

HENRI BROSI, THE DORCHESTER

From Hong Kong to London: Two Great Chefs

by Giles Fallowfield

Buying fresh local ingredients is important for most top chefs practicing haute cuisine wherever they are located, but when it comes to sourcing certain luxury products they look to France to find the quality their customers' demand. Giles Fallowfield talks to two top chefs **Henry Brosi** and **Uwe Opocensky** running the kitchens at leading luxury hotels in London and Hong Kong as they prepare a series of lunches to match the Krug family of Champagnes.



Scallops Pic by Henri Brosi

Henry Brosi, The Dorchester Hotel, London

Henry Brosi, who oversees the six kitchens at the Dorchester Hotel, is one of London's longest established and most-respected chefs. He has worked at the Dorchester for 15 years, the last ten as he puts it "at the helm", as executive chef looking after a team of over 100 chefs who service the Grill, the Promenade, the Dorchester bar, banqueting kitchens, room service, and the new Spatisserie at the Dorchester Spa. He also creates bespoke menus for guests in the Krug Room, London's original 'chef's table' which first opened in the 1940s.

Brosi also works together with the team that runs the Alain Ducasse two-star Michelin restaurant in the Dorchester. "This is run as a 50/50 partnership," says Brosi, "but we pay the staff, we paid for the interior design and equipping the kitchen. It's an added benefit to the hotel but it has to work as a business and make money."

While Brosi sees the approach taken to food generally at the Dorchester as "quintessentially British" and he has built up a network of local suppliers, he nevertheless looks to France for certain luxury ingredients impossible to source, or hard to find at the right quality level in Britain. Ingredients like foie gras, which he buys from leading producers based in

both Périgord and Strasbourg in Alsace. Milk-fed lamb from the Pyrénées, when he can't source enough of the quality he wants in Wales and oysters from France's major production region on the Charente delta just south of La Rochelle. Plus some seasonal products like white asparagus from Alsace, black Périgord truffles, Charentais melons – "the king of melons from Gascony" -- and fraises des bois (wild strawberries) which he buys from a producer in the South of France near Nice. Some purchasing is done in conjunction with Ducasse who has other links with the Dorchester group of hotels, including a two-star Michelin restaurant at the Plaza Athénée in Paris, and because of his reputation, plus the many restaurants he's involved in, considerable purchasing power. "Sourcing certain luxury ingredients it makes sense to use the Ducasse name, we are all pulling in the same direction and have to operate collectively," says Brosi. Poultry, including Bresse chicken and the best foie gras for a la carte dining, come from Jean-Claude Huguénin who is based in Strasbourg but also has a stall at Rungis market in Paris where they do business. "It makes sense to buy such luxury ingredients centrally through Ducasse rather than go through a middleman when the foie gras would be £50 a kilo more," says Brosi.

"Of course we are dealing with 'luxury' dining at all levels at the Dorchester," says Brosi, "from individuals eating in the Krug Room to banqueting where 400 people may be paying £120-£150 a head. For banqueting we don't use the most expensive foie gras but instead we buy a special flash frozen product that is made by Rougié [one of the largest French producers founded in 1875 and based in the medieval town of Sarlat in Périgord]." It comes prepared, de-veined then it's heat sliced and flash frozen into 50g portions immediately after prep stage and can be cooked from frozen straight to the pan giving very little reduction. "It's a fantastic product for banqueting," says

Brosi, "it holds its shape, doesn't lose the fat and can be used thawed or straight from frozen."

He also uses a foie gras terrine made by Georges Bruck in Strasbourg and like the Rougié he buys this through London Fine Foods one of his three or four key suppliers. While he doesn't use the most expensive oil for cooking, for salads and dressing he sources a fine Provençal oil -- La Vallée des Baux extra virgin -- which comes from the Moulin Cornille Olive cooperative.

Uwe Opocensky, Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong

Logistics – he isn't just a hop across the Channel – make the purchasing of such a broad spectrum of French sourced luxury ingredients more problematic for Uwe Opocensky, executive chef of the Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong who oversees all the ten restaurants and bars there. But like Brosi, Opocensky also benefits from a symbiotic (mutually beneficial) relationship with a top French chef in the shape of Pierre Gagnaire who takes day-to-day responsibility for running the one-Michelin-starred 'Pierre' within the Mandarin Hotel. Though he brings in some products like Charolais beef and organic vegetables from Gascogne through a handling agent in Hong Kong not via Gagnaire's culinary empire and contacts.



Uwe Opocensky

The Dorchester Hotel
The French products and the suppliers

Poultry including Bresse chicken and fresh foie gras:
Jean-Claude Huguénin
Tel: +33 (0)1 56 70 60 60

Flash frozen pre-sliced duck foie gras:
Rougié
Tel: +33 (0)5 53 08 12 18
www.foie-gras-rougie.com

Duck foie gras terrine
Georges Bruck
Tel: +33 (0)3 88 32 62 62
www.bruck-foiegras.com

La Vallée des Baux Olive extra virgin olive oil
Moulin Cornille
Tel: +33 (0)4 90 54 32 37
www.moulin-cornille.com

The three imported by London Fine Foods Group
Tel: +44 (0)8456 439 121
www.efoodies.co.uk

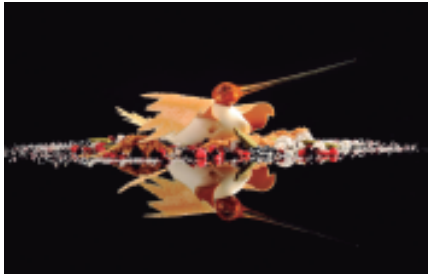
Périgord black truffles
Jerome and Natalie Galis
Tel: +33 (0)4 90 29 76 63

Echiré Butter
Tel: +33 (0)5 49 25 70 01
www.echire.com
Imported by Foodspeed
Tel: +44 (0)20 8848 8006
www.foodspeed.co.uk



Henry Brosi

Bird by Uwe Opocensky



Furthermore as Opocensky points out: "We get air freight deliveries from Europe twice a week so we can bring in literally anything. But it is very hard to get unique products from a small artisan producer because of the logistic problems and it's difficult to build a relationship with your supplier at such a distance. But on certain products you can't compromise. Like Henry at the Dorchester I am working at the very top end of the luxury hotel market and our customers demand the best and they are happy to pay the price whether it be for truffles, foie gras, lobster, Bresse pigeon or Eclairé butter." Perhaps because his food is less obviously classical and to a great extent he is catering for an Asian audience with different tastes, this is less of an issue than it might be. Opocensky describes his cuisine as 'progressive gastronomy'. He's friendly with Heston Blumenthal -- he'd been along to see Blumenthal at the Fat Duck with Brosi and Tim Raue from the Krug Room in Berlin (the third chef involved in the Krug lunches) the day before we met -- and he sees the six months he spent training and learning more about molecular gastronomy with Ferran Adrià at El Bulli in Spain as particularly important.



Restaurant Pierre in the Mandarin Oriental Hotel

The Krug Room lunches: Hong Kong, Berlin and London October 2009

Matching food and Champagne throughout a 'gastronomic' meal is always a challenge, and having sat through many attempts over the past two decades that haven't entirely worked, I usually find myself dreaming of a glass of red wine around the time the meat course arrives. Pink Champagne with a pudding, though widely favoured by the Champenois, is another combination that only works if the chef really understands the challenge. I was pleased to hear this is view with which Olivier Krug entirely concurs. "I like to see Krug rosé served earlier in the meal with salmon, lobster of something like volaille." He had to concede however that the delicate, creamy and not too sweet strawberry soufflé (with basil and black pepper coulis) that Henri Brosi matched with Krug rosé was an entirely successful marriage.

Bringing three top international chefs together (Tim Raue from the Krug Room in Berlin as well as Brosi and Opocensky) and asking them each to produce a course to go with four different cuvées of Krug Champagne, sixteen different dishes in all, was always going to be an interesting experience for the diners. There certainly were high points and less successful matches, but because Krug is really more wine than Champagne -- think in terms of fine white Burgundy with bubbles -- the whole concept had far more chance of success than usual. Krug Grande Cuvée, Krug Vintage 1998, Clos du Mesnil 1998 and Krug Rosé, the wines involved, lend themselves to this sort of exercise.

Added to which the three chefs in question are confirmed Krugophiles, they run the 'Krug Rooms' respectively



Krug Room in the Dorchester



Krug Room in the Mandarin Oriental Hotel

located in the Dorchester Hotel in London, the Mandarin Oriental in Hong Kong and located within the Adlon Complex in Berlin, matching food and Krug is part of their job description. As Henry Brosi of The Dorchester says: "The challenge was to come up with three unique and diverse dishes for each cuvée working with the complex flavour profile of the different Champagnes. With the Clos du Mesnil, an extremely elegant and pure Blanc de Blancs style, I have tried to mirror the underlying minerality with the use of foie gras and sea urchin, while complementing the sweet scallops and pungent truffles with this cuvée's pure Chardonnay character."

The highlights of the meal included Brosi's braised turbot, bone marrow, and lobster lasagne, lemon balm nage and Opocensky's Seaside: French line-caught sea-bass, sand and shell' that were both served with the relatively young but already richly expressive Krug Vintage 1998. Brosi matched the creamy texture and richness of the turbot against this also picking up on the citrus note with the lemon balm. Opocensky's dish, which he says took him more than eight months to develop, was a clever, witty assembly very much on the lines of his childhood memories theme and one of the highlights of the whole meal. He constructed a seaside landscape on a plate complete with light and dark coloured edible sand, shiny pebbles (made from brown lentils) shells and succulent fish.

More challenging flavours with more than a sprinkling of French luxury ingredients were matched against Krug Clos du Mesnil 1998 for an encore. Brosi employed diver-caught scallops with a truffle risotto, foie gras with a strong pungent note of sea urchin, while Opocensky matched it against the more meaty texture and flavour of Bresse Pigeon, a challenge the wine easily rose to.

He's not without past classical influences however having worked his way up to gain the head chef position with Anton Mosimann in London before becoming executive chef at Toast, while he also worked a stage with Alain Ducasse in Paris in 1998. Since joining the Mandarin Oriental Hong Kong in June 2007 Opocensky has quickly achieved critical acclaim and been recognized as one of the leading chefs in the city. Opocensky takes what he calls a more whimsical, fun approach to food -- compared to Brosi's more classic style. He delights in the unexpected and his food is more about visual impact and playing with different textures on the plate. He likes food to evoke childhood memories, but to achieve this working in Asia he says he has to use the ingredients that are familiar to the Asian palate, spices, exotic fruits ingredients like coconut milk, not weird new things outside their experience.

One thing that he has found different working in Asia is that there is not the same skill levels among kitchen staff that you easily find in Europe so it's safer to use sous vide as it enables you to maintain control of quality standards. He uses it for pretty well everything -- meat, fish and vegetables -- because it simply cuts out mistakes and leaves him free to concentrate on what's on the plate, textures and he visual impact.

The Dorchester
Park Lane, Mayfair
London W1K 1QA
Great Britain
Tel: +44 20 7629 8888
www.thedorchester.com

Mandarin Oriental
No.5 Connaught Road
Central
Hong Kong, China
Tel: 0852-25220111
www.mandarinoriental.com

Mandarin Oriental The French products and the suppliers

**Bresse chicken and pigeon
Au Chapon Bressan**
Tel: +33 (0)4 74 25 43 54
www.chaponbressan.fr

**French butter
Le Beurre Bordier**
Tel: +33 (0)2 99 04 11 11
www.lebeurrebordier.com

**Foie gras
Rougé**
Tel: +33 (0)5 53 08 12 18
www.foie-gras-rougie.com

**Périgord black truffles
Pebeyre**
Tel: +33 (0)5 65 22 24 80
www.pebeyre.fr

**Charolais beef
Denaux**
Tel: +33 (0)3 86 97 28 00

**Fresh fish
Armara**
Tel: +33 (0)1 41 80 88 88
www.armara.fr

**Oysters
Les Parcs St Kerber**
Tel: +33 (0)2 99 89 65 29
www.saintkerber.com

Les Parcs de l'Impératrice
Tel: +33 (0)6 50 74 51 51
www.parcdelimperatrice.fr

**French cheese
Ceneri**
Tel: +33 (0)4 93 43 07 70
www.ceneri.fr