

## toronto

by Howard MacGregor

TABLE  
TALK

It seems a strange part of the city for an apprehensive downtowner to go searching out a French restaurant at night—north of the 401 where the Allan Road heads toward the vast, black tract of the Downsview air base.

Finding Le Montmartre, turned out to be considerably simpler than I feared it might be. The painted squat building near the corner of Sheppard and Wilson Heights is brightly enough lit, and what else but a French bistro would have a wooden, cut-out caricature of a chef beckoning customers from its perch outside the front door.

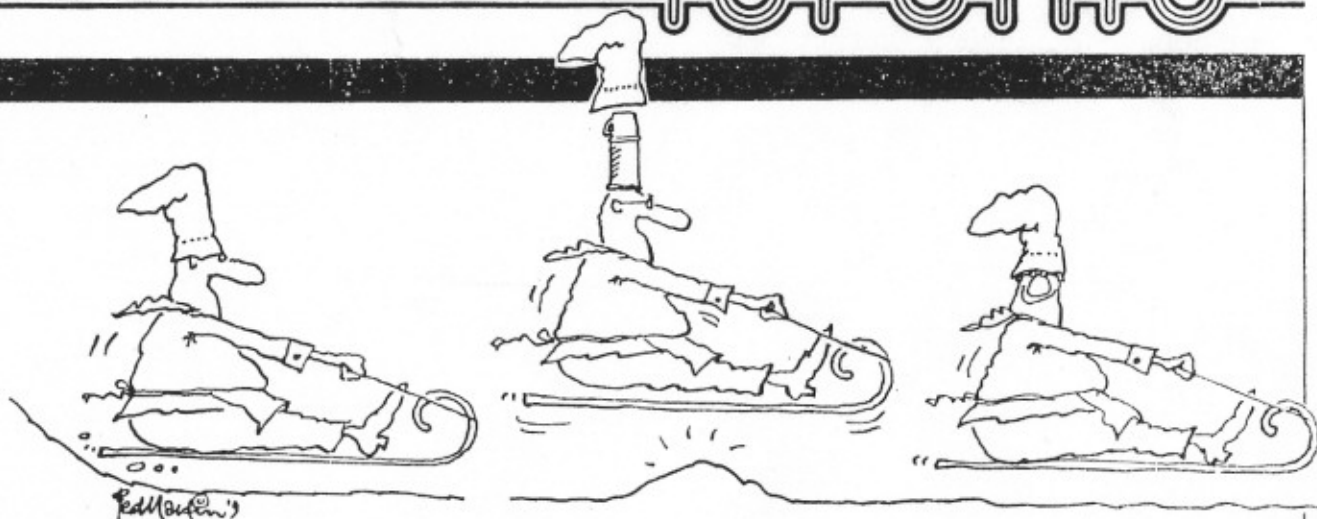
At first glance, the wary diner wonders whether the place might be another of those suburban eateries possessing exotic names that conjure up images of satisfactory dining but, in reality, turn out to be shabby beer joints that degenerate into strip joints.

Once inside, though, those fears are allayed. Montmartre is a real dining room with a proper menu that offers up simple French bistro fare.

It's much larger inside than it looks from the parking lot at the rear with three dining areas pleasantly done up in a style that's reminiscent of those inexpensive restaurants that dot the side streets of French cities and towns.

Tables are covered with pink cloths overlaying white ones. Walls are hung with prints of popular late 19th-Century French artists. Vased table carnations may be artificial but potted plants stuck around the room are real. Decorative knick-knacks include an ancient, wooden mantel radio, and a reproduction of those ornate French telephones that we remember seeing at the ears of Parisian tarts in scores of old Hollywood movies.

There's an appealing unpretentiousness about Montmartre that extends to the sound system. It's French, all right, but not the usual Gallic elevator music. What diners hear a lot of are copy-cat francophone versions of such things as *Bad, Bad*



## Montmartre magnifique!

Leroy Brown, along with Supremes' arrangements and other pop stuff one hears constantly these days on Parisian FM stations.

It also helps that the owners are actually from France and, the partner who's originally from Toulouse tells us, they'd put a cassoulet on the menu if they could find some satisfactory goose meat to go along with the beans.

Until the goose is found and cooked, diners will have to be satisfied with an easy-to-take mix that includes sauteed breast of chicken with a lemon-cream sauce for \$13.95, medallions of veal with a marsala and mushroom sauce for \$16.95, roast duckling with an orange sauce for \$15.25, scallops zapped with a curry and cream sauce for \$14.95, poached salmon with a dill sauce for \$15.25, and

sauteed shrimp hit with a bit of garlic and ginger for \$15.95.

And, naturally, a couple of steaks—one of them a \$17.50 filet sprinkled with green peppercorns and pink pepper.

Along the way, one finds the expected onion soup and a creamy mussels bisque that's been laced with anisette-flavored spirits. The two broths go along with a lower-priced daily potage.

The flavor of the south of France comes through on the kitchen's rack of lamb. Six tender little chops have been nicely cooked and are accompanied by a pan-juice and olive oil sauce that's been lifted with a good whiff of garlic and a touch of rosemary.

Also arrayed neatly on the plate is a larding of carrot, some seasoned haricots vert and a few small puffed potato. All of it is a touch overcooked by contemporary standards in North America but (despite what you may have been told)—most French diners prefer their dinner veggies cooked somewhat beyond the crunchy stage.

A bottle from a short list of acceptable French labels should help dinner along.

Most dessert—such things as profiterole, chocolate mousse and creme caramel—are made on the premises.

Montmartre is a cheerful dining room where the service is attentive and the cost of dinner for two with some wine is in the \$50 range.

Montmartre, 911 Sheppard Ave. W. Major cards. 630-3804.