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TASTING NOTES

EATING AND DRINKING WITH JEAN-CLAUDE VRINAT

By ANTHONY DIAS BELLE

Jean-Claude Vrinat, owner
L'Angle du Faubourg
 195 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris
 011-33-1-4074-2020



Of all the temples of gastronomy in Paris, Taillevent is perhaps the most revered. First opened in 1946 by André Vrinat, the restaurant is named after the medieval cook and cookbook author Guillaume Tirel, known to history as Taillevent (meaning “wind carver,” evidently a reference to Tirel’s rather prominent Gallic nose). By royal command, Taillevent wrote the founding text of French cuisine, *Le Viandier*, in 1370. For what it’s worth, Tirel is also the supposed inventor of sausage.

Vrinat served a different French provincial menu each day at Taillevent, and by 1948 the restaurant had earned its first Michelin star. In 1950, Vrinat relocated to the splendid former *hôtel particulier* (town house) of the Duc de Morny, just around the corner from the Arc de Triomphe. A second Michelin star appeared on Taillevent’s horizon in 1956.

In 1962, Vrinat’s son Jean-Claude, a passionate wine connoisseur, joined his father in the business. Under Jean-Claude’s direction, Taillevent became a meeting place for the world’s most demanding gastronomes. Aristotle Onassis and Maria Callas were regulars. Salvador Dali liked to order off the menu (he once had a peacock cooked in its own feathers). Perhaps partially in recognition of the younger Vrinat’s grace and aplomb under such international pressure, Michelin awarded Taillevent its third star in 1973.

Today, his passion for wine and cuisine unabated, Jean-Claude Vrinat is still at the helm of this culinary bastion. Seeking the best bottles for his clients, he opened one of Paris’ best wine shops, Les Caves Taillevent, in 1987. And, as if helming two businesses weren’t enough, several years ago — just to keep himself on the cutting edge — Vrinat decided to take a whole new angle. In April 2001, the smart, younger sibling to Taillevent, L’Angle du Faubourg, opened. As opposed to Taillevent’s boiserie-clad luxe, the new restaurant is a study in understated modernism, with clean, simple lines and warm hues.

“My intention was not to create an annex of Taillevent,” Vrinat is quick to point out. The establishment easily stands on its own. The competent young staff at L’Angle includes Stéphane Cosnier as chef de cuisine. Dishes such as the duck *foie gras confit* and the succulent beef cheeks (not to be missed if available) maintain obvious resonance with historic French regional cuisine, while racy preparations such as shellfish *glace* with fennel cream, or loin of tuna roasted with spices, deliver a more contemporary vibe. A tasting menu, changed daily, is always available, and has the shockingly modest price tag of 60 euros for dinner. For this price, though, don’t ask for a peacock cooked in its own feathers.



CHEF'S PICK
Domaine L'Aiguière Coteaux du Languedoc Montpeyrroux Côte Dorée 2000 (542)
 This intense, 100 percent Syrah is a favorite at L'Angle du Faubourg.