

Eau de Vie

a wine, spirits, and travel newsletter

Vol. 14 February 2020

WHAT IS FINE DINING?

In 2016 Sara and I were between French canal boat trips and we rented a car to drive around the upper Loire River valley. Our purpose was to simply explore. We had a destination in mind for the evening but the purpose of the day was completely open to our whims. We only had a short distance to travel so we could indulge our curiosity.

As one indulgence we stopped in the town of Valençay and we were awed by its dominating hill top chateau with the town splayed at its feet. We toured the chateau and I was surprised to learn that the Chateau was fully furnished and one of the past owners was Maurice Talleyrand. Talleyrand was Napoleon's chief diplomat and I imagine he corresponded with Thomas Jefferson while negotiating the Louisiana purchase.

Down in the chateau's basement

kitchens they had a display about Talleyrand's chef, a man named Marie-Antoine Carême. Carême was no simple cook. He is directly responsible for influencing current French cuisine.

Many of Carême's core cooking concepts were formed at Valençay. Carême's cooking emphasized using herbs, fresh vegetables, and making intensely concentrated, yet simple, sauces. Carême is credited with developing the white chef's hat and changing French dining styles from *service à la française* to *service à la russe*.

Service à la française is the practice of serving all the dishes at once. This was the typical French service style from the middle ages until the time when Carême adopted *service à la russe* in the early 1800s. *Service à la française* is still around today and we would recognize it by a different term, the buffet.

Service à la russe is serving the meal in the Russian fashion which is, one plate at a time and in courses.

Carême's ideas were eventually codified in a book first published in Paris in 1903 by Georges Escoffier. Escoffier's book *Le Guide Culinaire* became the standard for *haute cuisine* (aka Fine Dining) which is characterized by meticulous preparation and careful presentation.

As I stood in the kitchens of Valençay and realized that this was the epicenter of French cuisine, I remembered a book my brother had given me many years before: it was the English translation of Escoffier's cookbook. This senediptidous stop at Valençay had brought me circling back to a gift from my brother and to a new understanding of food and service.

If you've ever had hollandaise, tomato, or a bechamel sauce, then you've tasted Carême's cooking. And if you've ever set a table or ordered from a menu, you've followed Escoffier's advice.

Fine dining is preparation, intention, technique, and presentation. It doesn't have to be expensive, it doesn't have to be purchased, it can be done at home.

Napoleon, Talleyrand, Carême and Escoffier still influence our meals everyday with concepts of Fine Dining.



* Château de Valençay is one of the scheduled stops for the 2020 Chateau tour.

2020 Pairing Club Classes

Practical Information:

Class starts @ 6:00pm @ 2620 E.
Superior Street. Cost is \$20/pp.

Class size is limited to 12.

R.S.V.P. required.

Class includes: Nose Testing, 6
wines, tasting cards, information,
and custom wine pairings.

Each class needs 5 volunteer
pairing cooks. Email:

david@savvynomad.com to
volunteer to bring a food pairing.

April 18th ~ *Printemps*
Wines for Spring.

July 18th ~ *Été*
Wines for Summer.

August 15th ~
Diner en Blanc Duluth

November 7th ~ *Automne*
Wines for Fall



*The Canal Lateral a
la Loire*

plus the Chateau ^{AND}

Cathedral Tour

We have 1 spot open for our Fall
2020 France canal boat cruise.

If you are interested in joining us
or you'd just like to know more

[follow this link to our
Fall 2020 trip planner.](#)

Pairing Club Advice

AND

Comments

Last month I introduced the
Pairing Class idea and it was met
with much enthusiasm and possibly
confusion. I'd like to write a bit
about both here.

Enthusiasm: the *Hiver* class filled
up in the first few hours of me
emailing the *Eau de Vie*. This is
great but it also means that I had to
turn down almost an equal number
of people as I could accept in to
the class. The class size is limited
to 12 so that the wine pours are
large enough to taste and evaluate
properly. I also want to manage
expectations, yours and mine. By
keeping the classes small, everyone
in the group can more effectively
participate.

But this means that by limiting
the size I limit the availability
for everyone. With equality of
opportunity in mind, I won't be
taking advance reservations for
the classes until the wine pairing
list is published in this newsletter.
This means that for the April 18th
Printemps class the earliest anyone
can sign up would be the day I send
out the *Eau de Vie* in early April.

Confusion: the Pairing Classes
asks some of the participants
to prepare some sort of food to
pair with one of the wines we
will be tasting. This created some
confusion as participants thought
they had to make part of a meal or
an appetizer or a main dish but this
isn't the intention.

The intention is to use the [advice
given in the *Eau de Vie* for the
wine selected](#) and to try to come
up with some sort of dish that
will compliment not just the food
but also the wine. The dish can
be simple like a can of smoked
almonds or slices of cheese or
complex like Shepard's Pie.

When pairing wine with food there
are three possible outcomes.

1. The wine and food pair well
but neither offends nor rewards
the taster with new flavors in the
mouth.
2. The wine and food pair poorly
and they clash in the mouth
making both less palatable.
3. The wine and food pair perfectly
creating new flavors and sensations
in the mouth that alone neither
would have produced.

When learning to pair wine and
food it is most common to have
the first outcome, nothing special
but nothing bad happen. But if
you don't know anything about
pairing wine and food then the
second outcome becomes a bit
more common and nobody likes
a clash of flavors. And if you train
yourself in how to pair wine and
food the third option becomes not
just a happy coincidence but a real
potential every time you sit down
to a meal.

The Pairing Club is my attempt
at teaching how to pair wine with
food and I hope it will provide
the participants a chance to try
their hand at pairing and tasting
food and wine in a fun, learning,
nonjudgmental, environment.