

# THE GREAT CHEFS' FAMILY TREE

## KING OF THE ANCIENNE CUISINE

**GEORGES AUGUSTE ESCOFFIER (1846–1935)**

a Foodie hero and the greatest chef of his age, represents the style against which nouvelle cuisine was a reaction. Escoffier worked for César Ritz and ran his hotel kitchens in Monte Carlo, Paris and London.

Escoffier rationalised kitchen organisation: each chef de partie was in charge of a department, eg fish, sauces, the larder, but could also work simultaneously with other parties on a dish. The previous method, with no assembly line, was slow, with some chefs working furiously, each on his own dish, while others were idle.

Escoffier also attacked the traditional basic sauces – white and brown – and substituted fumets (reductions of stock) – much lighter and cleaner on the palate. In this he was the ancestor of the nouvelle cuisine chefs. However, Escoffier's practices, recipes (5,000 in his *Guide Culinaire* alone), and dicta (including the novellish 'faites simple') assumed the authority of scripture and stifled inventiveness for generations. Chefs were taught that cooking was simply a matter of copying Escoffier. So his culinary progeny are mostly in hotel kitchens rather than serious restaurants.

## CATERING COLLEGES AND GRAND-HOTEL KITCHENS

**ANDRÉ PIC (1893–1984)**

was one of the three great French chefs outside Paris in the Thirties (the others being Point and Dumaine). He moved his family restaurant, Des Pins, from the hills above Valence into Valence in 1935. By 1939 he had won three Michelin stars; in 1946 he lost a star, and he and the establishment went into a decline. The restaurant was rescued by his son Jacques, who won back the third star in the Sixties.

**JACQUES PIC (b 1932)**

wanted to gain wider experience than his father's kitchen, but was unable to get a place with Point or Dumaine. His training in Geneva, Beaulieu, Deauville and Paris was not, says Quentin Crewe, 'in the mainstream followed by his colleagues of today', but he has won back three stars for his family restaurant. His eight to nine-course menu 'Rabelais' was one of the first 'menus dégustations'.

**EDOUARD NIGNON (1865–1935)**

was chef and later maître d'hôtel at the popular Larue restaurant in Paris. He reacted against the rigidity of Escoffier's followers,

saying 'routine in cuisine is a crime'. He taught respect for the character of the ingredients – the main tenet of the nouvelle cuisine – and was the spiritual ancestor of

**FERNAND POINT (1897–1955)**

the great chef-teacher of our times, taught half the celebrated chefs of France. He trained at the Hotels Bristol and Majestic in Paris, the Imperial at Menton and Royal at Evian-les-Bains. In 1922 his father set him up at La Pyramide, in Vienne, having failed to find a restaurant in Lyon itself. He taught that

ingredients should taste of themselves, and never be disguised – therefore they must be of the first quality and freshness. Everything in the kitchen had to be done 'from scratch, with nothing on the stoves' each morning. In 1933, three years after his marriage to a coiffeuse from Vienne in 1930, Point got three Michelin stars.

## DIRECT HEIRS OF POINT

**RAYMOND THUILIER (b 1897)**

Point's great friend, was a life-insurance salesman until he saw the hill village of Les Baux-de-Provence in 1941, and decided to become a chef and restore the building that became the Oustaù de Baumanière. He opened in 1946 and got his third Michelin star in 1954. The cooking is now done by his grandson. Raymond Thuilier is also mayor of Les Baux.

## Indirect heirs of Point

**CHARLES BARRIER (b 1916)**

has fallen on hard times. He not only lost his third star for his restaurant, Charles Barrier at Tours, but was convicted, in December 1983, of fraud, and sentenced to six months in prison 'for falsifying his tax records'. The oldest of the nouvelle cuisine chefs, Barrier is a wonderful talker, an atheist, Freemason and great cook.

**MICHEL GUÉRARD (b 1933)**

is the most original of the famous chefs. The son of a butcher, he became a cook only at 17, working first for the caterer Kléber Alix and then for Jean Delavayne of the Camélia in Bougival. Stages followed at Maxim's, Lucas-Carton, the Meurice, the Crillon, and the Normandy at Deauville, before he opened the Pot-au-Feu at Asnières in 1963. He left this to marry Christine Barthélémy, a health-farm heiress. To please her, he lost weight, and invented cuisine minceur. They opened the world's most delicious fat farm at Eugénie-Les-Bains in 1972, and in five years earned three Michelin stars. It remains the only place in the world that serves authentic cuisine minceur.

**PAUL HAEBERLIN (b 1923)**

chef of L'Auberge de l'Ill at Illhaeusern in Alsace, fought with the Free French Army in the war; his brother, Jean-Pierre, the maître d'hôtel, was conscripted and fought for the Germans. After the war, Paul Haeberlin trained at La Rôtisserie Périgourdine in Paris and with Edouard Weber, who had been chef to the Tsar, to the Kings of Greece and Spain and to the Rothschilds, at La Pépinière at Ribeauvillé in Alsace. He reopened the family auberge in 1950 and it now has three stars.

**ROGER VERGÉ (b 1931)**

has two restaurants at Mougins, near Cannes. The three-star is Le Moulin de Mougins, which he opened in 1969, after deciding not to be an aeroplane mechanic. He trained at the Tour d'Argent and Plaza Athénée in Paris, then seemed always to be on an aeroplane – he worked at Casablanca, St Moritz, Monte Carlo, and in Jamaica and South Africa before opening his own restaurant. He still enjoys flying down to Rio to do lunch for a couple of hundred people.

**GEORGES BLANC (b 1943)**

the handsome young chef proprietor of La Mère Blanc at Vonnas. Gault-Millau discovered him (and gave him their highest award – chef of the year – in 1981). He has three Michelin stars. He is firmly in the Lyonnais tradition, and makes wonderful use of the chickens and pigeons of nearby Bresse.

**MARC MENEAU (b 1944)**

of L'Espérance at St-Père-sous-Vézelay, has at last got three stars in Michelin in 1984. Gault-Millau gave Meneau their highest award – chef of the year – in 1983, and alerted the Michelin inspectors to do their duty.

**JACQUES MAXIMIN (b 1948)**

of Le Chantecler, in the Hotel Negresco in Nice, trained for two years with Roger Vergé. He may not get a third Michelin star, though he deserves it. Gault-Millau recognised his quality in 1980, the year after he

moved to his present post, but Michelin's weird policy is not to give three stars to hotel chefs. Maximin is the only great chef in France to offer a vegetarian menu, and never changes his tasting menu 'because it is technically perfect'.