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ROBERT MONDAVI

- HIS WINERY CELEBRATES 50 YEARS
- HIS IMPACT ON AMERICAN WINE

**JEAN-GEORGES
VONGERICHEN:
MENU WITH
MATCHING WINES**

**BOUNTY FROM
AUSTRALIA:
DIVERSITY
AND VALUE**

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THE *quiet* EMPEROR

Jean-Georges Vongerichten presents a menu of modern classics

BY OWEN DUGAN | PHOTOGRAPHS BY EVAN SUNG





Celebrated chef
Jean-Georges
Vongerichten brings a
peripatetic past and a
light touch to his iconic
international cuisine.

“It’s a very simple business,” says Jean-Georges Vongerichten during the tail end of lunch service at his namesake flagship on Manhattan’s Columbus Circle. Waiters glide by silently as deals are made on a handshake, and ladies who lunch gossip near tourists and office workers. Chefs in the open kitchen quietly finish complex platings. He counts off on his fingers: “Good food; good service; low overhead.”

That’s either the overstatement of this young century or one of those disarmingly straightforward business models—like “buy low, sell high”—that could explain Vongerichten and partner Phil Suarez’s resounding success in this challenging line of work. At last count, they oversee some 3,000 employees here and abroad at more than 30 restaurants and counting, the majority of which are licensed or managed properties.

Vongerichten’s family had other plans. As the oldest male child, Jean-Georges was expected to take over the family coal business in Alsace. But in 1973, at age 16, he was expelled from the technical school where he was supposed to learn the trade. He’d always been more interested in the cooking his mother did for the company’s employees. When he heard about an apprenticeship at Alsace’s L’Auberge de l’Ill, Vongerichten went for it. Under chef Paul Haerberlin, he learned classical technique and the workings of the French kitchen system.

Next he went to work for chef Louis Outhier, progenitor of nouvelle cuisine at L’Oasis, near Cannes, where he got a window on the south. Then he went to Paul Bocuse’s flagship, L’Auberge du Pont de Collonges. There he learned rigorous standards for ingredients.

In 1980, Outhier made him a staggering offer: “He invited me to open a restaurant for him in Bangkok. I was 23 years old. I was too young. I had been *chef de partie*, not even sous chef. But then I thought, ‘If I fail in Thailand, nobody’s going to know about it.’”

The entire team from L’Oasis went to Thailand for 10 days for the opening. “After that I was by myself.” A new phase of his education began. He took English lessons with the 18 Thai cooks in the kitchen. And while the restaurant was strictly French, Vongerichten’s appetite was not: “I was eating Thai food breakfast, lunch and dinner every day. I wanted to know everything about it.”



Philippe Vongerichten, director of operations at Jean-Georges

An exchange began. French ingredients like foie gras and truffles arrived often via airmail. “I would send back ginger, lemongrass, curry paste,” he says. Outhier is widely credited with introducing Asian flavors into nouvelle cuisine, and Vongerichten was a major link, as was the arrival of Japanese chefs apprenticing in France in the 1970s.

Vongerichten began an itinerant period during which he opened restaurants for Outhier in Singapore, Hong Kong, Osaka, Geneva, Lisbon and London, receiving his first Michelin star at the latter, at 90 Park Lane. In 1985, he arrived in Boston, where he received top ratings at the Lafayette Hotel’s Le Marquis de Lafayette, and he repeated that success at the Lafayette at the Drake in New York in 1986. He says now, “I’d made a name for myself.”

The audience in New York was different: “New Yorkers eat out every day. They talk fast and eat fast. That changed my cooking. And they ate Chinese every Sunday night, so there was no resistance to Asian ingredients.”

WINE SPECTATOR MENU

Ribbons of Tuna, Avocado, Spicy Radish & Ginger Marinade

Rainer Wess Grüner Veltliner
Qualitätswein Trocken Wachau Süssenberg
2011

Slow-Cooked Black Sea Bass With Charred Poblano & Coconut Broth

Leeuwin Chardonnay Margaret River
Art Series 2012

Roast Squab With Za’atar Spice, Nasturtium Vinaigrette & Smashed Peas

Raymond Usseglio & Fils
Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2011

Red Berry Pavlovas With Ginger Granité & Fromage Blanc

Braida di Giacomo Bologna
Brachetto d’Acqui 2014

Ribbons of Tuna, Avocado, Spicy Radish & Ginger Marinade

"I started making tuna tartare in New York City. This shows 25 years of evolution of tuna tartare for me. Now we are using sustainable yellowtail from Hawaii instead of bluefin. It has less fat and milder flavor, so I replace the flavor with this texture through the cut of noodles and with avocado. We tried dice, but it's hard to eat dice with chopsticks." —JEAN-GEORGES VONGERICHTEN

1/4 cup lime juice
1/4 cup sugar
6 makrut lime leaves, rough chopped
1/2 cup ginger, peeled and roughly chopped
10 tablespoons olive oil, divided
1/2 cup Champagne vinegar
1/2 cup soy sauce
12 ounces tuna
Salt to taste
1 shallot, minced
1 Thai chile, minced
2 ripe avocados, small-diced and lightly mashed
6 red radishes
Chile oil, preferably Dynasty or Lee Kum Kee brand

Make makrut syrup: Combine lime juice, sugar and lime leaves in a pot. Bring to a boil. Remove from heat and cool to room temperature. Strain.

Make ginger marinade: Puree ginger in a blender with up to 2 tablespoons olive oil, adding a little at a time until totally smooth. Stir in vinegar, makrut syrup and soy sauce.

Cut the tuna into spaghetti-like strands. Gently season with salt, shallot, chile and 4 tablespoons olive oil, or to taste.

Mix avocado with 4 tablespoons olive oil and salt to taste. Slice the radishes 1/8-inch thick and place in cold water. Drain well, season with salt and toss with chile oil. Spoon a generous amount of the avocado mixture into 4 small bowls. Top with about 6 slices of radish, and arrange a quarter of the tuna in a bundle on top. Top with more radish. Spoon the marinade around the avocado, and drizzle with chile oil. *Serves 4.*



Tuna sliced into ribbons

WINE MATCH

Rainer Wess Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Wachau Sussenberg 2011

"I'm a huge fan of Rainer Wess. He's an amazing person, and I've visited the winery. This wine is a classic example of the Wachau. It has only healthy grapes—no botrytized—so it has a savory character that is great with the ginger, soy and radish. It just enhances the dish." —ERIC HASTINGS

WINE SPECTATOR ALTERNATES: Prager Grüner Veltliner Smaragd Trocken Wachau Wachstum Bodenstein 2014 (91, \$85); Buchegger Grüner Veltliner Qualitätswein Trocken Kremstal Pfarrweingarten Reserve 2014 (91, \$25)

Slow-Cooked Black Sea Bass With Charred Poblano & Coconut Broth

“Black sea bass is still one of the best fish in the Northeast. It has pure white flesh. The flavors are Southern Hemisphere. If you think about it, South America and Southeast Asia have a lot of the same flavors: coconut, chiles and so on, and use sweet, sour, spicy. This is a contrast to the tuna; it’s delicate and has this great fragrance. It makes you travel in your brain.”

—JEAN-GEORGES VONGERICHEN



TO MAKE THE COCONUT BROTH

1 cup plus 2 tablespoons coconut juice
3 tablespoons coconut milk
3 teaspoons lime juice
1 small jalapeño, destemmed
1 lemongrass stalk, smashed and chopped
One 5-inch piece cassia, in small pieces
One 2-inch piece fresh, young ginger, peeled and thinly sliced
2 tablespoons sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
12 makrut lime leaves, finely chopped

Combine all ingredients but the lime leaves in a medium saucepan and bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Remove from heat

and stir in the leaves. Cool to room temperature, then strain.

TO CHAR THE POBLANOS

2 fresh poblano peppers
1 tablespoon olive oil



Charring poblano peppers



Coconut broth

WINE MATCH

Leeuwin Chardonnay Margaret River Art Series 2012

“Here you need to look for a wine with texture and weight to work with the coconut, and also acidity to work with the slight oiliness in the fish. A little barrel maturation helps with the coconut too. It’s fun to introduce people to wines from Margaret River. It’s very different from what people grew up on from Australia. It’s more reserved.”

—ERIC HASTINGS

WINE SPECTATOR ALTERNATES: Robert Oatley Chardonnay Margaret River Finisterre 2013 (92, \$33); Vasse Felix Chardonnay Margaret River Heytesbury 2014 (92, \$62)

WINE MATCH

Raymond Usseglio & Fils
Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2011

"There's a big spice element on the squab, so I like a wine with baking spice but also ripe fruit to balance the spice. An earthy wine here would make the spice stronger. White wine isn't a huge stretch either. Older Alsace or even Riesling, just off-dry, could be really cool." —ERIC HASTINGS

WINE SPECTATOR ALTERNATES: Clos des Papes Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2013 (94, \$125); Domaine du Pégau Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Réservee 2013 (91, \$74)

with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature for 24 hours. Pour into a chinois and let drain for exactly 30 minutes. Discard liquid and season paste with grapefruit zest.

TO MAKE THE PEAS

½ cup butter
4 cups baby sweet peas, roughly pulsed in the food processor
1 teaspoon serrano chile, chopped
Salt, to taste

Combine all ingredients with ¼ cup water in a pot over medium heat, stirring, until peas are tender.

TO COOK AND SERVE THE SQUAB

Nasturtium blossoms
Flaked sea salt, such as Jacobsen, to taste

Heat grill to high. Place squabs skin-side down and cook for 5 minutes. Turn carefully and cook 5 minutes more. Let rest 3 to 5 minutes.

Spread 2 tablespoons vinaigrette across each plate. Mound 2 ounces of peas next to the vinaigrette. Split each half breast lengthwise and lean against the peas. Sprinkle with nasturtium blossoms and sea salt. *Serves 4.*

Red Berry Pavlovas With Ginger Granité & Fromage Blanc

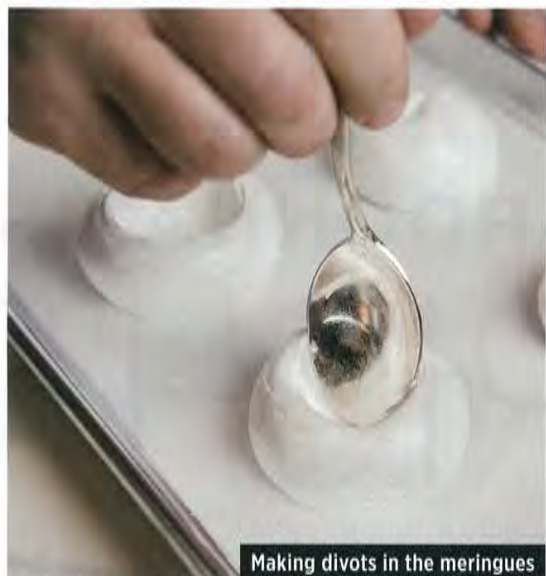
"The first time I had pavlova was in Australia, where it was invented; it was a spin-off of a vacherin. The base is texture: crunchy outside, chewy inside. It's one of my favorite desserts because of the play of textures with other ingredients. It's very adaptable too: berries in summer, citrus in winter and so on." —JEAN-GEORGES VONGERICHTEN

TO MAKE THE MERINGUES

6 large egg whites, at room temperature
1 ¾ cup organic granulated sugar
2 teaspoons white vinegar
1 teaspoon cornstarch

Heat the oven to 200° F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or Silpat. Whip the egg whites in a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment on medium speed, to soft peaks. Add the sugar slowly so the meringue doesn't deflate. Whip until mixture is stiff and glossy and all sugar is dissolved. (Check by rubbing a small amount between your fingers.) Fold in the vinegar and cornstarch. Using a pastry bag fitted with a ¾-inch tip, pipe the mixture onto the baking sheet covered with parchment in 3-inch circles. Create a divot in each meringue by twisting a spoon into the center. Transfer to the oven and bake for 1 hour, until crunchy on the outside and soft in the middle. Let cool, then store in an airtight container until ready to serve.





Making divots in the meringues

TO MAKE THE PASTRY CREAM

1/2 vanilla bean, split and scraped
1 cup milk
2 tablespoons sugar, divided
1 whole egg, plus 1 yolk
1 1/2 tablespoons cornstarch
1 tablespoon butter

Place the vanilla seeds and pod, milk and 1 tablespoon sugar in a pot over medium-high, stirring. In a bowl, mix the whole egg, yolk, cornstarch and remaining 1 tablespoon sugar. When the vanilla mixture boils, slowly add it to the bowl, combining thoroughly. Return mixture to pot and cook over medium-high, stirring constantly, and bring to a boil. Strain into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment and mix on medium until an instant-read thermometer registers 100° F. Add the butter; mix until cool. Place in the refrigerator with plastic wrap pressed against the top.

TO MAKE THE FROMAGE BLANC

1 cup heavy cream
1 cup Fromage Blanc
1 cup pastry cream, from above
1/4 teaspoon salt
Zest of 1 lemon
1/4 cup elderflower syrup
2 teaspoons lemon juice

Whip the heavy cream until it holds medium peaks. Mix the Fromage Blanc, pastry cream, salt and lemon zest in a mixer fitted with the paddle attachment until smooth. Fold in the whipped cream, then the syrup and juice. Store in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

TO MAKE THE GINGER GRANITÉ

3/4 cup plus 4 teaspoons sugar
2 grams gelatin



WINE MATCH

Braida di Giacomo Bologna Brachetto d'Acqui 2014

"Sometimes a syrupy wine is like another course; it's too much. This wine has bright acidity and a touch of effervescence, and the berries and the fruit in the wine and dessert work great together. It lightens and lifts everything." —ERIC HASTINGS

WINE SPECTATOR ALTERNATES: Ca' Bianca Brachetto d'Acqui 2014 (87, \$17); Marengo Brachetto d'Acqui Pineto 2014 (86, \$25)

6 tablespoons young ginger juice, warm
1 1/2 teaspoons lime juice
1/4 teaspoon salt

Heat the sugar with 2 cups water over medium-high heat until dissolved. Mix the gelatin with 1 tablespoon ice water until soft, then

combine with the ginger juice to dissolve. Add gelatin mixture, lime juice, salt and 1 3/4 cups plus 3 tablespoons water to the sugar mixture. Pour into a freezer-proof pan and place in the freezer. Every 2 hours, scrape diagonally in both directions with a fork to create fine flakes of ice.

TO SERVE

1 pint mixed berries, such as strawberries, raspberries, blackberries or blueberries
1 tablespoon confectioner's sugar
Zest of 1/2 a lemon

Place berries in a bowl. Sprinkle with sugar and zest and toss gently. Let sit for 15 minutes.

Spoon a dollop of Fromage Blanc onto the center of each plate and top with a meringue. Drop a dollop of Fromage Blanc into the divot. Top with berries, then spoon some granité on top at the last moment. *Serves 4.*