



BON APPÉTIT

*The best of French gastronomy
at home and away*



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As Paris continues to recover after last year's terrorist attacks, the city's chefs and winemakers are leading the way in getting tourists back to the capital, as **Pierre de Villiers** reports

At an opulent restaurant around the corner from the Champs-Élysées, three waiters, each cradling a roasted duck, emerge from the kitchen and start waltzing between tables to show off today's main course. Just across the river, diners play a foodie version of pick-up-sticks as they tuck into an extraordinary *amuse-bouche* – salsify shards, made to look like twigs.

Close to Pont Neuf, friends sip pear-flavoured champagne in a 17th-century cellar, while, in the Bois de Boulogne, a pastry chef is using a glass-blowing technique to make a dessert that is a twist on toffee apples. A long queue has formed outside a van serving American burgers and cupcakes in the 19th arrondissement while, in the Madeleine neighbourhood, a chocolate version of Rodin's *The Thinker* watches on as shoppers cram their bags with treats.

Whether you like sweet or savoury, traditional or experimental, a fancy meal or a food truck snack, there has never been a better time to have a taste of Paris. Not only does the City of Light have the celebrated dishes of Michelin-starred chefs; it also has cantinas serving gourmet light lunches and restaurants offering global cuisine, which have sprung up all over Paris including in the

grittier parts of town. It's a diverse culinary landscape that is playing a crucial role in luring tourists back to the city after last year's devastating terrorist attacks.

To celebrate the contribution that restaurants make to Paris, and to get the word out that the city is well and truly open for business, the Mayor, Anne Hidalgo, presented the Grand Vermeil medal, the capital's highest honour, to its 84 Michelin-starred chefs. "What you bring to Paris is indescribable," Hidalgo told the ceremony at the Hôtel de Ville, which gave guests the chance to sample some of the medal recipients' wonderful creations, including Salvador Dalí-adorned cakes by Alain Ducasse and Yannick Alléno's soup served in cups made from hollowed-out fruit. "You carry the image and the beauty of our city. Paris is gastronomy. It is the heart of our way of life and the world we want," she said.

Later, I spoke to the Deputy Mayor, Jean-François Martins, who told me: "We want to tell the world that things have changed in Paris, but in a good ➤"



ANTI-CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: The Pierre Sang Boyer fusion restaurant; Patrick Roger's chocolate version of *The Thinker*; Salvador Dalí cakes from Alain Ducasse; Fanny Heucq pours champagne at Dilettantes; A liver dish at Spring; **LEFT:** Mayor Anne Hidalgo with Paris's Michelin-star chefs

PHOTOGRAPHS: PIERRE DE VILLIERS; SPRING RESTAURANT



way. We have these inspiring Michelin-starred chefs but also great bakeries and young cooks putting a fresh new twist on traditional French food. There is diversity here, from cheap, quality food to world-class cuisine paired with amazing wine. We say, come to Paris, you will find something that fits your taste and wallet.”

Another celebration was planned over the Valentine’s weekend of 11-14 February, with 18 top chefs from the capital opening pop-up restaurants in the Grand Palais exhibition venue as part of the Taste of Paris event.

An especially encouraging aspect of the changing culinary scene in Paris is the fact that restaurants are opening in the city’s less fashionable areas. “It’s been exciting, because we want to create a balanced city where all districts feel the same energy, the same beating heart,” says Martins. “Young chefs are going to traditionally working-class areas in the north-east of Paris and opening restaurants that offer fantastic, creative food.”

An hour or so later, I’m at just such a restaurant. At Pierre Sang Boyer in the Oberkampf/Bastille area, Korean-born, Paris-raised chef Pierre Sang serves up inventive fusion dishes such as flash-seared mackerel with butternut squash and yuzu purée, lotus root and tahoon leaves, wagyu beef with a shiitake mushroom purée and cheeses with yuzu jam.

“People come to this area because they want to see something different on their plate,” explains Sang, who became a local celebrity when he reached the finals of French TV’s *Top Chef* in 2011. “We have only one menu and it changes every day. I use basic recipes but always put a Korean spin on it. For me the most important thing is to use fresh produce and to make sure that the food is good value.”

Pierre Sang Boyer is close to where some of the terrorist attacks occurred last November, but Sang believes the area will quickly recover from the shock. “I think people are stronger after the attacks and they want to come out,” Sang says. “Restaurants are full again and I can see more places opening up in this area. There are a lot of young people here who want to enjoy life and to experience the best that Paris has to offer.”

While thousands of foodies are seeking out fusion restaurants such as Pierre Sang Boyer, traditional French cuisine remains as popular as ever, especially if it is as beautifully prepared as the dishes at Spring, around the corner from the Musée du Louvre. Here, scallops are topped with crispy pig’s trotter, sea bass is cooked on its scales and served with leeks and *matelote* sauce, and the meal ends with an almond-cream *galette des rois*.

“There is a reason why certain things become classics,” explains chef Daniel Rose, who was born in America, but cut

his culinary teeth in Brittany. “My rediscovery of traditional French cuisine is not a blind embrace, but an attempt to understand what universal qualities make something timeless and classic. There is a tremendous amount of human energy, intellect and experience that nourishes traditions which people have tried to preserve. It would seem a bit presumptuous to discard all that energy before beginning to understand it.”

Spring is the ideal place to linger and savour some classics, but these days there are plenty of ways in Paris to tap into the city’s incredible gastronomic history on the go. I head for the Madeleine district and join a band of excited foodies for a gourmet walking tour. We stop for a *madeleine* cake with black melanosporum truffle at Maison de la Truffe, which has been serving up the *diamant noir*, and its even more expensive white cousin, since 1932. There is an elegant caviar and salmon tasting at Caviar House & Prunier in Place de la Madeleine, a dizzying array of mustards at Maille and a kaleidoscope of *macarons* at Ladurée. And the shop run by *chocolatier* Patrick Roger – famous for making chocolate versions of *The Thinker* to celebrate the reopening of the Musée Rodin – is part art gallery, part Willy Wonka factory.

After a three-hour assault on the senses I head to Dilettantes to cleanse my palate with some of the finest champagne in Paris. Run by Fanny Heucq, who is every bit as bubbly as her product, the shop acts as a shop window for artisan winemakers who would otherwise struggle to get a foothold in Paris.



A staircase takes you down to a 17th-century cellar where Heucq leads fascinating tastings, pointing out different bubble sizes and aromas.

"My parents are champagne producers, so I knew how hard it was for artisan winemakers to get into the Parisian market," she explains. "Because I'm from the Champagne region, it was easy for me to meet a lot of great producers. I decided to build a business with them, but it was not clear whether it should be a restaurant or a cellar. I soon realised that running an eatery is a completely different challenge and that I should stick to what I knew. I decided to do tastings and champagne selling, and it worked out well."

Spending time with Heucq, it soon becomes clear that she has as much passion for the bottles lined up in her cellar as any chef would have for his creations. It is the sort of enthusiasm that does exactly what Mayor Anne Hidalgo hopes every business in

TOP ROW, FROM LEFT: A starter at the Pierre Sang Boyer restaurant; Salsify shards at Restaurant David Toutain in Rue Surcouf; Sea bass with leeks at Spring; Delicacies at Maison de la Truffe; Tasting champagne at Dilettantes; **SECOND ROW, FROM LEFT:** Chef Pierre Sang; Creations from *chocolatier* Patrick Roger; Daniel Rose, chef at Spring; *Madeleines* with truffles at Maison de la Truffe; **LEFT:** The front desk at Caviar House & Prunier

her city would achieve – draw large groups of tourists, in the good times and the bad.

"The day after the last attacks in Paris I had a tasting scheduled but wasn't sure if I should open the shop," Heucq recalls. "But a lot of my customers insisted on coming over and lending support to the business. There were about 20 people in the cellar at midday, drinking champagne. It was this beautiful moment of defiance." 🍷

Francofile

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GETTING THERE

Trains from London to Paris cost from £29 one way (tel: 0844 848 5848, www.voyages-sncf.com).

WHERE TO STAY

Hôtel Napoléon
40 Avenue de Friedland
75008 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 56 68 43 21
www.hotelnapoleonparis.com
This five-star hotel a short stroll from the

Arc de Triomphe has stylish rooms with comfortable beds, amazing service and one of the best breakfast spreads in the city. Rooms from €242.

WHERE TO EAT

Pierre Sang Boyer

55 Rue Oberkampf
75011 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 9 67 31 96 80
www.pierresangboyer.com
Three-course menu €25.

Spring

6 Rue Bailleul
75001 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 45 96 05 72
www.springparis.fr
Fixed price dinner menu €84.

WHERE TO VISIT

Maison de la Truffe

19 Place de la Madeleine
75008 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 42 65 53 22
www.maison-de-la-truffe.com

Patrick Roger

3 Place de la Madeleine
75006 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 42 65 24 47
www.patrickroger.com

Dilettantes

22 Rue de Savoie
75006 Paris
Tel: (Fr) 1 70 69 98 68
www.dilettantes.fr

● La Route des Gourmets has a range of walking tours in Paris from €45 (tel: (Fr) 6 62 41 24 63 www.laroutedesgourmets.fr).



TOURIST INFORMATION: Paris tourist office, www.parisinfo.com; www.france.fr

