with our crowd, as is the mountain of chocolate (three species—white, milk and dark) that accompanies the coffee and tea.

The night's culinary journey has been a bit of a guilt trip, but I'm motivated to dust off my binoculars and head to the forest in the morning. Who knows? I just may work up an appetite. —

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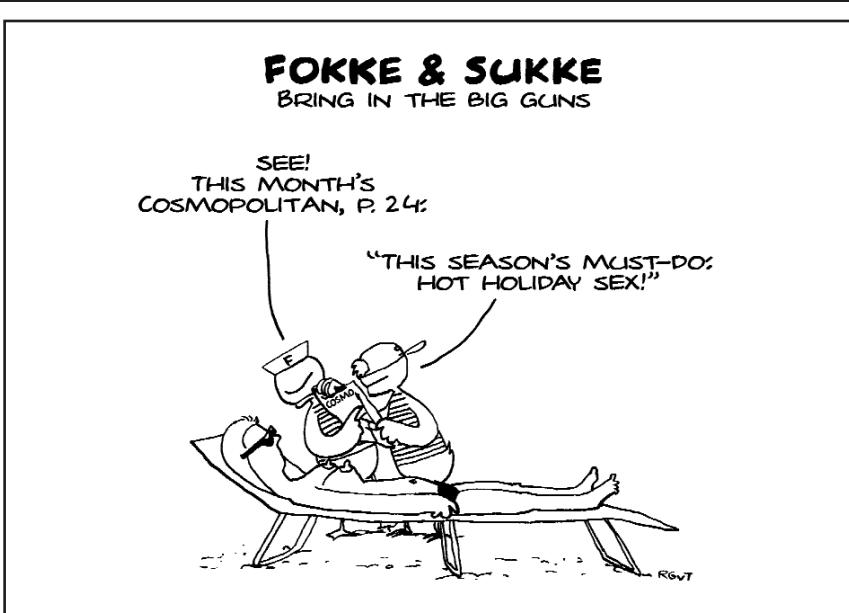
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