

## **Semilla: buzzing market cuisine for locavore foodies in Saint Germain**

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Semilla fills an authentic yet contemporarily-aligned french niche in Saint Germain created by the expats and tourists flocking into Cafe Flore, Brasserie Lipp et al. This millennial Parisian bistro has been for over a decade drawing in regulars of all ages - local or seasonal visitors like ourselves - to its convivial, fast-paced, casual and transparent, industrial hip womb.

The clipped paper menu (only in French as usually) hangs on the stone wall of Rue de Seine. Passing by, we always peak what is cooking. Sometimes casually walking in, other times reserving a table on the go. The founders Juan Sanchez and Drew Harré literally own this snippet of a street. Their **Fish** project across, a tapas concept **Cosi** next door, a wine bar, what is next?

## **Market cuisine plated small**

The 'seed' of Semilla is creativity that daily sprouts from the Parisian markets and its chefs called up by the grand eye of Eric Trochon, M.O.F in 2011. The chefs' roster changes frequently. We sampled the cuisines of Matthieu Roche, Thomas Estrader, and now Pablo Thiollier-Serran whips the seasonal delectables, creating and changing recipes as the produce arrives into the kitchen. Pure *Cuisine selon le marché*. Some menu items disappear at lunchtime, and if you come for a late dinner on a Sunday night, the order options can shrink substantially. God, I craved that **agnolotti** pasta with house ricotta!

The majority of their superb quality edibles is sourced as locally as possible. From the best *maraichers*, gourmet providers like *Terroir d'avenir* next door from [Frenchie](#), another popular bistro in Paris, French butchers and the wild-caught fish and seafood are delivered mainly from the Atlantic ocean. Current produce providers are always highlighted on the menu. In contrast to nearby [Ze Kitchen Gallery](#), another contemporary bistro favourite of ours, the plates are distinctively European. There are no Asian intrusions on Semilla's simple, monochromatic service. Rather, the French tradition, the Gallic meadows, mountains, rivers and seas are the source for innovation here.

Semilla does special lunch menus for a fixed price. Usually, a trio of starters like tapas served on one plate. Including a soup - like **Onion velouté** or **Artichoke bouillon** with mushrooms. Accompanied by a seasonal play of vegetal notes like **Beetroot salad with hazelnuts** or small fish course like **Mackerel escabèche** (*maquereau*). The third bite, when we went, was always a variation of **Parmesan sablé** topped with mushroom or olive cream.

Followed by a fish, meat or vegetarian main course of your choice. **Pork** (*cochon*) as much as **French beef** (*beuf*), with its race specified on the menu (also from Belgium), often enter the carnivorous plates. Only once over the years, we got a plate cooked badly. A bland slice of pork with overcooked green peas and stringy artichoke barigoule recently reminded us of the school meals one eats with a sour face, boring. On the veggie side, once at lunch I enjoyed the main plate of **Roasted Carrots with verbena, spinach cream and lentils**. Desserts follow further down.

## **Semilla: vegetarian friendly as a contemporary bistro should be**

At dinner, a la carte offers more flexibility. The starters are tapas size, but Semilla had to add some large plates in Paris to qualify as a bistro. Steak or fish like **Crusted hake with mushrooms, cilantro** and I relished once, satisfy. I often go for the vegetarian starters like the exquisite **Green peas with its iced husk cream, savory and Corsican fresh brocciu cheese** (sheep's) and the refreshing sweet **Beets with fresh cheese, green mayo and granita** on a hot summer evening. **Green asparagus** was still in season and so were the *champignons femme fatale* - the morels, so by combining the two with oxidative *Vin Jaune* from the Jura in a cream sauce I was flying high! Cheese often slips into many vegetarian plates at Semilla. Fresh goat cheese in beets with granita, parmesan with hazelnuts in a sable for an indulgent vegetarian plate.

## À partager — to share

*Pour terminer* either a dessert or artisanal farm cheese touches your palate with a powerful finale. While seasonal fruits drive the sweet offer, with sorbets popping on the dessert plates during the summer, traditional pastries like [Calissons](#), [Clafoutis](#) or [Financiers](#) are updated for contemporary tastes. Sansho pepper, sesame ice cream and even vegetables (as in green pea sorbet) freshen up the sugar-touched temptations at Semilla.

As cheese lovers we incline to Semilla's impeccably sourced *fromages*. *Ossau-Iraty*, hard ewe's milk cheese from Northern [Basque Country](#) and the only AOC cheese of the Pyrénées, pampered us once. There are only a handful of producers of this balanced yet deep nutty tasting elastic cheese, so try when you see it. Blue *Fourme d'Ambert*, fresh goat's cheese, *Tomme du Jura*, aged *Comté* or niche unpasteurised cheeses are served with a bowl of market leafy greens.

There are always wine suggestions, moods of the moment, that the sommelier highlights on the menu. We like to sample by the glass offerings, nothing fancy, but some worthwhile discoveries. The wine list is Francophile, with practical pitcher option for many bottles. Coffee roasted locally, while tea was selected by a French [tea master](#), and the tisanes (verbena, lemon balm, linden, mint, orange flowers) are organic.

You can sit in the open room sided by the bar counter and opened into the kitchen where all the hum physically competes with the aural noise fuming from the diners' mouths. Tucked on a side, there is a tighter space with alluring photographs of fresh produce hanged on the white-cast walls. Unlike the user-unfriendly reservation system of Septime in the Marrais, Semilla feels more authentic, less pretentious hip and more accomodating. No need to prepay, just casually pop in and eat well.

As with many other establishments in France, €500 bills (*"except for a tip"*, how amusing!) and Amex are not accepted.

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Daily for lunch 12:30-14:30; Dinner from 19h.