



Chez Marcon – Mushroom Cuisine

Located 100km south of Lyon, the hamlet of St-Bonnet-le-Froid is perched up high in the mountains, at an altitude of 1200m and is surrounded by Douglas fir forests. In October 2012, I joined a dozen French “apprentices” that had come to this town to take cooking lessons. In this town, Chef Régis Marcon runs his hotels, restaurants and also his cooking school. My fiancée and I stayed at the hotel *Le Clos des cimes* and we usually ate, along with the whole group at the bistro *La coulemelle*, dishes that were the fruit of our learning and labour.



Restaurant Jacques et Régis Marcon



St-Bonnet-le-Froid - Environs

Happy coincidence, Régis and most of the participants had visited Québec recently so relationships were quickly established. Many had experienced the rigors of our winters in snowshoes, snowmobiles or dogsled excursions. St-Bonnet’s climate is not that different: the mushroom feast that starts early November is often held under a thick carpet of snow.

Most participants were from the Massif Central, especially from Auvergne. An inn-keeper was in his seventh cooking classes. He had already attended pastry, terrines and pâtés, sea food and many other sessions. All were passionate about cooking regional specialties and mushrooms. These themes were the topics of our conversations and inspired us in planning the few days of “roaming” until our return trip to America.

In the workshop, the chef kept the leading role and distributed all secondary roles. I distinguished myself with my onion slicing skills. We were taught some basic principles:

- mushrooms can be served in all fashions, from entries to deserts
- quality, beauty and origin of produces are primordial
- one must loose neither time nor produce
- prepare ahead of time all that can be
- there is always place for creativity
- do not reveal all of your secrets

The tangle of recipes kept us alert at all times, the preparations were organized so as to make optimal use of the equipment and the products, taking into account the prescribed length of time for each operation.



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Within a few hours – the training lasted hardly two days – we realized some twenty recipes: snail and chanterelles short breads, terrine of horn of plenty, chanterelle cream soup, potatoes stuffed with porcini, squabs with mirabelles, chanterelles and gentian, porcini custard, St-George mushrooms and meadow mushrooms along with many others...

It was an early fall day and the coniferous forest was carpeted with wild mushrooms. As we approached St-Bonnet by car, we had an overview of this abundance on each side of the road.



On the first afternoon, we went for brief mushroom picking in the forest: they were numerous and varied. Amethyst deceivers were particularly abundant and found their way in some of our recipes. Upon returning, Régis and Gilles, the local expert, were waiting for us for identification and fantastic harvest stories.

The apotheosis was the final feast at the starred restaurant *Régis et Jacques Marcon* where dishes followed one another from one to five p.m. The displays reminded me of Versailles in a miniature.



On the menu, the first serving consisted of tasty bites on spoons. Then, succeeded the main dishes: mussel and chanterelle bouillabaisse, parsnip sole with horn of plenty and verjuice sauce, mushroom stuffed saddle of lamb accompanied by a porcini risotto. The bouillabaisse was a variant from the one we had done in our workshop.

Wine flowed copiously throughout the meal and each wine having being selected in harmony with the dish. Indeed, nothing to incite my fiancée and I to take the road toward Millau and its recently built gracious 2,460 meters long viaduct, the next step on our trip.