

ESSENTIEL

PRESS RELEASE



" We have to get back to basics.

Start all over again.

Begin with real and original tastes.

*Allow them to fully express
their vibrancy and subtlety.*

*Give technique back its real role,
its single purpose –
revealing the flavours of nature.*

*This is the simple,
honest belief that I have been working
so hard to promote since I started as a chef
and now I want
to bring this quintessence
to the Plaza Athénée. "*

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Ducasse'.

ESSENTIAL TASTE

This is a radical approach. It takes courage to dare a pure cuisine which turns simple into good. Like an architect that turns his back on flamboyance to achieve perfect harmony through pure lines. In this instance, the food has acquired greater purity (one product, one garnish), allowing it to breathe and release its full flavour.

Going back to basics means producing real taste, without any superfluous ingredients. Langoustine Tartare, prepared in an instant, is merely seasoned with lime juice, salt and pepper so that suddenly you have all the flavours of the ocean in your plate. It is the quintessential, absolute, sublime taste of the langoustine that expresses itself.

Going back to basics means refusing to demonstrate virtuosity for virtuosity's sake. Cooking does not mean displaying one's technique but paying homage to the flavour of the product. A fillet of beef, for example, is tied. Slivers of bacon and truffle are inserted into it then it is seared to concentrate its jus and roasted.

Going back to basics means turning one's back on restrictive conventions. Comparing and contrasting the so-called "noble" and "common" products is quite wrong; the only categories of food are the exceptional and the rest. Lobster is a prestigious dish but it can very well be served with potatoes on condition, of course, that they are the subtly-flavoured Noirmoutier potatoes seasoned with a jus from the shellfish.

Essential taste means respecting the seasons and selecting a product only when it is at its best and can be harvested without compromising endangered species. In late summer, bass is replaced by turbot which will remain on the menu until the depths of winter. In autumn, game birds will appear on the menu before venison or wild boar. And, in each season, there will be three dishes based on the truly great French cuisine such as Picardy Hare roasted, a la royale or jugged, poultry from Bresse with Albufera Sauce, early vegetables supplied by **Didier Pil**, and tartufi di Alba. How better to pay homage to French culinary tradition.



HEAD CHEF CHRISTOPHE SAINTAGNE

Born in Normandy, he spent his early career at the Auberge du Vieux Logis in Conteville, with Guillaume Louet. He then joined Philippe Groult at the Amphyclés restaurant in Paris, in 1998. He did his national service at the Elysée Palace in 1999 before entering Alain Ducasse' kitchens, first at 59 Poincaré then at the Plaza Athénée. In 2002, he became Head Chef at the Parisian restaurant, "Aux Lyonnais". Between 2005 and 2008, he assisted Jean-François Piège at the Hôtel de Crillon as Sous-Chef before returning to Alain Ducasse in 2009 as Executive Chef and contributing to the book entitled, "Nature, simple, healthy and good" published in October 2009. He took over from Christophe Moret as Alain Ducasse' Executive Chef at the Plaza Athénée on 6th September 2010.

HEAD PASTRY CHEF NICOLAS BERGER

In 1989, Nicolas won the title "Best Apprentice in France" while still training with his father, Paul Berger. He then worked with a number of prestigious names such as Le Nelson in Saint-Étienne, or Hévin, Peltier et Ladurée in Paris. Drawn to the idea of international experience, he honed his skills at the Tagliafico Pasticceria in Genoa then in New York, in particular at Payard. This is where he met Alain Ducasse, a meeting that was life-changing since he then became Alain Ducasse' Head Pastry Chef at Essex House in New York, in 2000. In 2003, he became Head Pastry Chef at the Plaza Athénée and, a short time later, Executive Head Pastry Chef to Alain Ducasse.

A FEW DISHES

Steamed langoustines served cold, caviar

Cock pie, Madeira reduction

Vegetables and fruits

Lobster, sea potatoes

Duckling, turnips

Strawberries, cream, meringue

Hazelnut

A TASTE OF THE ESSENTIAL

Before cuisine, there is nature. Without farmers who care passionately about the flavour of their products, a chef is powerless. If the Farm Rabbit with Mustard is so tasty, it is first and foremost because it comes from one of the best rabbit farms in France. If the Strawberries and Cream are sheer delight, it is first and foremost because the strawberries go straight from field to plate without spending time in a refrigerator and because the luscious cream from **Maison Borniambuc** in the heart of the Norman bocage has had time to reach perfect maturity.

Farmers, vegetable growers and fishmongers who love taste are a chef's best connections; they will supply products that are not always easy to source. For the dessert called "Citrus Lovers'Delight", fruit farmers **Bénédicte and Michel Bachès** grow many different types of citrus in their orchards at the foot of Mont Canigou in the Pyrenees (bergamot, kumquat, limequat, citron) including varieties such as Tangor Murcott tangerines or sweet Pursha lemons.

Maintaining the taste of food is a battle for the entire planet and it is being waged by farmers and chefs.

The scallops supplied by **Alain Rigault** in Grandcamp-Maisy come from Normandy. They are caught in a good area for scallops because the water is shallow and plankton is therefore plentiful. Of course, the stocks have to be responsibly managed. The fishermen fully understand this and they are careful to comply with quotas, sizes and the tide tables. Brought ashore in the morning, the shellfish are on the plates by evening. Sustainable fisheries and short travel times equal maximum flavour.

Cuisine that places the product first is good for the planet, good for health and so good for taste!

WINE AND WOMEN

Is there a feminine approach to wine? Over the past few years, women vineyard owners, winegrowers and vinification managers have carved out a significant place for themselves in this sector. **Gérard Margeon**, Executive Head Sommelier with Alain Ducasse, has decided to showcase their wines, many of them rich and all of them perfectly balanced. Produced with great precision and immense passion, they provide particularly interesting possibilities when it comes to balancing wines and food, as if there was some secret connivance between them and produce-centred cuisine. **Laurent Roucayrol**, the restaurant's Head Sommelier, will introduce guests to these superb wines and many more besides.



UNIQUE TABLE CREATIONS

If you see a meal as a story or a stage set, the tableware becomes part of the play, emphasising what is said and giving it a certain rhythm. When guests sit down, they see "Volute" plates in front of them, on an ivory tablecloth. This has taken more than a year to design. It is a technical feat, inspired by the Baroque swirls that decorate the capitals in the restaurant. This, then, is the beginning of the story, a design full of tension and harmony. The story ends with a sumptuous fireworks display when dessert is served, with silver-gilt cutlery and delicate celadon green plates that return to the swirl theme. The dessert service and "Volute" plates are original designs by **Pierre Tachon** made by porcelain manufacturer **JL Coquet**.

Between the two, there is a succession of visual surprises created by the carefully orchestrated combination of objects from very different sources. The contrast begins with the amuse-bouche – prawns quickly sautéed in salted butter (a simple, obvious method of preparation) but eaten with titanium chopsticks by the Portuguese designer **Paolo Vale**, or wafer-thin slices of streaky bacon and meagre, each placed on a thin slice of bread. As a starter, it's daringly rustic, laid out on modest butcher paper, but presented on a delicate Japanese plate. Of course, it is also a French play on words since "maigre" can be the opposite of "gras" (thin/fatty) as well as a type of fish.

Glasses from **MD Crystal**, 19th-century "Monthélie" cutlery by **Puiforcat**, plates by **Bernardaud** and crystal sundae dishes by **Saint-Louis** used to serve superb low-sugar desserts illustrate the perfection of traditional French expertise.

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PIERRE TACHON / SOINS GRAPHIQUES

He is responsible for the visual identity of Alain Ducasse restaurants such as "Le Jules Verne" or "Alain Ducasse at the Dorchester". His agency, "**Soins graphiques**", has also designed the "Structure" plate for the chef, inspired by the structure of the Eiffel Tower, and the "Cookpot", a timeless piece of cooking equipment. He is amongst other things, artistic director for Editions Alain Ducasse for which he edited the books "Champagne", "Nature" et soon to be released "J'aime Paris". For "Alain Ducasse at the Plaza Athénée", he has not only designed the tableware but also the graphics of the menus printed on delicate Japanese paper. The paper is handmade and uses only natural, almost rustic, colours on which the menu is hot-printed in very precious silver. All of these items perfectly embody the spirit of the restaurant where contemporary design blends with traditional craftsmanship.

"In a few words, I would define my style of cuisine as a sum of what I like, of what I know and of what I have."

Alain Ducasse

••• Yet in another unexpected twist, these items stand next to contemporary designs such as the marble butter dish designed by **Pierre Tachon**, ("A discreet cloud whose unique design arouses one's curiosity and makes one want to lift the lid", he said). It is handmade by **Mustapha Messaoudi**, a stonecutter with the French Historic Monuments department. The liberty taken light-heartedly with conventional precepts knows no boundaries. Japanese crafts also add a graphic touch in the form, for example, of a delightful wide-mouthed vase in shades of chestnut and grey, created by a designer from Tokyo, **Shinichiro Ogata**.

All this takes guests on a doubly surprising journey – the tableware has a stylistic freedom that enhances the amazement created by the novel gastronomic experience. Just as the intransigent search for real taste provides the basis for the cuisine, so the meticulous search for harmony provides consistency and coherence between all the objects in the restaurant.

Yet all these items are filled with sensuality. The impeccably smooth, heavy marble of the butter dish delights the eye before amusing the hand. The lacquered bowl is as warm as an old friend. The crystal sings the beautiful arias of moments of happiness.

The tableware is resolutely eclectic but always very elegant. The intrinsic beauty of each item, their often unique character and, more importantly, the overall minimalism underlines the fact that these objects are rare in the sense of their uniqueness and in their sparsity.

SHINICHIRO OGATA

Shinichiro Ogata is a Master of forms and shapes.

By naming his design company "Simplicity", **Shinichiro Ogata** sets the bar high. Since 1998, each everyday object designed by this Japanese designer has contributed to the creation of a "modern Japanese culture". With extreme refinement, Ogata builds bridges between the past and present. Materials and techniques echo traditional methods – wood, gold and silver leaf and of course "Washi" paper and "Urushi" lacquer, all true icons of the Japanese craft industry. It's exactly these venerable materials, requiring the use of ancestral know-how and talent, that are used to create the unique pieces of tableware, such as the traditional Nichi-Getso Wan bowl, (the sun and moon bowl) especially designed by **Shinichiro Ogata** for the Alain Ducasse au Plaza Athénée restaurant. Ogata and Ducasse's first encounter goes back many years. Their mutual appreciation of raw materials and love of products, their mastery of proven techniques to create the unknown; and their visionary talent was so similar that joint projects quickly multiplied, installing a fruitful dialogue between Japanese and French culture. The two designers, for example worked together in 2007 on "Le Comptoir de Benoit", Alain Ducasse's bistro in Osaka.

Today, **Shinichiro Ogata** appears in the Plaza Athénée's restaurant bringing much more than just a touch of exotic, but a philosophy, for a serene and refined life, and to sum up: universal.



METICULOUS SERVICE FOR A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

Under the watchful eye of **Denis Courtiade**, Restaurant Manager and a close collaborator of Alain Ducasse since 1991, the team displays such fluidity in its service that it seems innate. Paying attention to each guest, adapting service to the speed of each table and being present without becoming oppressive, such is the mark of great expertise.

The ballet of the waiters is an extension of the movements of the chefs. As soon as the plates are put down, the jus are carefully poured over the food. The huge loaves of bread made with smoked flour are sliced in the restaurant, creating a nostalgia awakened by a sound set deep in memories of childhood. A trolley moves from table to table, recreating the great tradition of French-style service. The string around a bass steak roasted in salted butter is whipped off, taking the skin of the fish with it, as if by magic. The maître d' then pricks the bone to show the guest that the fish has been perfectly cooked.



INTERLUDES ? SHH ! IT'S A SURPRISE.

Here's a secret for you to keep: at selected moments during the meal, mini-dishes will arrive on the table, served in the delicate Japanese dishes designed by **Shinichiro Ogata**. A few deliciously flavoured prawns, a melting mouthful of steamed cereal or a spoonful of a delicious clear soup. This is a subtle interlude in a meal, and a means of surprising the tastebuds. It shows a meticulous attention to detail reflecting supreme expertise in the art of entertaining guests.

UNIFORMS : PARISIAN CHIC

The hostesses are dressed by designer **Maud Lesur** in straight ivory skirts and black blouses with three-quarter sleeves made of fabrics used by haute couture houses. The clothes are beautifully cut and well-fitted, elegantly emphasising their wearer's femininity. The waiters and waitresses are dressed by **Gérard Meyer** for **416 Saint Honoré**. The beautiful fabrics are highlighted with a narrow stripe and the style of the suits is resolutely modern. The very narrow ties are patterned; the pocket handkerchiefs large. The sommeliers have replaced their jackets with structured, long-sleeved waistcoats. The commis wear long aprons.

HAUTE COUTURE DÉCOR

As the creator of the Plaza Athénée's restaurant since Alain Ducasse took it over, **Patrick Jouin** is now adding a few touches that further emphasise its spirit.

The most spectacular addition is the covering of the four large screens in unique pieces of embroidery. Garlic, mushroom, artichoke, lettuce – the graphic designs created by **Patrick Jouin** pay homage to the cuisine here, and therefore to the produce. It took a whole team more than one year to make them. **Stefan Glass** provided the age-old expertise of the Müller workshop near Nuremberg, cutting the pieces of satin and leather with very high precision machinery. Then **Sébastien Barilleau** from the **Cécile Henri** workshop in Paris, added the beads, sequins, tubes rock pearls using the traditional "Lunéville" technique (the embroideresses work on the back of the piece, positioning the haberdashery by touch on the front and stitching them in place with chain stitch). Then back to Germany for the meticulous assembly of the various sections and again back to Paris for finishing, to ensure absolute perfection. The upholsterer **Stéphane Corler** took over at that point, positioning the panels on the screens. The result is breathtaking. The silvery, golden and bronze colours of the satins and leathers emphasise the metallic blue-tinged gleam of the stone and crystal embroidery. A technique used in haute couture for an exclusive, sophisticated atmosphere.

Patrick Jouin also designed a very unusual piece for the fireplace at the back of the restaurant. Three sculptural delftware logs, created by **Jean-Philippe Hazard**, a Parisian specialised in model building, are lit by various coloured lights diffused by a projector concealed up in the flue. The reflections on the logs are a subtle suggestion of the idea of fire. This concept has been created by **Enzyme Design**.





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HEAD PASTRY CHEF Nicolas Berger

RESTAURANT MANAGER Denis Courtiade

CHEF SOMMELIER Laurent Roucayrol

OPEN Lunch, Thursdays and Fridays, 12.45 to 2.15 p.m.
Dinner, Mondays to Fridays, 7.45 to 10.15 p.m.

MENU AND A LA CARTE Menu 360 euros (excluding beverage)
Average price à la carte 220 euros (excluding beverage)

Member of Châteaux & Hôtels Collection

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Member of the Dorchester Collection

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