

Ugly American orders steak well-done in France- funny, not sad!



Le Relais de l'Entrecote

First, let's get something straight. My son & daughter are getting tired of hearing my France stories, especially this one. What they don't seem to get is that France is very special to me, and re-living it helps it last well beyond the 10 days I'm there. I should point out it's not really France per se, but the mountains, Alps & Pyrenees. If I were a person of means, I could easily see myself spending a month or two each summer in the Pyrenees, maybe having a small house, somewhere at the foot of the mountains. It's a dream that will never be realized, except in my recollection of trips past. And this past trip was one of the best, and this story, even though it's Paris, was the icing on the cake.

It's after the finale in Paris, we'll be heading home the next morning, and Lee, our friend who spent the last 4 days with us (a first-timer for visiting the Tour de France), took us to his favorite restaurant. Le Relais de l'Entrecote, in the Montparnasse section of Paris. It's a bit different from your normal restaurant, in that there is no menu, because there's only one thing they serve. Steak & fries. That's it. You get a walnut salad, plus steak & fries. Yes, you can order wine or water and there are some really great desert options, but people walk in, hearing about this great place but not knowing the, what, gimmick? And they get confused. But we knew ahead of time, because Lee comes here, and to one of their sister restaurants in Geneva, often.

You are asked one thing. How would you like your steak cooked? Lee asked for rare, my son went for medium and me? Well, I could blame this on the time I ordered a hamburger in France that could have been sucked through a straw, but truth is, I like meat really overcooked. So I asked for well-done. The waitress took the orders and in very short order came back with our steaks (and why not; if you only have one item on the menu, it's not like you have to prepare anything special). The steaks were very, very good. An interesting green sauce with an herb that I had had before but none of us could place, but wow, great steak. The fries were OK but I'm always kinda scared of the whole fries & mayonnaise thing in France and didn't want to be "that guy" who has to have catsup to eat fries.

So she comes back, asking how our food was, and I told her it was excellent.

"No, it wasn't. Yours was well-done."

Complete deadpan delivery. No hint of either rancor or sarcasm. It was delivered in a matter-of-fact way that was absolutely hilarious. And that wasn't the end of it.

After desert (which you can see an example of in the far-right photo), she comes back and asks if we'd like coffee. I explain no, had to get to sleep because we're flying out in the morning. And suggest that the only thing worse than well-done steak is decaf coffee.

"No, it's not. Well-done steak is worse."

I cannot imagine what a better final meal in Paris could have offered. Friends, family, great food and an awesome waitress (who talked about her journey from Romania and what she liked about Paris, and was in fact very friendly). It is going to be very tough convincing me that I should take a year off from my every-July TdF routine, when the memories of this past one are so good.