



The Anatomy of Success

By Naomi Barry in Paris

Franco American Relations via the Kitchen Door

The American Embassy in Paris which is on the Avenue Gabriel just off the Place de la Concorde hosts its official lunches, dinners, teas and receptions at the Ambassador's Residence, a stunning mid-19th century mansion at 41 Faubourg. Saint Honoré between the British Embassy and the Palace of the Elysées.

The carousel of entertaining represents the sugar-coated side of international diplomacy. The pragmatic French long ago observed that if you want to strike a successful deal, you go for it between the pear and the cheese. Ergo: setting a good table is wise government practice.

The pattern probably was set by Thomas Jefferson who served for five years (1784 to 1789) as American Minister to France. The man who had penned the Declaration of Independence followed Benjamin Franklin who had already demonstrated to the folks back home that living in the "grand stile" might be a successful adjunct to achieving political wonders.

To the surprise of some, the American Residence runs a French kitchen. The executive chef for the past 10 years has been [Philippe Excoffier](#), 38, an amiable young Frenchman who hails from Savoie where he started in patisserie at the age of 15. To acquaint himself with all aspects of French cuisine, Excoffier apprenticed himself in kitchens all over the country during his own tour de France. Cannily, he chose to apprentice in luxury restaurants affiliated with the [Relais & Châteaux](#) network.

Jefferson was a skilled player in the power game of diplomacy at table. During his Paris years he rented a handsome house, the Hotel de Langeac, on the site of what is now the corner of the Champs Elysées and the rue de Berri.

He set a fine table serving the most exquisite French food accompanied by a savant selection of excellent Burgundies and Bordeaux. There he dispensed a generous hospitality drawing among the regular guests the finest minds in the city. Lunches and dinners were an intellectual feast. As a New World treat for his French friends, the epicurean Virginian introduced them to the sweet Indian corn that he had succeeded in growing in the vegetable garden of the Hotel de Langeac.

While he was in France, Jefferson became a connoisseur of the country's wines. He visited the vineyards and studied the methods of production. In the travel journal of his trip, he noted

all details. Chateau Lafite, for example, required three years to reach its peak. His friends back home, trusting the discernment of his taste gave him Carte Blanche to buy for them. On his recommendation George Washington ordered thirty dozen bottles of Château d'Yquem. Jefferson purchased some 180 bottles of Château Margaux for his table in Paris and 1020 bottles more after he returned to the United States.



Philippe Excoffier

His representative in Beaune kept him supplied with the great Burgundies. His dream was to influence his countrymen to become a wine drinking nation but he was ahead of his time.

Gastronomy recognizes no borders. Years later the New England statesman and orator Daniel Webster visited Jefferson in retirement at Monticello. Webster informed his fellow Americans that "The menu was half in Virginia, half in French style".

For US national holidays, Chef Philippe Excoffier switches to menus honoring the Red, White and Blue. One of his favorites is the Jambalaya of Crawfish and Chicken. French guests have shown a particular fondness for this dish. It seems to evoke in them a kissing cousin relationship to New Orleans and La Louisiane. Everybody also loves crab cakes, a specialty of the East Coast.

Another of Excoffier's favorites is wild rice, as native a product of the North American continent as you can find. Wild rice is not actually true rice but the grains of a perennial grass native to a marshy area of Minnesota which traditionally had been cultivated by the Chippewa Indians. It is delicious, slightly nutty in flavor, expensive, but worth it. Alas it loses its appealing looks when cooked becoming a dreary brown which puts some people off.

Excoffier decided to give the rice a Cinderella treatment. He added golden raisins and dice of green apple. Excoffier's Wild Rice became an Embassy hit. His version is good enough to share on the next page.

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Throughout the year without the excuse of a national holiday he presents such American specialties as smoked wild Alaska salmon, peerless but rare, citrus fruits, particularly pink grapefruit,

avocados, raisins and cranberries which he finds exceptional for their natural combination of tart and sweet.

WILD RICE with fruits

for 6 persons

250 grams of wild rice

1 onion

2 stalks of celery

1 green apple

1 bouquet garni

100 grams of large golden raisins

40 grams butter

2 cups chicken consommé

Salt and pepper

Soak the rice for several hours or overnight

Rince and drain well

Soak the raisins to plump them

In a casserole melt 20 grams of butter and sauté the finely chopped onion and celery for 3 minutes

Add the rice, the consommé, the bouquet garni, salt.

Cook covered over a low fire for 25 minutes

Peel the apple and cut it into 1 cm dice.

Warm 20 grams of butter in a pan and sauté the apple cubes for 6 minutes, taking care not to color too much.

Salt and pepper lightly. Add the raisins & hold aside

Remove the bouquet garni from the rice.

Stir the apple raisin mixture into the rice,

Simmer for five minutes.

Serve & Enjoy...