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The Eiffel Tower

## Wining and Dining in Paris

**D**URING THE WEEK BEFORE the sixth annual Crystal wine and food cruise I organized, most of the participants (25 of 31) opted to go on a Rhône Valley land-based tour. Most of these chose to spend a few days (2-7) in my favorite city in the world, Paris. My wife and I, as well as most others, spent three days and nights there discovering and/or rediscovering many of Paris's intriguing sites.

Most of us chose to stay at an exquisite hotel, the Splendid Etoile. It is located at 1 Avenue Carnot, just by the Arc de Triomphe. I found this hotel quite by accident in 1996. En route to Paris, but with a weekend before that in London, I read an interesting article titled, "Where do the intelligent people stay in Paris?" Although I was booked into the Ritz, I called the hotel and asked about availability. I switched hotels and since have

never stayed in Paris at any other hotel. We were all pleased with our choice this time.

On Sunday night, we ate at a local restaurant with Ursula and Greg Pearson, owners of Travelex International, the travel agency we use for these trips. We had a very nice meal accompanied by ample wines (5 bottles). This was our first foie gras overdose over the next four days. On a separate note, if you like Crepes Suzettes, you can talk to Greg or me about how good they can be (seriously, four orders each, as a hint).

My wife and I rode the Metro up to Montmartre on Monday morning to visit Sacre Coeur and the famous artists' studios at Place du Tertre, located behind the Basilica. Although we enjoyed a nice lunch there, we found no art to purchase. Perhaps this is because of an experience we had there 50 years ago. Walking quickly around the

perimeter of the square, we found a palate knife painting of the Pont Neuf Bridge in Paris. We returned to it, bought it for the princely sum of \$40. The artist, Didier Grandt, wrapped the painting, took our money, turned to face a woman looking down on us and shouted, "Maintenant, nous mangerons" (Now we can eat). This painting has remained frameless in part so we vividly remember this event, as well as the painting at that moment.

After lunch, we took the Metro to visit Notre Dame, returned to the hotel, and prepared for our evening dining experience at Jules Verne on the second floor of the Eiffel Tower. We went with our good friends, Denice and Milton Johnson from Nashville, Tenn., to continue our dining experience as described in the QB May-June 2015 issue. None of us had ever been to Jules Verne. The restaurant is owned by Alain Ducasse who arguably



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The Notre Dame Cathedral

has the greatest collection of gourmet restaurants in the world. At Jules Verne for dinner, one has a choice of a prix fix meal, with or without wines to accompany each course. We chose the wine option. We dined from 8:30-11:30 p.m. on one of the longest days of the year, and the spectacle of the City of Light changing from day to night was made more memorable by the clearing of the clouds which provided the afternoon showers which really cleared the air.

The dinner consists of six courses. We started with Bellevue-style blue lobster, followed by preserved duck foie gras in a strawberry-rhubarb geleé. Both courses were accompanied by the 2013 Condrieu (Viognier) from Domaine Ballet. The highlight of the meal came next in two courses—warm white asparagus in a citrus mousseline sauce, the best asparagus I’ve ever eaten. Next was roasted turbot with artichokes prepared in two ways. These courses were accompanied by the 2013 Les Haut de Smith, a white Bordeaux from Pessac-Léognan. The combination of this wine with both courses was magical.

The meal ended with two dessert courses. First was a contemporary vacherin, a meringue shell filled with whipped cream, raspberry, lemon, and essence of rose. This was accompanied by the 2009 Chateau Haut-Bergeron Sauternes. The finalé was a crispy tower nest of chocolate and praline paired with the 1989 Rivesaltes wine from Gérard Bertrand. I enjoyed this experience but for the same price (\$640) there are other restaurant choices I prefer in Paris; however, the view is one-of-a-kind.

On Tuesday, several of our group, plus their friends, had a gourmet lunch on a Seine River boat. We had a nice table near the bow of the boat and during the two hour trip saw many of Paris’s famous sites while enjoying good wine and food.

The boat “Saphir,” for our luncheon, is part of the Bateau Parisiens located by the Tour Eiffel. I highly recommend this company if you are looking for a high-quality luncheon or dinner cruise. We had a four-course luncheon with four options for all but the cheese course. We started with a glass of Champagne and mini cakes. I had the Terrine duck foie gras (the devil made me do it) with toasted sourdough bread paired with a Chardonnay and a Viognier blend. Next came the veal with simmered vegetable and Marengo sauce accompanied by Les Fiefs des Mascareignes (Medoc). We then had a cheese course and a strawberry-rhubarb tartlet for desert. Inclusive of the very good wines, poured liberally, mineral water, and petit fours, the price was \$110 per person. What an enjoyable way to spend part of an afternoon in Paris.

On Tuesday evening, most of us went to one of the world’s most famous restaurants, La Tour d’Argent, for a grand kick-off. My history with the restaurant begins in 1969. As a co-leader of a European economic seminar while at Indiana University, I read about it and wrote to the owner, Claude Terrail about the possibility of dining there. He was fond of students and granted a reservation for seven of us. Imagine being seated at a prime table for an optimal view of Notre Dame when I noticed that Princess Grace and Prince

Rainier were seated to my right and the U.S. astronaut Alan Shepard was to my left. My main memory of the dinner was the famous pressed duck which came with a picture of the duck.

The meal started with Amuse-Bouches followed by Chilled Tomato with Diced Lobster. Both paired well with the sommelier’s recommendation, the 2010 Schlossberg Reisling Grand Cru from Blanck (almost bone dry from Alsace-Lorraine). This wine also went very well with our fish course of Pike dumplings, “Andre Terrail,” named for the restaurant owner. This medium-firm fish is one of the restaurant’s specialties and has superb texture and taste.

The main course came in two waves. First was the Challandais roasted duck breast “Marco Polo” served medium-rare with souffled potatoes. It is most undoubtedly the world’s most famous duck and I have never had better. Perhaps tastier and for sure richer came the confit of duck leg with salad. Both entrees went superbly with the 2010 Chateau Citran from the Haut-Medoc in Bordeaux. After we exhausted the Citran, I chose the 2000 Guigal Côte-Rotie, Côtes Brune et Blonde which paired a little better with the richer confit.

We finished this magnificent meal overlooking Notre Dame with a great selection of cheeses followed by a pear “Vie Parisienne” dessert while the Côte-Rôtie continued to flow. Our four-hour dinner ended with mignardises (petits fours), then down the tower of silver (La Tour d’Argent) and into the night for a brief sleep before our trip to Lyon early the next morning. A Vôrte Santé! 🍷



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

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