



Bill Boggs Corner Table: Lunch at Le Cirque, NYC

The legendary TV personality visits a legendary restaurant



Boggs with Mario Wainer, maitre'd (left), and co-owner Mauro Maccioni (right)

One of the many great and indulgent pleasures of my life in New York has been a series of Friday afternoon lunches at the brilliant **Le Cirque** restaurant. I started going in the late 70's, a few years after Le Cirque's creator, the handsome, urbane, and sardonic Sirio Maccioni launched his fabled hotspot on East 65th street. I followed Le Cirque from its lovely incarnation in the Villard House on Madison Avenue to its present location, a lavish Adam Tihany-designed home with massive Mikasa Ebony walls. It's at One Beacon Court, 151 East 58th street. Through the years, I have never failed to have both an excellent meal and a festive time.

My most recent visit was no exception. The Friday ritual includes not returning to work and generally visiting galleries or seeing a movie afterward, so I always begin with a glass or two of their excellent very dry Prosecco. (What I am hinting here is that this is a boozy lunch tradition). The menu is compact. It is offered as three courses at \$49.00, with some supplemental charges. Among my favorite appetizers are the Tuna tartare with daikon and curry sauce and the Le Cirque Lobster Salad which includes avocado, haricots verts, and grapefruit truffle vinaigrette. Main courses that I would suggest are Skate Grenobloise with cauliflower puree; lamb chops with vegetable fricassee and rainbow potatoes; and the Le Cirque classic, paupiette of sea bass with leeks, potatoes and Rocca di Frassinello sauce (a reduction of red wine, fish fumet, and shallots). Back in the 80's the concept of a red wine reduction with fish was blasphemy, but this dish changed that perception. The thin crisp potato crust and the moist tender fish inside are perfectly complemented by the drizzled sauce and the rich bed of leeks beneath it. A savory and textural masterpiece.

There is a wondrous array of desserts. High points for me are the chocolate stove cake, Creme Brûlée Le Cirque, or the banana soufflé. The wine list is massive, and there is a wide selection also available by the glass.

Le Cirque has been hailed as one of the great restaurants of the world, but it is not the least off-putting. If you call for a reservation someone actually answers the phone immediately – no singsong recordings listing when you can come or pronouncing deadlines for reservations or suggesting buttons to push to try to get through. It is a most welcoming place with the heartbeat of a family restaurant, because that is exactly what it is. Sirio Maccioni, who will be honored by the James Beard Association with a Lifetime Achievement Award this spring, is there most days. Either of his two sons, Marco or Mauro Maccioni, will likely be on hand to stop by and say hello. (The oldest son, Mario Maccioni, runs the family's restaurant interests in Las Vegas, and no, he is not in the "Fredo" mold out there). Greeting you as you enter is the elegant and friendly maitre d', Mario Wainer.

Lunch at Le Cirque is an ideal place to impress a business client, a romantic setting for a lingering twosome, or a feast for anyone with a rapacious appetite. Here are my directions: Men should wear a jacket and be happy to be in the company of other well-dressed men at lunch. Women, look your best, you'll have competition. Dining here is a special occasion. Lock in for a high-altitude culinary treat and a plain old good time, and please tell them Bill Boggs sent you. Or maybe I'll see you there.

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