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France's Gastronomic Capital Beckons

LYON CONTINUED FROM D1

Here, an outing to a restaurant is sustenance and entertainment aplenty for an evening; the precious evening hours are spent eating and talking at the table, rather than divided between dinner and a show, for example.

Not that the cultural scene is lacking, but the pleasures of the table remain primordial. It's only recently in Lyon that concepts like food trucks (called nomadic cuisine) have arrived. There are currently about 10.

A crowdfunded project, successfully funded last week and spearheaded by students from the Institut Paul Bocuse, intends to offer "Street Food à la Française," traditional French dishes on a tricycle. Their crêpe Vonasienne, for example, reinvents a recipe by one of the mère Lyonnaise, Mère Blanc. Using a potato base, the pancake is filled with beef confit and carrots for winter time.

Dining in Lyon

Lyon offers a more intimate experience than Paris, but it is also more affordable.

The bouchons, which date back to the era of silk workers who were in need of a hearty morning meal, offered simple, affordable meals, often based on pork ("cochonailles"), with Beaujolais or Côtes-du-Rhône. About 20 bouchons are deemed authentic. Today, the dishes at the bouchons are more diverse and offer a good experience of the cuisine from Lyon.

The city offers more than hearty fare, however.

Since the 1970s, pioneered by Paul Bocuse, French nouvelle cuisine is all about lighter, more delicate dishes, and presentation.

Today, the city holds 64 Michelin stars among 17 restaurants.

The dining scene is ever changing.

Paul Bocuse, who opens his 17th establishment on Oct. 15, a restaurant named Marguerite, after the wife of the one of the Lumière brothers from Lyon. Tabatha Bonardi, a woman chef at the two-star Nicolas le Bec, will take the helm at the kitchen.

Chef Têtedoie also opened his fifth restaurant on Oct. 1, what he calls a "pépinière à chefs." A pépinière being a plant nursery, Têtedoie envisions L'Arsenic as a "laboratory where we discover young chefs," where young chefs take the world over, looking to launch careers, will be invited to come cook for a week's time, provided they perform well during the first evening.

As far as sweets go, the latest craze in Lyon is the Praline, created by Auguste Pralus in 1955. His son, Francois Pralus, opened a shop in Lyon last month. Lines are out the door for the brioche confection, topped by bits of pink praline. The pralines are made with Valencia almonds and Piedmont hazelnuts, coated in pink sugar and then cracked.

Pink pralines are typical of Lyon, and are also made into tarts.

Markets

With so many places, where to eat, shop, explore, where's a visitor to start?

Jean-Michel Daclin, deputy mayor of Lyon, is unequivocal: the markets.

"To really feel the soul of Lyon's gastronomy, you have to go to the markets. In Lyon we have 52. The quality of Lyon's gastronomy

A Chat With Chef Christian Têtedoie

On calf heads and whether French cuisine is passé

Chef Christian Têtedoie, one of Lyon's top chefs, was in town for the Taste of France in Bryant Park last weekend. As president of the Maitres Cuisiniers de France association, he supports young chefs in their training and often travels to promote French cuisine across the world.

A native of Nantes, the Michelin-starred chef settled in Lyon in 1979, where he owns five restaurants.

Food runs in chef Têtedoie's blood.

His parents grew produce for a living, and he came from a large family of agricultural workers. "Twenty people at the table, it's practically a restaurant already," said Têtedoie who started helping his mother cook from a very young age.

Trained classically, chef Têtedoie found earlier in his career that he had to break through the rigidity of his culinary education to achieve the creative dishes he makes today.

For example, traditionally, French sauces are very structured through stocks and creams. He went after vegetable jus instead.

"What bothered me about [classic] cuisine was that the product had a flavor and the sauce had the same flavor as the product." He wanted to make sauces that provided a contrast, that would "put the product forward and the sauce as well."

The combinations are surprising.

His marries scallops and a cep mushroom garnish, with a sauce of lemon, soy sauce, and spices.

He has one dish that's been on the menu of his eponymous restaurant, Christian Têtedoie, for 28 years: lobster and calf head.

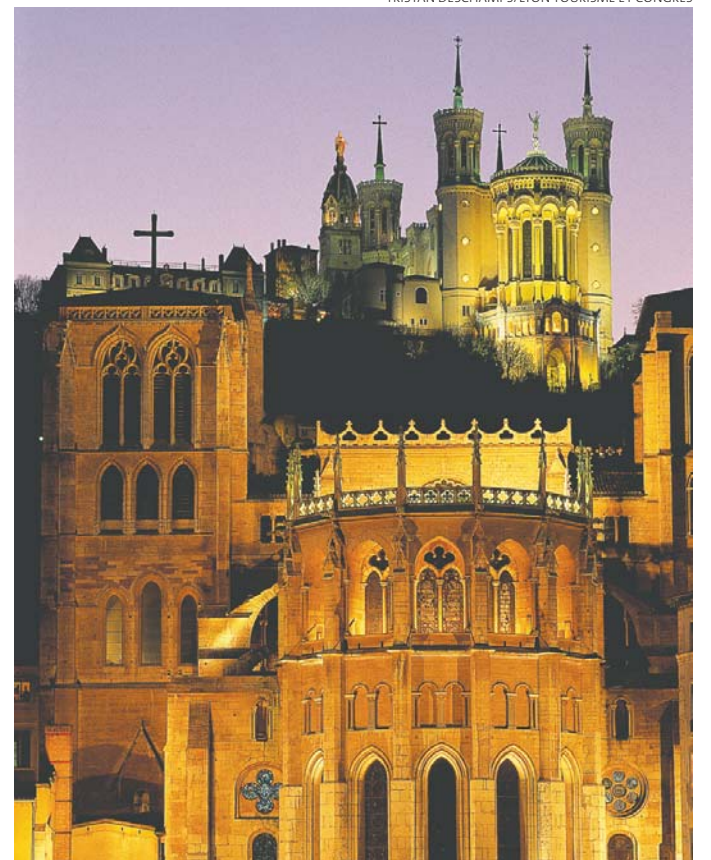
He hesitated before mentioning the dish. "Americans won't understand," he said, "yet it's very good."

Têtedoie was young and had just created his first restaurant. Thanks to a Canadian initiative promoting lobsters, he found himself the recipient of a massive amount of lobsters.

Cooking is about generosity. It's more than a job. It's almost un art de vivre.

Chef Christian Têtedoie

"I had 30 kilograms [about 66 pounds] of lobsters, and I had a tiny restaurant. I thought, what am I going to do?" At the same time, he had a very demanding client, who came to eat every day. "A guy who comes every day, you always have to surprise him. Finally, I didn't know what to do anymore." It proved to be



Cathedrale St. Jean and the Basilica of Notre Dame of Fourvière.

is first the quality of its products, and the fact that farmers are around the city. There is a formidable richness of the products that are distributed among, first, families, and then [Michelin]-starred restaurants, small restaurants, bouchons ... It's what I call gastronomy at all levels."

The most famous market is the Halles de Lyon Paul Bocuse, an indoor market of about 60 vendors that offer the best ingredients and products the region has to offer.

Tourist Highlights

The city has been drawing more visitors each year. North American tourists are currently on the rise; Americans account for the fourth largest percentage of tourists, while Canadians are fifth.

The last 10 years have seen profound change, said Daclin, notably in integrating natural and urban elements, "a better communion with the environment." Two rivers flow through Lyon, the Rhône and the Saône. "The riverbanks of the Rhône were all redeveloped, and work continues on the Saône.

Where the two rivers meet, an urban renewal project, call La Confluence, spans about 150 hectares over a previously neglected area. Public spaces, housing, shops, transportation, and environmental preservation have all been thought through in the planning.

Lyon is also a destination for history and architecture lovers. A UNESCO heritage site, it boasts Gallo-Roman history; medieval and renaissance architecture in Old Lyon. An intriguing feature are traboules, which form veritable mazes of interior passages that allow travel from one street to another. They were used by silk workers to move their wares indoors in case of rain; they were also used by the French Resistance during World War II.

Velo'V, Lyon's bike share system, which started 10 years ago, gets you around free of charge for less than an hour's use.

This is all to say, really, that if you go to Lyon for the gastronomy, there are plenty of ways to work off your meal—until the next one.



VÉRONIQUE VEDRENNE

a real education for him.

One day, he was preparing calf head—he sautéed it so it was crispy on the exterior, added lobster, and added some carrot jus which added some sweetness and married the flavors of the lobster and calf head.

Young people who come from other countries and taste the dish can't get over how good it is, he said.

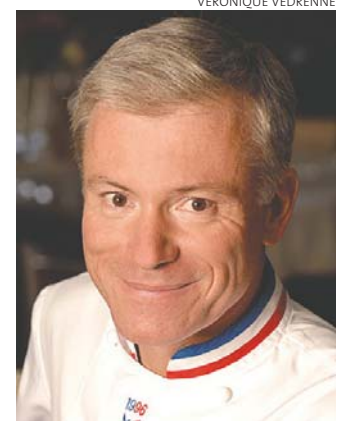
Although the dish has been on the menu for almost three decades, it has a different incarnation every season, every year.

"It proves that cooking, it's a living thing. It's infinite, you can create it, recreate incessantly. It's magic."

He actually makes a confit with the calf head, which takes five hours and produces a smooth texture. "Even those who don't like calf head ... it's impossible," he dismissed that idea. Foreigners who tasted it without knowing what they were eating couldn't get over that they ate calf head.

Is French Cuisine Passé?

Wherever he travels, Têtedoie



Chef Christian Têtedoie

said he is surrounded by journalists who tell him how passé French cuisine is.

Far from it, he says. "French chefs reinvent the terroir wherever they are. They adapt wherever they are."

He works on dispelling the perception of arrogance. Granted, some chefs have ego, but "most chefs I know are humble, and are concerned with pleasing people," he said.

"Cooking is about generosity. It's more than a job. It's almost un art de vivre."