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D10

D1 October 4, 2013

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MURIEL CHAULET/LYON TOURISME ET CONGRES

Lyon

France's Gastronomic Capital Beckons

BY CHANNALY PHILIPP
EPOCH TIMES STAFF

Paris has nothing to envy other cities. But another destination, long known in France to be the nation's gastronomic capital, is drawing Francophiles, especially the ones who love to eat: Lyon.

Lyon is the third largest city in France, and for years, it was known as a city you passed through on your way to the south—not a destination in its own right.

One of Lyon's top chefs, Michelin-starred chef Christian Têtedoie attributes the tradition of good eating to the immediate surroundings, famous for its high quality: Bresse chickens, Charolais beef, farms just outside the city who come to supply the city's markets, fish from nearby lakes. And of course Beaujolais wine.

In history, it was a prosperous trading crossroads during the Renaissance, when Italian merchants brought in spices from the East. Inns and restaurants proliferated to accommodate travelers.

Ascent of the Mères Lyonnaises

The city also has a unique heritage passed down from the mères Lyonnaises ("the Lyons mothers"), women who, starting in the late 19th century into the late 20th century, made quite a name for themselves, and for Lyon.

Têtedoie explained how in the 1880s, women entered the

cooking profession: "In the 1880s, these women who were either mothers, unmarried mothers, or widows—because their husbands, who worked working in the canuts [in the silk industry], worked very hard—they became widows at 30, without any money. So they bought products, or were even given, products that were throwaways at the time, like calf heads."

To really feel the soul of Lyon's gastronomy, you have to go to the markets.

Jean-Michel Daclin, deputy mayor, Lyon

"They worked so well to sublimate these pieces that the great bourgeois came to eat, and so were born the mères Lyonnaise."

Of course the French have been good at using all parts of the animals for years.

Today Lyon specialties include a great deal of charcuterie. Last weekend at a Taste of France soirée in Bryant Park, chef Daniel Boulud, a native son of Lyon, prepared various charcuterie: boudin noir (blood sausage),

boudin blanc, hare in croute, beef cheeks, and ham.

Têtedoie thinks that years ago, these would not have gone over so well with American diners, but now they seem eager, and it's been in vogue to use the whole animal.

As for the mères Lyonnaises, their golden age came during the early 20th century, where each shone with her own specialties: la mère Brazier, who was the first woman to earn three Michelin stars back in 1939, and one of whose apprentices was a certain Paul Bocuse; la mère Fillioux, known for her quenelles (light-as-cloud dumplings, traditionally made with pike, and a crawfish sauce) and poulet demi-deuil (braised chicken, with truffles are tucked under the skin, served with vegetables); la mère Léa, known for her choucroute au champagne (champagne sauerkraut).

Thanks to the mères Lyonnaises, a humble cuisine, including the tradition of using less desirable animal parts, or what the French call the "less noble parts," was thus merged with a more bourgeois cuisine.

Most of these mères Lyonnaises passed away in the latter part of the 20th century, and have been replaced by male chefs, in some cases their descendants or apprentices. The last mère Lyonnaise, Paulette Castaing, is 102 this year.

Pleasures of the Table
Eating, talking about food, and shopping for food are somewhat of national past-times, and very pronounced in Lyon.

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1. Chef Christian Têtedoie's eponymous restaurant overlooks Lyon.

Delicacies served at Christian Têtedoie:

- 2. Foie Gras Gourmand;
- 3. Coeur de Gunnaja;
- 4. Lobster and calf head.

5. Marking the Place Neuve Saint Jean

6. Biking Lyon. The city started a bike share system 10 years ago.

7. A passage in the Croix Rousse neighborhood

8. Les Halles Paul Bocuse market

TRISTAN DESCHAMPS/LYON TOURISME ET CONGRES