

We Dare You to Get a Reservation

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Shang Palace's Salmon Lo Hei.

Though *la rentrée*, or the fall season, which begins when privileged Parisians return to work in September after their long summer holidays, traditionally sees the city's gastronomic calendar come to a roiling boil, a spate of midsummer openings stole some of autumn's usual heat: notably, Au Passage, a hip new bistrot a vins; Neva Cuisine, an excellent modern bistro behind the Gare Saint Lazare; and Agapé Sustance, a tiny but brilliant contemporary French table in the heart of touristy Saint-Germain-des-Pres. Still, the coming of that delicious season when Paris gutters start filling up with bronze-colored chestnut leaves just wouldn't be the same without a new restaurant or two to create a reservations frenzy, and distinguish for all the world those who are in the *la* loop.

The sweetest new place to score high at this *très* Parisien game is Chatomat, a charming little shop-front in a scrappy neck of the woods where few tourists ever go, the frontier between gentrifying but still *populaire* Belleville and trendier Menilmontant in the 20th Arrondissement. Victor Gaillard and Alice di Gagno's winsome little restaurant is painted white and kitted out with industrial lamps and a surprising lack of attitude — the service here is as earnest and eager as the very good contemporary French bistro cooking, including dishes like baked celeriac in Parmesan cream, cod with grilled romaine and dried black-olive crumbs and a sublime fig-filled semolina cake with homemade pistachio ice cream.

If you want to put your hotel concierge to the test, though, ask for a table at the just-opened Shang Palace, the superb Chinese restaurant at the Shangri-La Paris hotel — it's only open from Thursday to Sunday and it's the toughest table to land this fall. Though it occupies a basement space, it so perfectly acers the look, atmosphere and hospitality of upmarket Chinese restaurants in cities like Hong Kong or Singapore that a meal here is like being there for a couple of very gracious hours. Chef Frank Xu, a native of Shenzhen, was brought in from Hong Kong, and his exquisitely delicate mostly Cantonese cooking has upstaged almost every other Chinese table in Paris — don't miss the salmon "lo hei," with dried jellyfish and sesame sauce; the best Peking duck in town; the pork with clams and chives; and the amazingly good fried rice "chef's" style.



Chef Sébastien Gravé's Pottoka.

A high-testosterone environment might be just the analogue to attending the Paris fashion shows, in which case it's worth scrambling for a table at Pottoka, the new modern Basque table by the chef Sébastien Gravé and the maitre d'hotel David Bottreau, who run the outstanding Les Fables de la Fontaine seafood restaurant just around the corner. Here they cater to the rough rugby player fantasies of this micro-quarter of Paris popular with junior bankers. It's not remotely stuffy, though, and the food can be really good, including a flan of

Ossau Iraty cheese under a cap of gazpacho with sardine rillettes toast, grilled lamb chops a la plancha with lamb stuffed piquillo peppers and a sublime cooked-to-order gâteau Basque.

In the Marais, it's easy to see why the *quartier's* gallery and boutique owners have made the bistro L'Intention their new local favorite. Not only does it stylishly mirror the neighborhood with its décor of exposed stone walls, polished cement and art photos, but Cédric Barbarat's light, market-driven cooking is also quite delicious. His menu changes every Tuesday but runs to dishes like guinea hen with figs and celery, sea bass with baby potatoes and zucchini in a tomato bouillon, and mirabelle clafoutis.

Anyone who's staying in Paris for a day or two after the shows might also want to check out David Lynch's spectacular looking new club Silencio, which is scheduled to open on Oct. 6 and will include cinema projection rooms, gallery space, an art library and a dance floor. Admission is for members only until midnight. Or, if you're looking for a perfect place to relax *après* shows, La Grenouillère in the tranquil northern French village of La Madeleine-sous-Montreuil may be just the ticket. The designer Patrick Bouchain's cozy new *huttes* (cabins) have zinc-lined showers, sapling-covered roofs, soaking tubs and coolers filled with locally made beer and apple juice. Alexandre Gauthier is also one of the hottest young chefs in France, and prepares brilliant dishes like his signature roast lobster tail in a bed of smoldering juniper boughs. The new Les Avisés hotel and restaurant just outside of Epernay in Champagne country is another spectacular retreat, with gorgeous contemporary décor and an excellent restaurant where the chef Stéphane Rossillon features dishes like tomato gazpacho with eggplant; pork braised with lemon grass, carrots and baby potatoes; and baba au rhum with lemon cream. Yum!

Agapé Substance, 66 rue Mazarine, Sixth; 011-33-1-43-29-33-83; agapesubstance.com.

Hotel-Restaurant Les Avisés, 59 rue du Cramant, Avize en Champagne; 011-33-3-26-57-70-06; selosse-lesavisés.com.

Chatomat, 6 rue Victor-Letalle, 20th; 011-33-1-47-97-25-77.

L'Intention, 3 rue du Roi-Doré, Fourth, 011-33-1-42-74-31-22.

Neva Cuisine, 2 rue de Berne, Eighth; 011-33-1-45-22-18-91.

Au Passage, 1 bis passage Saint Sébastien, 11th; 011-33-1-43-55-07-52.

Pottoka, 4 rue de l'Exposition, Seventh; 011-33-1-45-51-88-38.

La Grenouillère, rue de la Grenouillère, La Madeleine-sous-Montreuil; 011-33-3-21-06-07-22; lagrenouillere.fr.

Shang Palace, Shangri-La Paris, 10, avenue d'Iéna, 16th; 011-33-1-53-67-19-92; shangri-la.com.

Silencio, 142 rue Montmartre, Second; silencio-club.com.