



Written by
Nick Lander
14 Apr 2018

A theatrical Parisian restaurant



There is a notion that I subscribe to, and I may even have initiated, that the walls of every restaurant continue to contain all the best aromas of the cooking that has gone on within them. The longer any restaurant stays in operation, the better it will smell as the walls reverberate, albeit silently, with all that the kitchen has delivered over the years.

If that is the case, and it certainly was last Saturday evening in Paris, then chef Julien Roucheteau and his team at restaurant La Scène Thélème start with certain advantages.

The restaurant is close to the Arc de Triomphe in Paris's smart 17th arrondissement where, in its current incarnation as a first class restaurant with a theatre attached, Roucheteau is the third talented chef to occupy this space in the past 40 years.

In the early 1980s this site was home to [Le Bernardin](#) restaurant and the piscatorial cooking of

the late Gilbert Le Coze before his more determined sister Maguy moved the restaurant to New York (for more details on what this indomitable restaurateur achieved this see the chapter on her in my book *The Art of the Restaurateur* that Phaidon published in 2012).

This space then became talented chef Guy Savoy's eponymous restaurant. And it was here that Savoy first met Jean-Marie Gurné, initially as a customer. In those days Gurné must have been a good customer, judging by his figure and also by his former role in Nestlé, for which he worked for many years in Switzerland, the US and the UK. But when Gurné turned 60 he began to appreciate that it was the 'now or never moment' to realise his dream - of opening a restaurant with a theatre space attached.

Gurné is adamant that, although he is today chairman of La Scène Thélème, he still fulfils the vital role of being what every restaurant requires - that of the customer. And he can fill this role so well because of his own experience as a customer in many of the world's top restaurants, but also because he has hired two exceptional people to run the restaurant on his behalf.

First of all there is his restaurant director, Frédéric Pedrono, active for the past 12 years in three-star Michelin restaurants and whom I last encountered at Yannick Alleno's [Pavillon Ledoyen](#). He had initially been attracted by the slightly more informal atmosphere of this new venture and by the opportunity of bringing together a younger team comprised, he confessed to me quite explicitly, of equally talented and hardworking young men and young women.

In charge of the kitchen is the talented and relatively young chef Julien Roucheteau who was formerly in the same post at the [Hotel Lancaster](#) under the aegis of Michel Troisgros. La Scène Thélème has already been awarded its first Michelin star and Pedrono is adamant that his goal is to secure a second.

The combination of a Michelin-starred restaurant and a theatrical space is, I have to say, a very French affair. The theatre, which seats about 45, is located behind the reception and it is into this space that all the spectators, waiting patiently outside, either on the street or in Gurné's café opposite, are led when the doors open at 7pm.

On the night we attended, Gurné was the host introducing Catherine Salviat, well-known actor at the Comédie Française, on to the stage for a spirited performance based on the letters of the Russian playwright, Anton Chekhov. When she had finished, the audience (and actor) repaired across the road for a welcome, complimentary, glass of wine.

When we got back in the theatre space was no more. The curtains had been pulled back, the stage had been removed, and the entire ground floor was now a restaurant. We were shown to a very comfortable, modern table and the second part of La Scène Thélème's performance got under way.

The menu is short. There are three starters, supplemented at the moment by two variations on asparagus, white from Vardennes and green from the Vaucluse. Most of our table, however, plumped for a starter headlined *Fraîcheur* or freshness and described as a variation on langoustines with shiso, the Japanese variant of the mint family. This was an exquisitely pretty dish, perhaps lacking a touch of acidity, of cylinders of langoustine topped with caviar in a scented jelly.

Before then we were served perhaps the best bread I have ever had the privilege of eating in a restaurant. Rolls that were not too large, that had all the crunch and texture one could wish for, and proved to be a promising sign for all that was to follow.



For our main courses, we each chose differently: one of us plumping for a dish of sweetbreads with morels, another a very delicate fillet of John Dory topped with the finest slices of celery and served with ravioli made of celery; and another a fillet of lamb smoked in hay. With this we drank a 2016 Viré-Clessé from Lafon and a charming Tibouren-based 2014 Clos Cibonne, Cuvée Olivier Provençal red.

It may have been this appetising red wine, or perhaps it was just the sight of the cheese trolley, or perhaps it was the bread, that persuaded me not to order dessert, which is I believe a greater test of any kitchen, and to plump for cheese instead. But the cheese trolley here is one of the most alluring and best selected I have ever encountered. A couple of hard cheeses, including a Comté from Bernard Antony in Vieux-Ferrette and several unnamed goats' cheeses from Dominique Fabre in the south west of France, provided an excellent finish to what was an excellent meal.



Gurné will open a second location, close to the Bastille, in the second half of June where the focus will be on a more music-themed performance space with a less expensive bistro menu. This, I believe, will have considerable potential for a possible transfer to London. In the interim, for lovers of French theatre, or those who simply enjoy high quality, modern French cooking (the short performances are optional), then do head for La Scène Thélème.

La Scène Thélème 18 rue Troyon, 75017 Paris; tel +33 1 77 37 60 99
Closed all day Sunday and Monday, and Saturday lunch
Lunch menu €49 for three courses
Dinner à la carte €135