Bouillon Restaurants

Bouillon restaurants are a type of traditional French restaurant that originated in Paris in the late 19th century. They were designed to provide affordable and hearty meals to the working class. The term “bouillon” refers to a broth made from meat and vegetables, which was a staple in the menus of these establishments.

History

The first bouillon restaurant was opened in 1855 by Pierre-Louis Duval, a butcher who aimed to serve nourishing soups to market workers. The concept quickly gained popularity, leading to the establishment of numerous bouillons across Paris. These restaurants were known for their simple yet hearty meals, often featuring meat, broth, and seasonal vegetables, making them accessible to the broader public.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, bouillons became a staple of Parisian dining culture. They were characterized by their spacious interiors, Art Nouveau decor, and communal dining experience.

However, the onset of World War I marked a significant turning point for Bouillon restaurants. With the changing times, they fell out of favor, giving way to the rise of trendy Parisian brasseries. Many Bouillons closed their doors, and their popularity waned.

There were times when only the Bouillon Chartier was left to serve the french classics. Despite a decline in the mid-20th century, recent years have seen a resurgence in the popularity of bouillons, celebrated for their nostalgic charm and traditional cuisine.

Menu

Bouillon menus typically feature classic French dishes at affordable prices. Some common items include:

- **Bouillon (broth)** - The foundational dish, often made with beef or chicken and served with vegetables.
- **Oeuf mayonnaise** - Hard-boiled eggs with mayonnaise.
- **Escargots** - Snails cooked in garlic butter and parsley. Delicious with a crusty Baguette Tradition
- **Hachis Parmentier** - A French version of shepherd's pie, with minced meat and mashed potatoes.
- **Blanquette de veau** - Veal stew in a creamy white sauce with mushrooms.
- **Pot-au-feu** - A traditional French beef stew with vegetables.
- **Crème caramel** - A caramel custard dessert.

Bouillons aim to offer wholesome, traditional French cuisine without the high prices often associated with French dining.

Notable Bouillons in Paris

- Bouillon Chartier is perhaps the most famous bouillons, established in 1896. Located in the heart of Paris, it has retained its historic charm with Belle Époque decor, communal tables, and a menu that remains true to its roots. As of this writing, there are three Bouillon Chartier locations in Paris.
  - Bouillon Chartier Grand Boulevards
  - Bouillon Montparnasse
  - Bouillon Gare de l'Est
- Bouillon Pigalle Bouillon Pigalle - A contemporary revival of the traditional bouillon, known for its vibrant atmosphere and affordable prices.
- Bouillon Julien Bouillon Julien - Famous for its stunning Art Nouveau interior and classic French dishes.
- Bouillon Racine Nestled near the Jardin du Luxembourg, it was originally part of the Bouillons Chartiers. However, Bouillon Racine took on a different role in 1962 when it was acquired by the University of Paris. It served as the staff canteen until 1993 when it underwent a meticulous restoration to return it to its former glory as a Bouillon, both in terms of architecture and menu.
- Le Petit Bouillon Pharamond Originally situated near the bustling food market known as the “Belly of Paris,” this establishment was founded by a Normandy family with the aim of promoting regional dishes and introducing them to the Parisian crowd. Over the past century, the decor of the restaurant has remained largely unchanged, preserving its authentic charm.

Bouillons continue to be a beloved part of Parisian culture, offering a glimpse into the city's culinary history while providing hearty, affordable meals to locals and tourists alike.

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