



**“There are not many West End restaurants that have been going since the end of World War II. Most of central London’s dining scene has been re-invented since then. However, Francos in Jermyn Street has been in situ since 1946 and it is looking and tasting better than ever.”**

## **The Venue**

The large, double-fronted premises at the St James’ Street end of Jermyn Street used to serve fairly standard Italian fare. About three years ago, however, Francos had a complete overhaul to bring it into the 21st century. The two interconnected rooms are elegantly decorated with cream walls on which are mounted attractive modern pictures plus circular ceiling and wall lights. There’s a smart bar and a basement room for the overflow from the ground floor and for private dining. The overall appearance is one of luxurious comfort.

## **The Atmosphere**

A recent lunchtime visit found Francos to be really buzzing. In fact, it was almost full, which is always an encouraging sign at any restaurant. There’s a sound that emanates from diners who are really enjoying themselves and it helps to convey an ambience of undiluted pleasure. The mixture of patrons included many business people, a few family tables and the usual couples enjoying a meal tete a tete. It wasn’t until about 3pm that business slowed down and, it being a nice day, there were drinkers and diners outside at the pavement tables.

## **The Food**

You can choose your time and price range when contemplating a visit to Francos. The venue is open from 7.30am for breakfast which offers both cooked and continental breakfasts including porridge, croissants and pastries, plus all the usual juices, teas and coffees. For lunch and dinner there is an a la carte menu and a set menu at £25 for two courses, £30 for three and £35 for four. For pre- and post-theatre diners a special menu is served until 7pm and from 10.30pm at £16 for two courses or £20 for three.

The first course at lunch can include antipasto, Galloni ham with cantaloupe melon, girolle mushrooms with rocket, black truffle and gorgonzola dressing, or sauteed mussels, clams and prawns. The deep fried calamari are beautifully soft and tender and they’re served sliced and piping hot in a thin, fresh batter. Aubergine Parmigiana with buffalo mozzarella is a delicious dish that combines the two main ingredients, the soft and pulpy vegetable with the chewy white cheese into a single melding that is most satisfying. Other alternatives for a first course are various salads, pasta dishes (the black tagliolini with crab and courgette sounds particularly fine) and a green vegetable soup.

Main courses present roast monkfish with celeriac puree and cherry tomatoes, pan fried turbot with samphire and black ink sauce, veal Milanese or mint-crusted lamb cutlet. Pan fried plaice is a source of wonderment: pure white fillets beautifully browned are stacked one on the other with an accompanying gazpacho and new potatoes. What excellent fish this is: fresh, dense, wholesome and packed with flavour. This is the real hit number on the lunch menu. However, the roast chicken breast stuffed with Scamorza cheese and spinach is a nice variation on an old theme. The filling adds another layer of flavour to the fairly bland taste of the chicken and raises it to a new level entirely. Roast garlic potatoes and French beans complete the main courses. Other possibilities include something from the grill such as ribeye or fillet steak, lamb cutlets, organic salmon, sea bream, wild sea bass, tuna steak or swordfish.

With limited space left for dessert the apricot crumble proves to be just enough with halves of the fruit filled with a delicious and sugary crumble mixture and a generous

dollop of clotted cream. Otherwise a selection of petit fours suffices, as you can eat as few or as many as you wish: they are, with such delights as mini strawberry and raspberry tarts, orange sponge, blueberry muffin, chocolate truffle and macaroon, all very tempting.

## **The Drink**

The bar offers a lengthy cocktail list. You can try the usual suspects such as a Champagne cocktail, a Singapore Sling, a Rusty Nail or a bespoke Martini, as well as a Carol Channing (eau de vie framboise, crème de framboise, sugar syrup and champagne) or a Rob Roy (Scotch, sweet vermouth, bitters and maraschino) plus a list of non-alcoholic mocktails. The wine list is very impressive: lots of Italian regional wines from £20 a bottle; plus a few French, Spanish, Moroccan, Lebanese and wines from the New World. Many are available by the glass, so the Pinot Grigio, Mezzacorona, 2007 white (£6.50 a glass) is a good choice with the first course calamari, and the Inferno Mazer, Nino Negri 2004 red (£7 a glass) is a good drink with the main course chicken dish.

## **The Last Word**

It's great to see Francos doing so well. After over fifty years in the business it is splendid that, with a little bit of updating, a perennial favourite can still find a place among the best of the newer restaurants where anybody can enjoy a meal at any time of day."