



Le Cordon Bleu: pushing modern culinary boundaries

While still honouring French culinary traditions that date back to 1895, Le Cordon Bleu is simultaneously riding at the forefront of radical new experimentation with food – as typified by the work of leading Le Cordon Bleu chef Philippe Clergue, who came to Australia from Paris to be a major participant in Tasting Australia 2010.

Chef Philippe's role in Le Cordon Bleu's Paris culinary school is to create new menus for food and wine education programs, and to explore cross-cultural connections in food – which he deliberately pushes to unexpected extremes. "At present we are working with kimchi, the Korean pickled vegetables, which I believe is fabulous – so interesting and different to our Western style." So, in a radical food fusion experiment, chef Philippe has taken a round of camembert, coated it with kimchi, wrapped it in filo pastry and then deep fried the parcel. The result, he says, is sensational. "It is like nothing you have tasted before," he assures. "This type of experimenting is what makes great cuisine – to push the boundaries of what is already known; to explore fresh possibilities."

While he challenges conventional cooking in his work, chef Philippe is still a stickler for revered French traditions. Hailing from the Pyrenees region in southern France, he cites cassoulet as his best dish. "It must be cooked for two days for the flavour and texture to be right, for the meat juices to slowly seep into the beans in a very slow oven, otherwise it is not a real cassoulet," he insists. And as he now lives in Burgundy and commutes to Paris, chef Philippe identifies escargot in garlic and cabbage as a time-honoured regional favourite that he loves cooking at home. "These dishes are called classics for a reason. I greatly respect that."

Chef Philippe was trained in the 2-star Michelin restaurant Relais de la Poste in Magescq, then worked in several Michelin star restaurants in Beunne and St Tropez before joining the Le Cordon Bleu teaching staff at the organisation's Paris Institute during 2006. His vast experience in leading restaurants is now used in designing menus for the elite Le Cordon Bleu Food and Wine Pairing Classes, and the organisation's new Sommelier Program.

Much of his hectic Australian visit was spent conducting major public and student culinary demonstrations, at the Regency Park TAFE College in Adelaide – which included a day-long Masterclass with television chef Simon Bryant – and in Le Cordon Bleu's Sydney culinary campus. While chef Philippe showed off the exacting skills and professional application of classical French culinary training, such as making a perfect soufflé, his demonstrations covered vast culinary terrain. "We don't believe



in demonstrating the same thing over and over. There is so much to the world of food and that is what Le Cordon Bleu strives to do – to present people with as many new food ideas and experiences as possible.”

This visit has also proved to be a beneficial cultural exchange. Chef Philippe takes back to Paris with him indelible impressions of Australia’s food culture, of which he was previously ignorant. He says he was mightily impressed with the Adelaide Showground Farmer’s Market, where he found a diversity and range of seasonal farm produce that surpasses what he usually finds in France. “You have venison, duck, rabbit, all these fresh meats and sausages, all in the one place at the one time,” he says. “This is unusual in the world. It shows that people demand to eat well in this city – and that farmers can provide the best for them.”

He was also excited by the pristine freshness of seafood that he tasted – especially plump pacific oysters from Coffin Bay, and he was greatly enjoying learning how to team them with great South Australian rieslings from the Clare Valley and Eden Valley. “This is a great experience, because I knew so little about Australian food,” he says. “I realise now that I have much to learn – and I will very much enjoy learning.”