



DINER DES CHEFS – 11 SEPTEMBER

Luxury Club Dîner des Chefs at Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons

Set in the Oxfordshire countryside, Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons is the creation of Chef Raymond Blanc, OBE, who envisaged a hotel and restaurant where his guests would ‘find perfection in food, comfort and service.’ For those members of the Luxury Club who attended the Dîner des Chefs there on 11 September, the whole experience was, indeed, nothing short of perfection.

Guests arrived in time to enjoy a stroll - glasses of Perrier-Jouët Champagne in hand - around Le Manoir’s fairy tale gardens – of which there are seven altogether – illuminated by the soft, late afternoon light, and were later joined by chef Raymond Blanc, himself a member of the Chamber and the Luxury Club.

Florence Gomez, managing director of the Chamber, offered her thanks to sponsors Citroën for transporting guests and introduced Raymond Blanc, giving a fascinating account of his arrival in the UK 30 years previously, his eventual acquisition of Le Manoir, the only hotel restaurant to have achieved and maintained its two Michelin star status for 28 years, and the way he had transposed his ‘art de vivre’ to his adopted country.

Raymond Blanc then took the floor, speaking about the strong cultural and business ties between Britain and France and how there were great opportunities to make these even stronger. Phil Duffy from sponsor Pernod Ricard UK introduced the two Perrier-Jouët Champagnes – Grand Brut NV and Belle Epoque 2004 - giving a history of the boutique House and noting that it had started exporting to Great Britain in 1815 , within four years of its establishment, and had received a royal warrant from Queen Victoria in 1861.

Seven delectable courses were set before the diners, beginning with an assiette aperitif of tomato essence. This was followed by confit of Landais duck liver with spiced cherries, almonds and mango chutney, and then Devonshire crab, served with pink grapefruit and buckler sorrel. A risotto of wild mushrooms preceded the roasted grouse accompanied by cabbage, bacon and blackberry jus. Desserts comprised a raspberry and strawberry soup with mint and basil, and ‘our millionaire shortbread’ served with salted butter ice cream. The menu reflected seasonality and impeccable provenance, with many of the ingredients coming from Le Manoir’s own extensive vegetable gardens. Carefully selected wines accompanied every course.

Between courses Raymond Blanc answered questions and regaled guests with stories of his early days in England and his first unappealing encounter with fish and chips. He acknowledged that the British are now reconnecting with their food, embracing regionality, history and local ingredients. What had initially looked like dilution of food culture in the UK, he said, was in fact an enrichment through multiculturalism, and he praised the up-and-coming British chefs who were doing very exciting things. An investor in that new generation himself, Raymond Blanc has trained over 28 Michelin star chefs.

To round off the gastronomic repast, guests were treated to the smooth intensity of the renowned Martell XO cognac, courtesy of Pernod Ricard UK, which was served with café Pur Arabica, petit fours and chocolates de Manoir. Extraordinary food – created from the finest British ingredients, conviviality and a melding of cultures had made for an exquisite evening in the best French tradition.