Inside or out, lovely French dining

By Tucker Shaw
Denver Post Dining Critic

No question about it: Bistro Vendôme is one of my favorite places in Denver to sup. I dig, in particular, Vendôme’s pleasant patio, a small, quietly busy collection of two- and four-top tables tucked into a brick-lined courtyard off Larimer Square. A shady canopy of trees rustles overhead, allowing just enough breeze to take the edge off the hot summer nights. It’s a lovely setting in which to lean back in your chair, swing your shoes from your toes, swirl your glass of Saint Hilaire Blanc de Blancs bubbly, and languidly peruse Vendôme’s informal French-bistro-inspired menu.

On the menu, you’ll find such Francophile treats as bœuf tartare (chopped raw beef tenderloin with aioli, dijon-style mustard, capers, and a fried quail egg), carpaccio de betteraves (thin-sliced roasted beets with goat cheese, pickled onions and walnut vinaigrette), and, naturally, steak frites (more on the frites later).

DINING: Pick appetizers wisely, as well as where you sit on patio

CONTINUED FROM 3F

To start, choose the terrine de foie gras, a suave soft pâté served with toasted Théloche and an intoxicating compote of rhubarb, melon and apricots, or the classic French onion soup. Also worthwhile, the character-filled, a simply country-style accumulation of cured meats, and if you’re feeling adventurous and hot, the croûtou with camembert sauce and sweet Modelo peppers can be a refreshing starter.

Appetite is swelled by a soup of pocher et porc, a cold pork vinaigrette with a pickled onion (this might make sense in a spring menu, but was too heavy for pole position at the top of the meal).

Approach the crisp Vendôme with caution. This very right of way of deep-fried calamari, fried calamari, and fried calamari was topped with fresh tomatoes, black olives, capers, and red onions, and piled with a chunk of butter. It was not a particularly worthwhile dish. Nor was the much more substantial and expensive dish, the saltimbocca, which was, in reality, a thin veal cutlet served with a delicious sauce of tomato and red wine. It was too much for what you paid. The presentation, however, was quite nice, and the sauce was delicious, but you’d wish you hadn’t seen the dish.

Steak frites, the ultimate prize piece of the menu — for the only way to make them as an appetizer is to order a steak — was a solid effort. The steak was well-prepared and flavorful, and the frites were crispy, not too oily, but no matter how I try to impress Vendôme with the artistry of my steak, I can’t say I was that impressed. The steak was well-prepared and flavorful, and the frites were crispy, not too oily, but no matter how I try to impress Vendôme with the artistry of my steak, I can’t say I was that impressed.

In addition, the flatbread, guacamole sauce and avocado were perfectly presented with a parsley and tomato salad. With the onion soup, it was a bit too much for what you paid for it. But no matter how I try to impress Vendôme with the artistry of my steak, I can’t say I was that impressed.

A little divided opinion on the steak frites, split right down the middle of the plate. The steak was very well-prepared and flavorful, but the frites were crispy. I was surmising that the steak was more to the taste of the meat lover, but the frites were more to the taste of the vegetable lover.

A little divided opinion on the steak frites, split right down the middle of the plate. The steak was very well-prepared and flavorful, but the frites were crispy. I was surmising that the steak was more to the taste of the meat lover, but the frites were more to the taste of the vegetable lover.

Overall, the flatbread, guacamole sauce and avocado were perfectly presented with a parsley and tomato salad. With the onion soup, it was a bit too much for what you paid for it. But no matter how I try to impress Vendôme with the artistry of my steak, I can’t say I was that impressed.

A little divided opinion on the steak frites, split right down the middle of the plate. The steak was very well-prepared and flavorful, but the frites were crispy. I was surmising that the steak was more to the taste of the meat lover, but the frites were more to the taste of the vegetable lover.

In addition, the flatbread, guacamole sauce and avocado were perfectly presented with a parsley and tomato salad. With the onion soup, it was a bit too much for what you paid for it. But no matter how I try to impress Vendôme with the artistry of my steak, I can’t say I was that impressed.

A little divided opinion on the steak frites, split right down the middle of the plate. The steak was very well-prepared and flavorful, but the frites were crispy. I was surmising that the steak was more to the taste of the meat lover, but the frites were more to the taste of the vegetable lover.

Overall, the flatbread, guacamole sauce and avocado were perfectly presented with a parsley and tomato salad. With the onion soup, it was a bit too much for what you paid for it. But no matter how I try to impress Vendôme with the artistry of my steak, I can’t say I was that impressed.

A little divided opinion on the steak frites, split right down the middle of the plate. The steak was very well-prepared and flavorful, but the frites were crispy. I was surmising that the steak was more to the taste of the meat lover, but the frites were more to the taste of the vegetable lover.

In addition, the flatbread, guacamole sauce and avocado were perfectly presented with a parsley and tomato salad. With the onion soup, it was a bit too much for what you paid for it. But no matter how I try to impress Vendôme with the artistry of my steak, I can’t say I was that impressed.

A little divided opinion on the steak frites, split right down the middle of the plate. The steak was very well-prepared and flavorful, but the frites were crispy. I was surmising that the steak was more to the taste of the meat lover, but the frites were more to the taste of the vegetable lover.

In addition, the flatbread, guacamole sauce and avocado were perfectly presented with a parsley and tomato salad. With the onion soup, it was a bit too much for what you paid for it. But no matter how I try to impress Vendôme with the artistry of my steak, I can’t say I was that impressed.

A little divided opinion on the steak frites, split right down the middle of the plate. The steak was very well-prepared and flavorful, but the frites were crispy. I was surmising that the steak was more to the taste of the meat lover, but the frites were more to the taste of the vegetable lover.

In addition, the flatbread, guacamole sauce and avocado were perfectly presented with a parsley and tomato salad. With the onion soup, it was a bit too much for what you paid for it. But no matter how I try to impress Vendôme with the artistry of my steak, I can’t say I was that impressed.