



# Styles to suit every taste

One of the oldest ancestors of modern Europeans made his home some 450,000 years ago in a cavern in a limestone cliff just inland from modern Perpignan in the far south of France. Tautavel Man's tastes in food are pretty well established from the animal and bird bones found alongside the remnants of his skull and skeleton (or, rather more accurately, those of a small group of men, women and children from which one individual has been pieced together). But there is little likelihood that he drank wine.

Now, however, Tautavel men (and women) make much of their living from the fermented grape. Walk through the streets of the village, which lies below the cliff where archaeological investigations continue, and you'll see tall arched doorways opening onto cellars which compress into a very small space all that goes on between harvest and final sale in bottle.

Domaine Mounié is one of them, a five-generation wine estate which, unusually, has passed down through the female line rather than the male. In charge now is Claude Rigaiill, who with his wife H el ene produces a range which encompasses the multiple styles of wines from the Roussillon: dry whites through ros e and a series of increasingly serious reds to aromatic muscat and fascinating aged examples of vins doux naturels – sweet wines where the addition of grape spirit has stopped the alcoholic fermentation.

Claude Rigaiill has an intoxicating enthusiasm for his work, delighting particularly in the blending process which follows fermentation. Perhaps his choice of wines is too generous,



■ Claude Rigaiill shows an intoxicating enthusiasm for his work

he smilingly admits, but he sells them to a wide spectrum of customers, from individuals who taste at the Tautavel cellar to French supermarkets and independent wine shops, with a large export share too, a diversity which means Domaine Mounié has kept its head above water during difficult economic times.

Sadly, the export destinations don't yet include the UK, though the Rigaiills' new, commercially oriented partner, Yonesse Lahbari, has been assiduously showing the wines at London tastings and wine fairs recently.

## Fragrant vermentino

I hope his efforts will soon be rewarded, for there are some excellent wines from the domain – starting with a fragrant vermentino (an uncommon variety in this particular part of the Mediterranean vineyard area, but well handled here). The oaked grenache blanc, Cuv e Robert Mouni e, is a very smart mineral-rich food wine, not showing its best until four or five years after harvest – 2008 is drinking beautifully now.

The reds are consistently classy, also with well-handled oak in the posher wines. Top-of-the-red-range Carpe Diem (19 euros at the

cellar) was a risk, admits Claude Rigaiill – he rarely buys bottles for himself at that price level. But supporters of his wines urged him to go for it, and they were right – it consistently sells out. The vins doux naturels include an attractively fresh red Rivesaltes Grenat, not too sweet and with a pleasant touch of tannin.

Given that Domaine Mouni e's wines are not on sale here, let me point you to those of one of the Rigaiills' near neighbours, Pierre Fontaneil, whose Domaine Fontanel dry and sweet wines are available through Stone, Vine and Sun ([www.stonevine.co.uk](http://www.stonevine.co.uk)). Recently, I've particularly enjoyed the stylish white C otes du Roussillon 2011, grenache blanc and malvoisie from vines up to 105 years old (£12.75), and the memorably delicious, complex Rivesaltes Ambr e 2000, remarkable value at £15.50. The Wine Society also has fine Tautavel wines from Domaine Gardi es, 2008 reds Clos des Vignes (£14.50) and Les Falaises (£26).

Claude Rigaiill will, I'm sure, not object to those recommendations. The Tautavel vigneronns believe in working together rather than in opposition – an enlightened attitude as good as their wines.

# An entertaining time with a man of theatreland

Our reviewers has lunch with the great Noel Gay's grandson, who regales him with tales of Eton and a speech in Japan that bombed

The current perception in West End theatreland is that these days the only safe bankers are musicals. Not new musicals, of course – no one is going to be crazy enough to touch one of those – but revivals of all the legendary hits of the past. Or stage versions of much-loved classic films such as *Top Hat* and *Singin' in the Rain*. Otherwise juke box musicals: *Mamma Mia!* was the mamma of the genre, and those devoted to Queen and the Four Seasons continue to pack them in. *Let It Be* was panned, though (because you can't and shouldn't tamper with the Fab Four, and particularly not if you're trying to fob us off with a right-handed McCartney) while the Spice Girls' *Viva Forever!* turned out not to be forever, having closed last month. One fine

musical that always seems ripe for revival is *Me and My Girl*, written by Noel Gay and first performed in 1937: quite a few memorable and deathless ditties in that, including *Lambeth Walk* ("Hoy...!") and *The Sun Has Got His Hat On* ("Hip hip hip hooray...!"). Noel Gay was actually a pseudonym for Reginald Armitage who wrote many songs for the likes of George Formby, Gracie Fields and Flanagan and Allen and was – according to the late theatre critic Sheridan Morley – the nearest this country got to Irving Berlin. He then founded the famous Noel Gay agency to handle actors, musicians and all sorts of other talent ... which still is going strong and still a family concern, currently headed by the grandson, Alex. With whom last week I had the pleasure of lunching.

We went to 28-50 in Marylebone Lane – restaurant central in this

“Although I love food,” said Alex, “I don't like cathedrals devoted to it. I went to Heston's place the other night, and they thought they'd done a great thing by giving me a table looking into the kitchen! I don't want to look into the kitchen...!”

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■ Joseph with guest Alex Armitage at 28-50 in Marylebone Lane

Picture: Polly Hancock

part of the world. The actual street number of this large glass-clad, wedge-shaped curiosity is 15-17, so if it's bugging you why they called it 28-50, just live with it, as I have had to (it's actually to do with degrees, but I can't be bothered to go into it). Wine is the guiding principle of the place: there is a screen made of Bollinger pupitres as you enter, the rear wall given over to a giant's chest of drawers, each one of which is a wine crate. An enormous horseshoe bar hung with excellent stemware and surrounded by blue fluted leather swivel high chairs (for big children) with the tables clustered around that. The wine ranges from the humble but interesting up to burgundy at more than £400,

and many of them are available by the glass. The menu is small, and largely made up of reliable, unobtrusive dishes that will not muscle in on all the frog that they hope you will be ordering. There is a set two-course lunch at £15.95, or three for £18.95, and a lot of the main menu comprises grills. One of which attracted Alex: spatchcocked chicken – a whole poussin, decoratively opened out and flattened. Alex likes chicken – and at home in Hertfordshire has three flocks of them: two for eggs (“they roam about freely. Bantams are pretty – small eggs. Then I have the solid layers”) and one more for eating (“they live a wonderful life. Fed on maize. Total freedom. A chicken in Waitrose may be 12

weeks old, but mine can be up to 30. Much more flavour. You hold their legs ... and then sort of pull, and twist. Very quick.”) And because he is a very keen cook, he fishes for brown trout and grows all his own vegetables. “I get my hands dirty. Like to dig. Broccoli, beans, asparagus...”

I was having asparagus as a starter: English, of course – five decent spears, but they had been unnecessarily charred, and even more unnecessarily chilled. Still quite nice, with fresh leaves and a touch of parmesan. Alex had foie gras terrine, which came as a thin and glossy slice on a square of slate. “Nice and smooth ... though it doesn't exactly sing out. The flavour is muted”. We

both felt very comfortable here – it has a casual yet professional air. “Although I love food,” said Alex, “I don't like cathedrals devoted to it. Where you are meant to applaud. I went to Heston's place the other night, and they thought they'd done a great thing by giving me a table looking into the kitchen! I don't want to look into the kitchen...!” We'd had the house champagne (good mousse, bone dry) and now I ordered some Rhône, which I thought would be good with the spatchcock: was it...? “Indeed. Very good. And so is the chicken – moist, not overcooked, very flavoursome.” And so were the broccoli spears and green beans – vibrant and al dente. I had “grain-fed US 28-day aged rib-eye” – which had a good depth of flavour, but goodness – you see “US” on a menu, you expect half a cow like they do it Stateside: this was more the proportion of a rasher they would have at breakfast with four or five eggs sunny side up, and a whole mess of grits. The Bearnaise sauce was especially good, the triple cooked chips fat and crunchy and quite hopelessly addictive: I had loads of those.

#### Eton-bashing

Alex went to Eton, where he had a marvellous time – having been the fag of the chap who currently is headmaster. Small world, eh? I wondered what he thought of the current fashion for Eton-bashing in the press...? “I just find it odd that people are vilified and criticised for having had a good education.” Well quite: Floreat Etona! And here's a thing: it is a tradition at Eton that when you are done with the flamboyant waistcoats affected by the elite prefects' club ‘Pop’, your fag will toddle off and flog them to others. “Mine got a very good price. I said to him that any clothes he ever sold in the future, I should be in for 10 per cent. His name was Johnnie Boden...” After school, Alex was due to go to Oxford, but his father wanted him to come into Noel Gay straight away – which he did, and very soon came to love the world of showbiz. “My father then accused me of liking only

sleeping with actresses. Quite true, of course.” His own son may or may not be the fourth generation: “At the moment he is 19 and at Cambridge, his sole ambitions being to run Footlights and edit *Private Eye*.”

Then we had very good puddings: ginger panna cotta with blood oranges, rhubarb foam and caramelised oats: Alex really loved that. And I had a first-rate triangle of dark but not bitter chocolate tart with milk ice cream: truly good – as were the glasses of recommended Jurançon: very sweetly delicious. “I love my job,” said Alex. “It makes me laugh. I recently did a promotional trip to Japan. In my speech I attempted to explain who I was and all about Noel Gay. It was met with a total stunned silence. After, someone suggested to me that I maybe shouldn't have gone on about the Enola Gay...”

It was pouring when we left: the sun did not have his hat on (‘Yah! Boo! Hiss!’) but I did. And then we splattered meanderingly down Marylebone Lane in a hesitating approximation of the Lambeth walk (‘Hoy...!’)

■ Joseph Connolly's latest novel, *England's Lane*, is published by Quercus as a hardback and ebook. All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk).

## FACTFILE

#### ■ 28-50

15-17 Marylebone Lane, W1  
Tel: 020 7486 7922

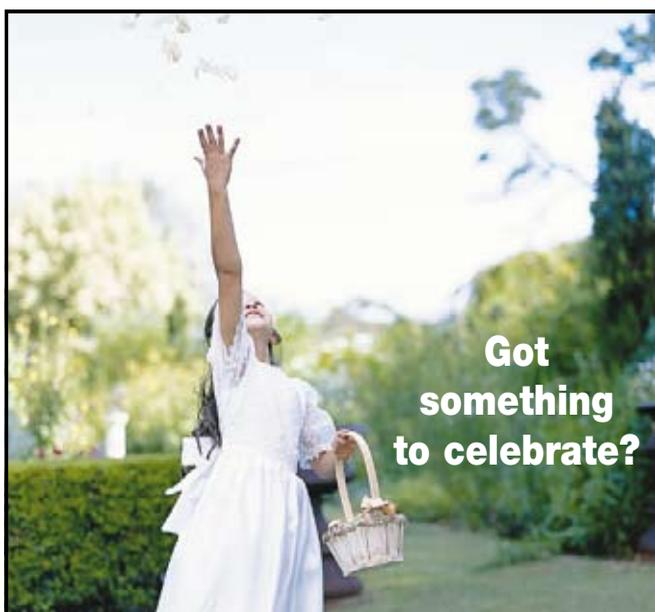
■ Open for lunch Monday-Saturday noon-2.30pm, Sunday noon-4pm. Dinner: Monday-Wednesday 6pm-10pm, Thursday-Saturday 6pm-10.30pm, Sunday 6pm-9.30pm.

■ Food: ★★★★★☆☆

■ Service: ★★★★★☆☆

■ The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆

■ Cost: Set two-course lunch £15.95, three courses £18.95. Otherwise, about £100 for three courses for two, with wine (unless you go nuts with it).



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