



Written by
Nick Lander
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Guy Savoy - on the money



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Guy Savoy, the renowned French chef, is old fashioned in the very best sense of the word.

He was born in Nevers in 1953, making him 65, old for a chef in a profession more akin to a sport in which youth dominates.

Savoy has opened restaurants in Singapore, now closed, and Las Vegas, still thriving, and three years ago moved his top restaurant into a fitting location for any *FT* reader. It is part of the Monnaie de Paris, France's principal mint, on the Quai de Conti overlooking the Seine.

The location is very much in keeping with Savoy's style of luxurious cooking. There are a couple of doormen by the entrance, one to guide customers up the red carpet to the restaurant. The door opens automatically into a dark passage that leads to the rather lighter series of small dining rooms, flanked by a series of smartly dressed managers.

Then straight ahead appears Guy Savoy. It is 8.15 pm on a Friday night and he looks immaculate. Grey hair, grey beard, grey trousers and a white chef's jacket without, unusually, his name embroidered on it. He smiles at us and we move on.

The couple we are meeting are old friends, originally from Korea, but who now live in Hong Kong. I recalled that when we last ate together in the dim sum restaurant within the Four Seasons Hotel in Hong Kong, I described them as constituting 'the table from hell'. At Guy Savoy, neither the wine nor the food nor the service gave them any grounds for complaint.

Once seated, we were handed the smart menus and a wine list that comes in such a thick book that a special lectern is provided for it. Even the menu, admittedly much slimmer, gave me pause for thought.

It opens with the menu in French, before moving on to the menu in English with a French translation. Then comes the menu in Chinese, Japanese and Russian – proof that Savoy's culinary reputation has travelled far and wide.

Then there are the menu prices. Here Savoy makes no attempt to hide either his ambition or his status. The first starter, iced poached oysters with a granita of seaweed, is priced at €105. Even the two vegetarian first courses, of which one was described as multi-coloured vegetables in a seasonal vegetable ragout, were €90. It looked very splendid, a panoply of the produce of a sunny summer topped with a splayed-out courgette flower.

As is typical of restaurants of this standing, there is little difference between the prices of the first and main courses. The most expensive dishes were the second first course, a boned skate wing topped with caviar, and a main course of roast lobster with a bouillabaisse sauce, both at €150 each. (The 12-course set menu is €415.)

Plenty of extras are included, of which perhaps the best was the first. Described as a club sandwich, this was two small squares of brown bread holding together three pieces of creamy foie gras served on a skewer. It was an impressive opener.

There were a couple of others, a rather less impressive variation on cauliflower and a half-portion of their artichoke soup laced with truffles before our impressive first courses arrived. The boned skate wing with caviar looked so generous that it could have been described as caviar with skate, and while another first course of raw tuna was a little underwhelming, there was no doubting the freshness of the fish.

On a particularly hot night, we all chose fish as our main course, two ordering the red mullet. They were served as two fish each, with an intricate cube of courgette and spinach and a sauce of red mullet liver. My John Dory was perhaps the most spectacular. Alongside the two fillets of fish came a transparent bag of clams cooked in the oven that was opened and placed on the samphire under the fish. There was also its sauce, a reduction from the fish and shellfish, which fortunately the waiter left on the table in a copper saucepan as otherwise I would have had to chase him into the kitchen for more. It was so delicious I drained the lot with my spoon.

Variations on a mille feuille and apricots were our desserts, both excellent, but these were really only a prelude to a chariot of supplementary desserts, a huge variety of ice creams, sorbets and even a cherry clafoutis. Nobody leaves here hungry. With our meal we drank a bottle of Dauvissat 2008 Forêt Premier Cru Chablis (€175) and a bottle of J F Mugnier, Clos de la Maréchale 2009 Nuits St-Georges (€240). Our bill for four came to a whopping €1,555.

There were two surprises about this meal. The first was the presence of Leonard Trierweiler, a young apprentice wearing his Ferrandi jacket, the name of the capital's leading culinary school, in the room. He, one of a series of apprentices Savoy takes on, was working that night preparing a first course, salmon with a hot consommé and lemon 'pearls'. This is encouraging – even if he looked nervous.

The second was on the Eurostar coming home to London. A young mother of three boys saw the menu and said that it was her husband's dream to eat there. I handed the menu over to them and encouraged them to start saving.

Guy Savoy Monnaie de Paris, 11 Quai de Conti, Paris 75006; tel +33 (0)1 43 80 40 61