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EDITORS' NOTEBOOK

TALES OF WINES, PEOPLE & PLACES



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Royal Treatment In Paris

I tend to be a creature of habit. One of those habits is enjoying a refined meal in Paris when I finish a work trip to Bordeaux or the Rhône Valley. And since it opened in 2015, I've made Le Clarence, a dining spot created by Domaine Clarence Dillon owner Prince Robert de Luxembourg, my regular stop.

First off, there's the feel of the place, which combines comfort and luxury. Walking in through a cobble courtyard, you have the sense of entering a grand home. There's a regal feel to be sure, while the warmth and professionalism of the staff allows you to sink into a chair and relax fully. Built in 1884, the mansion that houses Le Clarence is in a tony part of town and its elegant staircase leads up to small dining rooms with views of the Grand Palais. After your meal, another flight up finds you in the salon to linger with a digestif.

There's the wine list. Actually, there are two of them. Presented in small tomes disguised as books right off the library bookshelf, one has an exhaustive list of all the Domaine Clarence Dillon wines—Haut-Brion, La Mission Haut-Brion and Quintus, with a run of large-format bottles that is more than fun to browse while you daydream. The other book contains the rest of the wine world, a smart selection of France's top domaines from all its wine regions. You can take your time flipping through—there is absolutely no rush here.

And then there's the cuisine—classic French refinement under the guidance of chef Christophe Pelé, who garnered two Michelin stars within just



Le Clarence



Chef Christophe Pelé

two years of opening. The menu is easy to read, because there is no set menu. Choose the number of courses you want, and the kitchen does the rest, preparing dishes with a daily market approach.

The experience that hooked me for good on the place happened during a lunch. As I looked around at other tables, I saw that fish was the main course of the day. I don't adhere to strict pairing rules, and so despite the lighter fare, I ordered a bottle of Henri Bonneau Châteauneuf-du-Pape. It wasn't long after the venerable old-school vigneron had died, and there was a bottle of his 2010 on the list for a reasonable price (considering how hard his wines are to find). I knew the wine would be big, young and perhaps a bit bruising, but I felt like paying homage to Bonneau, and so it seemed like the right moment to drink it. At worst, I thought, I could get through the fish course with minimal wine-food disruption and then consume the majority of the bottle with the cheese course. When my main course came, instead of fish, a perfectly roasted pigeon appeared. The waiter mentioned that the chef thought it would be a better dish considering the wine I had ordered. It could have

been game, set and match right there, as I finished the bottle, heavenly with the gamy, earthy notes of the pigeon. But then what to do with the cheese course? Just as I was ruing draining the red too soon, the sommelier came around with a Maury that he served with a pipette from a glass demijohn. That's when I realized that no great seduction can ever be overdone.

I believe great wine and food comes in all combinations and works at all levels, from the BYOB taqueria a block from my office to destination restaurants you build a day's vacation around. From overlaid Thanksgiving tables to a salad and glass of rosé al fresco. When it comes to a little self-pampering after a long stretch of work, I like to be cradled in the lap of luxury, however temporary or aspirational it may ultimately be. Le Clarence affords me exactly that experience, with a remarkable consistency of quality coupled with the anticipation of knowing that every meal there is unique and different.

Le Clarence

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