

Keen student that I am, I am first to arrive at 11 Cours Gabriel for my second cookery class with M. Clement. This time I know the drill, so even though the classroom is empty, I go and hang up my coat on the hooks provided, which are red rolling pins stuck into the wall. I check out the lunch table which is set for 6..this will be a smaller gathering - last time we were twelve. Hopefully it will also mean a slight slowing of pace on the part of M.Clement.

Two French ladies arrive and we shake hands...one has been here before, the husband of the older woman had worked across the road in his youth and used to park his car here when it was a garage and before it was turned into a state of the art kitchen.

M. Clement rushes in looking somewhat stressed and says he has just got dressed. He shakes our hands and takes our money and the last two participants arrive, a young couple. I notice them looking a little anxious as M.Clement leaps straight for the knife and the salmon which is laid out on a slab.Today's dish will be Parmentier de Saumon a l'huile de noisette.

The salmon is sliced by the expert hand of M. Clement who now gestures us towards the onion chopping boards, The young couple anxiously ask if we may wash our hands...ah oui ah oui, M, Clement has forgotten this part of the routine although he has whipped out our plastic aprons from one of his many drawers and established who has cooked what with him on previous occasions.

He may not remember my onion fiasco but I do..it is shallots this time but I am not going to get caught so I ask M.Clement what direction I need to chop in..."N'importe" he replies and so I encounter another mystery of French cooking...again we all race over to the cooker and set our onions cooking then back to peel potatoes while M.Clement is grilling the hazelnuts in the oven. I am doing well, keeping up with the pace - mind you he has stressed that this is une recette TRES simple and I do already have a salmon dish in my repertoire. Next the potatoes are mashed with forks on the boards and put back in the saucepans and then we run to grab a handful of hazelnuts. These are crushed under the bottom of another saucepan in one swift movement by M.Clement, mine seem to require repeated battering attempts and still perhaps are not quite comme il faut..

And he is back over at the cooker, the saucepan with the potatoes on one ring warming with a dash of huile de noisette, the ladle reaching for some white wine which has been simmering and then some chicken stock and all this to be added to our onions..yet again, I appear to have the problem of the cooker ring not seeming to be heating up but this time I am on the ball and alert M.Clement immediately. He whirls a few knobs and tells me to stop lifting my saucepan up and down to see is the ring working or else my sauce will not reduce. This time I know what reduced means and watch my sauce which still does not appear to be reducing or even heating up with one eye while adding salt and pepper to the potatoes and starting to grate parmesan cheese which is put in a little circle and popped into the oven to emerge later as a sort of thin biscuit.

M.Clement appears bemused...his own sauce has reduced perfectly, however the rest of the class is lagging behind et pourtant we all put in the same ingredients. The potatoes are now being put in a small circle on our plates using a mould. The salmon is lifted off the pan and put on top. The older lady compares her sauce to mine and murmurs that only M. le Chef seems to have fully reduced his

sauce. Ca fait rien announces M.Clement as he runs to whip the Parmesan biscuits out of the oven and tosses us little sieves which we use to strain our non-reduced sauces down beside our little potato mounds. When we add our little Parmesan biscuits I feel like I am on Masterchef.

At lunch it transpires that M.Clement's brother -also a chef - has just returned from Ireland after 13 years. He worked for Patrick Guillebaud and the Merrion Hotel and then opened his own restaurant in Wexford but sadly with the recession he has had to close it. M. Clement himself had paid him a visit, hoping to play golf instead of cooking but oh la pluie..the older lady tells how she and her husband went to Ireland for a week but he would never return a cause de la pluie...we drink our coffees and shake hands and walk out into beautiful sunshine. Oh la France...