



THE WATERSIDE INN

The famous Roux family changed the way English people eat and have inspired a generation of chefs and gourmards. Michel Roux Jnr may be more well-known thanks to his illustrious TV career but his cousin Alain Roux has unobtrusively made his own mark. Chef Chantel Dartnall met him at the eponymous Waterside Inn.

Written by Sarah Marjoribanks

Chef Alain Roux is often referred to as "the quiet one" in the famous Roux family culinary dynasty, but has certainly made a name for himself at the world renowned Waterside Inn.

His father - Michel and uncle Albert were the founders of Le Gavroche in London in 1967 followed by the Waterside Inn in Berkshire.

The two brothers split the business along

family lines in 1990, with chef Michel Jnr of *Master Chef Professionals* taking up the reins at Le Gavroche in 1993 and Alain inheriting the 3 Michelin star Waterside Inn. In 2010 the latter became the first restaurant outside of France to retain all three Michelin stars for 25 years. Chef Alain started working at Waterside in 1991 after having worked in kitchens all over France for eight years. However, as I discovered during my interview with chef

Alain he was never handed anything on the proverbial silver platter.

"I had to prove myself and show that I am worthy to be part the team; that I could progress and develop to the point where Dad thought it was the right time to allow me to take over. It finally happened after 10 years of working together."

The Waterside Inn, with Windsor Castle and Eton as neighbours, is steeped in





tradition but chef Alain never let himself be burdened by his heritage and culinary pedigree.

“I am proud to be part of the Roux legacy. However, you have to build on it and bring a part of yourself to it. We do try to develop new creations for the house and be as innovative as possible in the context of respect for the tradition of the restaurant. Cooking in general is an evolutionary process, starting with the basics or fundamentals of classical French cooking then adding a personal twist or interpretation.”

The atmosphere at the Waterside Inn may be relaxed but Diego Masciaga, Maître de Maison keeps an ever watchful eye in the restaurant as well as the hotel and maintains an exquisite attention to detail. Menus are created to demonstrate both

classic and modern French cuisine at its best.

Le Menu Gastronomique is only decided every morning, based on the market availability of the freshest ingredients and has a truly seasonal feel. Tastes are unadulterated, and the focus is on the minimum ingredient.

Like Merlin of old, chef Alain’s magic tough lure the taste and essence of his ingredients to the fore, the duck succulent and soft taste like duck should...

Although he keeps up to date with new technology and new equipment, Alain still enjoys cooking as chefs have done through generations. He admits to be a fan of tradition. He has cooked sous-vide (a method of cooking food sealed in airtight plastic bags in a water bath

for longer than normal cooking times) and thinks that, while it is sometimes interesting, it reminds him too much of a factory.

He’s not a fan of molecular cuisine either: “Kitchens such as The Fat Duck don’t smell like a kitchen anymore. There’s no aroma of cooking and sauces.” Biodynamics and sustainability are important to him – “you must know where the product, the source of the food, comes from. It is all part of a chain which you should know about” – although 80 percent of the produce used in the kitchen at Waterside comes from France. “People are very conscious of what they eat and they want quality. Guests from overseas especially are looking for high quality,” he maintains.

He prefers to focus on flavour and texture

first, then on making a dish look good. While Chef Alain is proud of the accolades the restaurant has received, he firmly believes that quality should be excellent no matter how many stars a restaurant may have.

“It is all about consistency and continuity. This is the biggest chunk of the hard work.”

It’s also about working together as a cohesive group.

“We have an extensive team, front to back, and having a mix of youth and experience is important. The younger generation brings new blood, enthusiasm and passion and bond well with customers of all ages. It’s good to see so many youngsters coming to work as part of our kitchen brigade, because they realise that time is very important to go back to the

roots and learn the basics. “Good service is also theatre. The front of house must know how to speak and explain the food to diners. Everyone has to pull together and work as a team.”

While the kitchen brigade and staff have to perform, he also believes that a fine dining restaurant’s customer also have a role to play.

“I would just ask that the customer knows what to expect. They need to understand things in order to be able to appreciate it. If you have no knowledge of what a good dish is, and good service, why bother? I think that’s why people eat fast food today and it’s a shame. Like many things in life, you need to do things gradually and learn that experience counts. You need to be experienced as a customer too.”



Chantel Dartnall has become renowned, not only in South Africa but in culinary circles around the world, for her innovative and meticulous approach to modern fine dining. She is the award-winning patron chef at Restaurant Mosaic, located in The Orient Boutique Hotel in the Francolin Conservation Area, Elandsfontein, Crocodile River Valley, Gauteng.