



THE  
ATHENÆUM  
PALL MALL LONDON

## WINE DINNER

Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2022 at 7pm

*Spreading the Wine Word - Elizabeth David:  
teaching the English to eat and drink*



A John Minton drawing from *French Country Cooking* (1951)

Speaker: Professor Stephen Bayley  
Chairman: Richard Higham

# **MENU AND WINES**

## **Soupe au Pistou**

**La Chapelle En Rose 2020, 12.5%**  
**Château Saint-Jacques d'Albas, Minervois, France**



## **Pate de campagne**

**Chénas 'Les Carrières' 2015, 14%**  
**Domaine Thillardon, Beaujolais, France**



## **Daube de boeuf and Pommes mousseline**

**Lirac 'Baron Louis' 2015, 14.5%**  
**Château de Montfaucon, Rhone, France**



## **St Emilion au chocolat**

**Château Lamothe Guignard, 2ème Cru Classé, Sauternes**  
**2011, 14%**



## *French Country Cooking, 1951.*

Elizabeth David did as much to improve material life in Britain as anybody else in the second half of the last century. To call her a cook is as simplistic as calling Edwin Lutyens a builder.

Mrs David, as she was invariably known, took a long, hard look at post-War Britain and found it wanting. She found her native land depressing, cold, lifeless, joyless, damp, dull and lazy. So, with her cookbooks, she created stratagems of escape from suburbia....and from Brown Windsor Soup, snoek, beige rissoles and other rationing-era horrors. But it was a larger escape as well. More than any other individual, she introduced us to European taste, manners and culture.

Food was not just a passport. It meant everything to her. Food and wine did for Mrs David what religion does for the observant: something everyday, yet transcendent, providing a mystical ritual that confirmed spiritual truths. Friends were given carefully typed recipes as birthday presents.

She was very often photographed with a glass of wine: evidence of a life-time's enthusiasm. Her very last meal, enjoyed just hours before she died, was a bottle of good Chablis with caviar.

One of her best recipes, related with a haughty mischief that is her style was: "*Pesche in Vino Bianco*". "*Pesche*" is a sort-of homophone: muddling Italian for fish with the English for peach. It's very simple: "Into your glass of wine after luncheon, slice a peeled yellow peach. Leave it a minute or two. Eat the peach and then drink the wine".

Yet, strange to say, Mrs David had very little specific to say about wine. If she was a connoisseur, she kept her expertise a secret, although she did always begin lunch with her mentor Norman Douglas by asking an important question: “Can we manage a litre?”

Her influence on national taste was vast. It was just a short step from wanting to make *ratatouille* to needing something to cook it in. Accordingly, her Chelsea shop opened in 1965 and became a shrine where Le Creuset cookware and wooden spoons were articles of faith. Just the year before, Terence Conran had opened Habitat a short distance away: his influential cookware section was, he freely admitted, inspired by Elizabeth David.

The facts are quite simple.

Elizabeth Gwynne was born at Folkington in Sussex in 1913, grand-daughter of the 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Ridley. She died – single - in 1992 after half a lifetime of misalliances, always finding and always rejecting men who were consistently beneath her very high expectations.

Headstrong after school, she tried the stage, but had more beauty than empathy. She then became a *vendeuse* at the Worth *couturier*. In early 1939, she sailed to Greece in a boat belonging to her lover *du jour*. When Hitler invaded Poland, they were in the south of France, and it was in Antibes that she had met Norman Douglas. Sometimes described as “The moralist of amorality”, Douglas was a highly cultivated paedophile, classicist, raconteur, novelist and travel-writer. His *Venus in the Kitchen* is an extraordinary volume of erotic recipes, mostly culled from *The Byzantine Anthology*. She set sail again in the spring of 1940, but was interned in

Italy. Her odyssey continued to Syros in the Cyclades, but moved to Cairo in 1941 just in front of the Germans. Here she met and married Anthony David, an officer in the Indian army.

Back in London, the winter of 1946 was cold and nasty. By way of escape, Mrs David headed for a comfortable hotel in Ross-on-Wye with an old-new lover in tow. The marriage to Captain David did not last; she found him “feckless”, but retained his name.

After the lush cooking and embracing climate of Egypt, Herefordshire disappointed. She described being in an “embattled rage that we should be asked – and should accept – the endurance of such cooking”.

To comfort herself, she scribbled down lists of the things she most missed from the South: apricots, olives, butter, rice, garlic, oil, lemons, almonds. When worked-up, these notes were an expression of her yearning, one of an almost erotic intensity. (Which explains, to a degree, the ineluctable passion of her writing).

In 1949, Mrs David began a cookery column for *Harper's Bazaar* and these columns soon became a manuscript which was published in 1950 as *A Book of Mediterranean Food* by John Lehmann, a Bloomsburyite, who identified wholly with her hedonistic, if sometimes didactic, spirit.

*The cover and illustrations were by John Minton who gave perfect expression to the elegant, bohemian exoticism of the contents. Recipes included moules marinières, spanakopita, bouillabaisse and brandade, boeuf en daube and dolmades. None of these was familiar in the England of 1950.*

*Mediterranean Food* was followed by *French Country Cooking* (1951), *Italian Food* (1954), a book greatly admired by, of all people, Evelyn Waugh, *Summer Cooking* (1955) and *French Provincial Cooking* (1960). Later books - which included *Spices Salt and aromatics in the English kitchen* (1970) and *Harvest of the Cold Months*, a study of ice-houses, published posthumously in 1994 - moved impressively from stylish journalism to serious scholarship.

Although she agreed with Marcel Boulestin, the original telly chef, that peace and happiness begin where garlic is grown, Mrs David disdained television or, indeed, any contact of any sort with the *hoi-polloi*.

Thus her critics often accuse her of snobbery, privilege and superiority. Maybe, but she wrote with passion, wit and profound knowledge. Long before European tourism or telly chefs, Elizabeth David popularised pleasure, turning cooking from a chore into an educated delight that is to be shared. If Sainsbury's in Oswestry sells basil, that's, I think, down to her far-reaching and benign influence.

Sad to say, her last years were spent cooking and eating in a damp basement kitchen in Chelsea, not on a scorched Provencal terrace. But that's the mystery of art. And Elizabeth David was much more than a cook. She was an artist.

## **The dinner tonight comprises Elizabeth David classics:**

### **Soupe au Pistou**

“The origin of pistou is Genoese but it has become naturalised in Nice and the surrounding country” she writes with early authority. Indeed, it is nowadays a feature at Provençal village feasts.

The soup can be made of almost anything, but her recipe comprises French beans, potatoes, tomatoes plus *vermicelli*. Today, *vermicelli* is an unusual addition.

Mrs D’s “*pistou*” she calls “*aillade*” and is not quite the same as *pesto* (which includes nuts), although the words have a common origin. Crush garlic, basil and a grilled and skinned and seeded tomato in a mortar and pestle. If necessary, thin the paste with cooking water and splash into the soup. Mrs David suggests a sprinkle of grated Gruyere, but that was almost the only exotic cheese available; in her day.

### **Pate de campagne**

Mrs David offers several versions. This is typical. Her recipes tend to give general directions, rather than specific guidance. For example her advice on use of the then rare olive oil was: “Except for sauces, one does not often measure oil by tablespoons. One pours it out of the bottle into the pan. One uses one’s eye and one’s loaf.”

Anyway, grind a mix of pork belly, chicken livers, streaky

bacon into a rough paste, flavoured with juniper, garlic, salt and plenty of black pepper. Add an egg plus brandy. Perhaps some thyme. Press into a baking tin and cover the mix with bacon. Cook in a *bain-marie*, or water-bath. When finished, weight it down to compress the pate while cooling. Serve with good country bread and cornichons.

### **Daube de Boeuf Provencale**

This is a farmer's wife's recipe. "What goes in apart from the meat is largely a matter of what is available, and the way it is served is again a question of local taste" she writes with nice carelessness. Essentially you need, unsmoked bacon, pork rind, onions, carrots, tomatoes, garlic, *bouquet garni*, orange peel, oil and red wine. The *daube* must be cooked very slowly for about three hours until it is unctuous glop. Served with a *persillade* of garlic, parsley, anchovy and capers.

### **Pommes Mousseline**

Skin some baked potatoes and whisk ("until your arm aches") with hot milk and butter.

### **St Emilion au chocolat.**

Start by beating butter with sugar. Meanwhile, mix scalded milk with an egg yolk. Melt chocolate in a pan with some water. Stir in first the milk and egg mix, then the butter and sugar. Stir until smooth.

Line a tin with what Mrs David called macaroons (more likely today *amaretti*) soaked in rum or brandy. Over these pour the chocolate cream then another layer of macaroons and so on. Leave to cool "for at least 12 hours".



The great lesson Mrs David teaches us is neither to be profligate nor frugal, just intelligently sensible. Her best warning was: “A bad meal is always expensive”.

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## **La Chapelle en Rose 2020**



Chateau St Jacques d’Albas was bought by Graham Nutter in the early 2000s. The vineyard is set in the Minervois between Carcassonne, the Canal du Midi and the Black Mountain. 26 Hectares of organic vines are surrounded by Garrigue and forest and overlooked by a C11th chapel. The family have made major changes, now making their own wines with lower yielding, higher quality vines, replacing the Carignan and Alicante (favoured by the co-op) with ten different varieties. They follow the Cousiné policy which focuses on the long term health of soil and vines. The clay soil is left for 7-12 years before replanting, using cereal crops to restore balance. The climate sounds wonderful with 300

days of sunshine, 450-750mm rainfall and breezy. 2020 started wet but played out well with no frosts and good sunshine. They harvested 20<sup>th</sup> August to 23<sup>rd</sup> September just before the Autumn rains arrived. The Rosé composition varies from year to year with a majority Grenache 98%-50% and minority Morvedre 0-40%, some Roussanne <10%, occasional Syrah <10%.

## **Chénas Les Carrières Thillardon 2015**

Paul-Henri Thillardon (on left) started this domaine in Chénas back in 2008, and has built it up piece by piece.



They are based in Chessignol and have four hectares here, with very old vineyards behind the domaine (80-100 year old vines).

This was the first of their vineyards he took to biodynamics, which he started with when he acquired it in 2012. In 2014 Paul-Henri was joined full time by his brother Charles, and now all their vines are farmed this way. In total they work 12 hectares of vines. Les Carrières is (unsurprisingly given the name!) from the rocky part of the vineyard with a lot of granite.

Chénas is a small appellation with only 2.65 Km<sup>2</sup> of planting. The vast majority is planted with Gamay. In 2015 the

harvest started on 24<sup>th</sup> August in a heatwave. Yield was quite low. The conditions are said to have required skillful winemaking, of which the Thillardons are clearly capable.

“Fine, spicy, elegant Chénas with plenty of weight on the palate but still retains lift and lots of refinement. More earthy, autumn-leaf characters on the palate with attractive redcurrant and raspberry leaf notes.” (Andy Howard MW 2021 Decanter)

## **Chateau de Montfuacon Baron Louis 2015**

Chateau de Montfaucon is a medieval castle overlooking the and just across the river from Chateuaneuf-du-Pape. The original 18 hectares (1995) of vineyards have grown to 45



hectares by planting new vineyards and by buying old ones. The vines are up to 90 years old with an average age of 40 years. All the vineyards are farmed at low yields (between 25 to 42 hl/ha). There are a wide variety of vines: Grenache,

Syrah, Carignan, Mourvèdre, Cinsault, Counoise, Viognier, Marsanne, Clairette, Bourboulenc, Picpoul. The domaine is now run by the delightful Rodolphe de Pins who has spoken at Club dinners and Virtually Wine. He follows the principals of sustainable agriculture, no insecticides are applied and he only uses natural fertilizers (blend of sheep manure and marc compost). He leaves the native grasses to grow on the vineyards and control its growth by mowing regularly and ploughing when needed (if the season is too dry. When it

comes to winemaking, he co-ferments up to five varieties in the same tank to increase the exchange and integration of different grapes during fermentation. By controlling temperature and time on skins, typically 8 to 14 days, he is looking to extract only soft and silky tannins. The wines are aged in concrete tanks and French oak barrels (one to six vintages old) and the Baron is aged for 18 months before bottling.

Both the Northern and Southern Rhône had idyllic growing seasons in 2015 with a wet, rehydrating Spring, a very hot early summer, and a pleasant late summer with cooler nights. Despite some late showers the vines stayed fairly disease-free.

## **Chateau Lamothe Guignard 2eme Cru Classe Sauternes 2011**

The vineyard sits on one of the highest hills of Sauternes, and its gravelly and chalky soils overlook the misty Ciron river valley which produces the climate ideal for noble rot. After a history of changed ownership the largest



part was acquired by Philippe and Jacques Guignard in 1981. They have worked quietly but highly effectively to create wines whose quality consistently outperforms reputation.

For Sauternes, the 2011 growing season was ideal. The winter and spring were both dry with a particularly warm spring

prompting both an early and successful budburst and flowering. High temperatures in June exacerbated fears of drought, but both July and August brought cooling rains and intermittent storms. The storms helped bring humidity, and September then delivered the essential misty mornings and warm dry afternoons needed to kickstart botrytis and concentrate the grapes. The wines tended to be intense, refined and aromatic with crystalline fruit flavours, championing elegance over opulence. Enthusiastic and well-informed commentators speak of the excellent balance, rich pineapple notes and a long finish.

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## MEMBERS AND GUESTS

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