

World of Wine

WINE CONSULTANT **ROBERT GIORGIONE** GIVES HIS LIVER A REST BY HEADING TO L'ATELIER DES CHEFS FOR A COOKING LESSON

Atelier is a wonderful word. More accurately, atelier is a wonderful French word. It sounds sexy and conjures up all kinds of rustic delights, but when translated into English it simply means a workshop. When you look at it that way, it tends to lose a little bit of its Gallic frisson. Workshops inspire visions of men working tirelessly on their lathes or banging away on hunks of metal. In English, we do not think of workshops as having a culinary sense. It sounds far too clunky and straight-forward. Better to use the French word – it's just so much more glamorous.

In fact, professional kitchens really are like workshops. They are places where the application of skilled labour results in the creation of goods that can be sold and enjoyed.

At L'Atelier des Chefs, you pick up a real feeling of the artisan. Based on a French concept, it all started back in 2004 in Paris, where the original cookery school was established. Over the years, it has grown into a very successful brand and business. Currently, there are more than a dozen L'Atelier des Chef cookery schools in France, where it has developed very well, yet still retains its original ethos of back to basics cooking, keeping it simple and achievable. The company offers a variety of cookery courses and its experienced professional chefs will help you create delicious, everyday

recipes. In addition, you can also make some purchases in the attached shops, which offer ingredients and products, all of which are integral to the concept.

The London branch of L'Atelier des Chefs was established in 2006 on Wigmore Street. When they finally made it over the Channel to London, the original team was entirely French. The only person who has remained from that group is Andre Dupin, the head chef, who is responsible for all the menus.

In essence, this is a place where people can come to engage, create, discover and learn. Managing director Tom McNeile tells me: "In the early days, it was quite hard to translate this concept, which was very successful in its own French homeland, yet make it easy for English people to understand." Like a successful restaurateur, he has a keen eye for the business and certainly knows what his target market wants. Over the years, especially in the food and wine sectors, many brands have built up, but have then completely destroyed themselves by forgetting their original ethos or allowing it to become diluted. L'Atelier des Chefs ought to avoid such pitfalls – although Tom's background is quite diverse, including a stint as a currency trader in the City, he is a real foodie at heart.

The company's flagship course is the 30 minute Cook, Eat and Run.



LINKS

Robert's blog
robertgiorgione.com
twitter.com/robertgiorgione

Consultancy, advice and bespoke tastings
robert@robertgiorgione.com

Robert's first book, *An Epicurean Odyssey – A Road Trip Around New Zealand*, is out now. Visit his website or Lulu.com

This is the very foundation of its brand – simple, speedy, accessible, but high in quality. "The formula is to keep it simple and achievable," says Tom. "Anyone who comes in and experiences our course can cook a main course meal in just half an hour and then sit down and enjoy it afterwards, all for £15. That is great value. On the next day, by email, you are then sent a link to the recipe which you have created."

The two kitchens are completely open plan and enclosed in glass, leaving nothing hidden. Tom says: "We want to inspire people to come in and learn for themselves how to cook with the guidance of our professional chefs. We want them to gain confidence in themselves, to help develop their passion and enthusiasm for cooking and go away wanting to re-create the dishes for themselves. In addition, we want to inspire confidence and a belief in the quality and the product. Everything we use has to have this transparency and openness and must not be intimidating. Here we are dealing with real people and with a genuine top quality product. It takes time to build up that trust." Moreover, he goes on, "we prefer to use fresh, everyday ingredients and seasonal produce, which is available for the consumer to purchase regularly in the supermarkets, delicatessens and local farmers' markets and they then feel confident in themselves to cook these quick, easy and nutritious meals at home."

As a lover of cooking as well as wine, I thought I would go along and try out one of the courses on offer. I started learning how to cook by watching my father and grandmother at a very young age, then worked for a while in his restaurant. Wine was purely my hobby, which later I turned into a career when I came to London over 15 years ago. Chefs still inspire me as much as winemakers. Over the years, I have developed my

confidence, knowledge and ability and I now understand something of the importance of taste. At L'Atelier des Chefs you are encouraged to taste and to discover. They do not blind you with science and bombard you with too much technical information, because that would be intimidating, yet at the same time it is very important to be realistic. For instance, not everyone shares the same ability and skill, and domestic kitchens are very different to the all-guns-blazing appliances found in a professional restaurant kitchen.

You learn about why preparation and timing are key elements to success. You learn how and why things work well together when prepared and cooked using different methods, and you learn about the effects of taste and flavour. As a sommelier, when I am tasting a wine, I am always thinking about what type of food I would match it, but to do so it is also very important for me to know how that dish is prepared.

The Cook, Eat and Run course was great fun. We sat down together after almost precisely 30 minutes and enjoyed a delicious lunch which we had made ourselves. We felt so proud. The following day, the recipe for Asian salmon with spicy noodles hit my inbox. Even if I was a complete novice, I would be encouraged to cook it for myself. The chef at L'Atelier very patiently and carefully showed us how to do things properly and taught us a few useful tips too. While we sat at the dining table and enjoyed our meal, I discussed with the others which wine would we drink with the dish. Our creative juices were now flowing and our burgeoning confidence inspired us to consider an Australian riesling from somewhere such as Clare Valley. With its vibrant, citrus-packed flavour and mouth-watering acidity it would have been the perfect match for the spicy and flavoursome Asian salmon with noodles.

