

OUT TO LUNCH WITH ALANA KAINZ

Alana Kainz
The Ottawa Citizen

TABLE MANNERS 101:

KEEP ALL UNCOOKED JOINTS OFF THE TABLE

OK, less than one minute into a lunch with Miss Manners and I've made my first boo boo.

I left a voice mail that morning to make reservations at Signature by Le Cordon Bleu Paris, one of Ottawa's swishiest fine dining establishments. They didn't get my message. At a place like that, walk-ins get a tsk-tsking.

Was my lunch with, of all people, etiquette and image coach Diane Craig in peril? Good thing the restaurant was just about empty this day.

Our chairs are pulled at a table by the window. I do know that as the host, my guest sits first and has the better view. We unfold our 22-by-22-inch napkins and place them on our laps. Diane demonstrates that the napkin should be folded over at the waist, and you should blot often.

We pass on the aperitif, a kir with cointreau, opting to have a glass of California Chardonnay with our meal.

Menu lesson: "As the host, you have to show the extent of your hospitality," says Diane, owner of Image International.

For instance there's a \$557 Paul Jaboulet on the wine list, with a Cotes du Ventoux beneath it for \$25. The host should always take control of the wine list and suggest certain wines within his or her price range.

(Boss, skip to next paragraph. "There's no budget. The Citizen is paying!" I say shamelessly. "Let's get the Jaboulet!")

Reason does prevail. We order a mixed green salad to start and both get the relatively modestly priced poached halibut with a green olive tapenade with anchovy garlic and onion pistachio oil.

Fork and knife lesson: Tines down. Both the knife and fork are held daintily by the thumb and first two fingers, leaving the last two fingers the option of a raised pinky.

The knife can be used as a shovel on to the fork. You can put the knife down in order to switch the fork to the right hand. While practising, the waiter arrives with an amuse-bouche of escargot in a white butter sauce. (I'm wondering how many points that is on the Weight Watchers plan!)



CREDIT: Rod MacIvor, The Ottawa Citizen

Manners guru Diane Craig shows Alana Kainz how to be confident at the table, even if the photographer arrives before the food.

In case you get confused, solids are on the left and liquids on the right with water the closest to you, should you choke.

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Diane never complains. She won't even send overcooked or cold food back to the kitchen.

"Then everyone at the table is uncomfortable eating without you," she says.

Bread time: "You can tell so much about a person by the way they eat their bread," she says.

(I'm thinkin' it's a good thing I'm off the bread right now.)

Even if it's within reach, always lift the basket and offer it to your guest, same with butter. Never saw and butter like toast. Break with hands and butter each piece individually. Not one crumb lands on Diane's beautiful brocaded dress.

Salad lesson: Diane's got some stuck in her teeth. "Yes, it's OK to tell someone right away," she says.

While waiting for our main course, I go to the bathroom. "At a good restaurant, you leave your napkin on the chair and the waiter has it re-folded by the time you come back. This will be a test," she says. I'm gone for a while enjoying the Fruits and Passion soap, lotion and real towels.

What? The napkin was still there. But, hey, they didn't know we were coming so I deserve it!

What if your knife falls to the ground? "Leave it and ask for a new one," she says. Well, my kids are naturals at this one.

Elbows? Very controversial debate. Some say it's fine between courses, but Diane:

"All uncooked joints should be off the table."

All of this is important, she says, because executives get uncomfortable if they don't know how to act and that affects their concentration on business. And people make impressions, "Based seven per cent on what you say and 93 per cent on what you do."

As well as being an image consultant, Diane is the founder of Sandrine's Gift of Life, a national organ donor awareness campaign,

which she began in memory of her seven-year-old daughter who was killed in a bus accident. Shortly before her daughter's death, her husband had died of cancer.

But life, these days, is good for Diane. She lives with Dr. David Levine, a nephrologist and founder of the Kidney Research Institute. I gleefully can say I first introduced them two years ago!

On their first date, she thought she had a pre-trained partner. He ate crab cakes with his fish knife, properly held -- turned to the side to flake. Later, she discovered he used every knife like that. So there was some coaching to do.

Diane always sticks to her manners, even with plastic forks. "But if it's a chipwagon, I'll use my fingers."

Done, we place our silverware in the proper position on the plate: with the handles hanging one inch off at four o'clock.

Failing the cheque lesson, the bill arrives. "It's best to take care of the cheque ahead of time." It was \$130 including tip, but the company, the setting, the food and the impeccable service were well worth it.

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