

The last time I was here in Chartres, I read an article in a local magazine about a cookery school and this time, no doubt to your surprise, I decided to track it down and maybe do one of their lunchtime courses..

So I signed on for the Cours Sur le Pouce, from 12-1. 30 which would include making the lunch and eating it. We would just make the main course; dessert wine and coffee would all be supplied by the nearby hotel Le Grand Monarque where the courses used to take place. Now they are held in a beautifully kitted out space, a converted garage which looks like a set for Masterchef.

Our chef/instructor M. Clement, signed us all in and gave us our aprons. We were maybe 10 or 11, all ages, mostly women, two men. The dish we would make was quasi de veau, gratin de champignon et emmental, risotto aux champignons sauvages..

M.Clement starts to cook up the different champignons and I am lulled into thinking he will do most of the cooking as he waxes eloquent about girolles, trompettes de mort, pieds de moutons and champignons de Paris which should all be cooked separately in different saucepans of boiling water to produce different jus de champignons. Then suddenly he is rushing us all over to another table where onions and big knives are laid out and he quickly chops up an onion and tells us to do the same. I think I am doing great but oh no quelle horreur I have chopped it the wrong way....a little thrown by this I head back over to the main station where M, Clement has poured oil into saucepans and we all choose our pieces of veau.

We fry these up - somehow the heat under my saucepan isn't as high as the others, so I am still desperately trying to get it to brown while they are all back over at the onion table collecting same for the gratin. And now running behind the fast-talking, fast-stirring M.Clement, I make the mistake of throwing in all my onions into the pan, when in fact half are meant to be kept for later. We add the quickly chopped mushrooms, cream and emmental and then M. Clement spots that I now have far too many (badly chopped) onions in the mix. Oh la la, he tells me to just put half the mix on even though this means losing champignon flavour. It also means that when we start on the risotto, I have to use these browned onions which means that while the rest of the class are stirring beautiful creamy mixes I have something which looks definitely caramelised...

But not to worry - the pace is picking up even more and we are adding in bouillon and ladlefuls of porto and mascarpone and more jus de champignon and again I have missed a few critical moments and the French women who of course have not missed a beat are saying sympathetically to me que c'est comme ca qu'on apprend etc. etc.

In short I did not distinguish myself, however you can't have that much oil, butter, cream, white wine, porto, mascarpone etc in a recipe and it not taste good in the end even if it is the wrong colour...

So we all sat up at the table and M.Clement poured the wine and served the coffee and smiled graciously at the end when I thanked him and said I would return another day. For pictures, check out [www, 11coursgabriel.com](http://www.11coursgabriel.com).

Et bon appetit!

xSJ