

*Muscovy duck breast*

# French Advance

*Decadent delights abound in Vegas favorite*

BY E. C. GLADSTONE Photos by Beverly Poppe

**Las Vegas can be so focused on what's new and next that we often overlook our pioneers. But respect must be paid to Andre Rochat, the first world-class chef to open a true fine dining establishment here. Originally downtown, Andre's is now nestled into the Monte Carlo, and recently updated both décor and menu with pleasing results.**

Andre's has always been exceptionally intimate, the perfect place for an undistracted romantic repast. But while it was once all old-world elegance, the room has now been remade with art deco motifs contrasting complementary patterns of blue, rust, cream and brown—still subdued, but also convivial and whimsical.

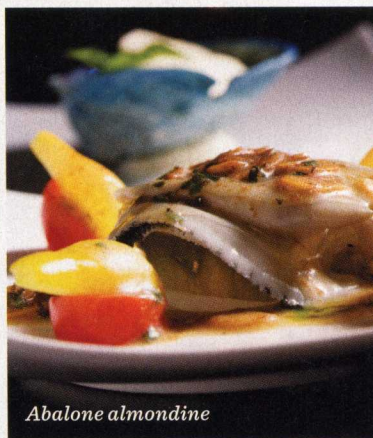
If you simply ordered a Caesar salad (garnished with rare tête de moine cheese) and a fine Prime Angus ribeye (finished in an inky pinot noir reduction), you would be happy. But why not play a little? Rochat and chef de cuisine Gary LaMorte produce some creative turns on French classics augmented by fresh ingredients and peppy presentation.

Be daring and plunge into that signature foie gras martini—half aperitif, half appetizer—the earthy fresh pâté dissolved and shaken with chilled vodka and poured (over fresh huckleberries, on my visit) in a glass as tall as your eye level. An almost milkshake-like savory sweet delight, it is a decadence best shared.

Of the many worthy first courses, I could have happily entertained the caramelized pork belly, frisée and warm oxtail confit salad, traditional escargot or the popular onion soup au gratin, but was diverted with the uncommon farm-raised abalone, the toothy shellfish providing a worthy canvas to an heirloom tomato and almondine potage, balanced with a subtle celery root mousse in the shell. A Cajun-inspired spicy crayfish bisque en croute followed, hot and peppery with delicate meat.

I was delighted with the modern take on Muscovy duck breast, lightly crusted and remarkably tender, accompanied by wild mushrooms, a tricolor gnocchi and a flourish of tart pomegranate sauce. Venison loin, vegetable risotto and veal pot au feu were other intriguing selections. Desserts follow suit with rousing revisions of the classics.

Such a meal practically demands the grape; wine director Claudio Viganì oversees a substantial but digestible list,



**Andre's**  
 Monte Carlo  
 5:30-10 p.m. Tues.-Sun. 702.798.7151

bolstered by Burgundy and Bordeaux verticals but also offering impressive bottles from California and around the world.

Andre's has yet another hidden surprise in its upstairs cigar and cognac lounge, one of the only places left on the Strip dedicated to enjoying a leisurely smoke. With possibly the biggest cognac and brandy collection west of the Mississippi, it punctuates the experience with panache.