

## **A Bocuse d'Or Christmas at Bekkjarvik**

The Chaîne des Rôtisseurs annual Christmas Dinner is a popular tradition in Bergen and one we take very seriously. Our members appreciate this chance to meet and enjoy the company of fellow food- and wine lovers and to relax around the table. We usually keep this a relatively informal and laid back event, focusing on ambiance and the Holiday spirit.

This year we decided to change the concept a little. We made plans to go to Bekkjarvik, the capital of the small island community Austevoll, situated on the coastline of Western Norway. The inhabitants of Austevoll are fishermen and entrepreneurs, specializing in fresh fish and shellfish, harvested directly from the ocean, but they also have ecologically raised sheep and wild deer from local farmers and hunters. No wonder Øystein and Asta Johannessen decided to start their restaurant and guesthouse, "Bekkjarvik Gjestgiveri", in the ancient Royal guesthouse, built by Danish King Christian Quart, in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Their sons, Arnt and Ørjan, caught an early interest in cooking from visiting their parents kitchen and were eventually educated as chefs. Arnt focused on the guesthouse and holds the position as Chef de Cuisine, currently titled "Chef of the year in Norway". Ørjan wanted to compete and headed for an international career. He trained at Restaurant Lucullus in Hotel Neptun in Bergen and his first Chaîne achievement was to win the Apprentice Chef Competition in 2005. A few years later he won Bocuse d'Europe in Stockholm in 2012 and later Best Fish dish in Bocuse d'Or in Lyon in 2013.

Many Chefs would have been satisfied with such an achievement, but Ørjan had higher goals. Supported by his brother and his parents, as well as the whole staff at Bekkjarvik, he and his mentor, Odd Ivar Solvold, former Bocuse d'Or bronze medalist in 1997 and coach for two other gold medalists, Charles Tjessem and Geir Skeie, decided to go for the Bocuse d'Or final in Lyon in 2015. The stakes were high when Ørjan decided for another competition, but as we realized, he was up for it and won, not only "Chef of the year Norway" in 2014, but went on to win the Bocuse d'Or Gold Medal in Lyon in 2015! Those of us who were lucky to be present in the Eurexpo competition hall during the event, can confirm that the cheers were quite comparable to any WC football final!

It is indeed a fantastic achievement to go this far as a Chef. Ørjan had the chance to pick a position in any prestigious restaurant in the world, but instead decided to head home for Austevoll and Bekkjarvik, to work together with his brother, his parents and the staff at Bekkjarvik Gjestgiveri.

So, Bekkjarvik Gjestgiveri had, not only the Chef of the year in Norway 2015, but the Bocuse d'Or Gold Medalist 2015 on the payroll when we decided to pay them a visit. Naturally, we hoped for a good meal!

The journey to Bekkjarvik involves a good 30 minute drive to the ferry at Krokeide, then a 30 minute boat ride to Hufthammer, before the final leg by car, 20 minute, to Bekkjarvik. You need to know your way around the timetables, but the ride, in good weather, is fabulous.

We arrived early in the afternoon on a Thursday and were warmly welcomed by the whole family and staff at the Guesthouse. After settling in our rooms, it was only natural

to enjoy a chilled glass of Bekkjarvik's own imported Prosecco in the bar. The audience waited in suspense for the events to come.

The Dining room was elegantly set with long tables, flowers and several glasses! We looked forward to the surprise menu, put together by the Johannessen brothers in cooperation.

The Amuse Bouche was simple, elegant and a breath of fresh air. Inspired by his Bocuse d'Europe in Stockholm, Ørjan combined two wonderful scallops with cucumber, avocado, horseradish and "løyrom" cream. The wine pairing was a fresh and crisp 2014 Pfalz Riesling by A. Christmann. A very good start.

The first appetizer was a superb crayfish with a symphony of Jerusalem artichokes and a hollandaise espuma to die for. The balanced, intense flavors simply seduced us all and matched the rather complex and fruity 2013, Cà del Magro from Monte del Frà.

As second appetizer we were served another winner: Perfectly cooked Skatewings, with a hint of citrus, in a sauce Verte with fennel and radish julienne. In the glass we were served a 2014 Grande Réserve Sancerre by Henri Bourgeois. Not bad at all!

The main course was the much anticipated Bocuse d'Or winning dish, Guinea Fowl, shaped as a half sphere, layers of light and dark meat, skin crisp and the flavors superb. The sauce, Guinea Fowl reduction, with tarragon tapioca and mustard seeds, was amazing and the vegetables, grilled onion, baked beetroot and puffed pumpkin balanced the meat very nicely. In the glass we had a very amiable Clos du Dessus des Marconnets, Pierre Labet Beaune. It was the highlight so far, and not even Asta, Ørjans mother, had experienced this course in her own Guesthouse after Lyon 2015. We dined in silence and respect.

After a moment of discussion and admiration for the two chefs, it was time for dessert. The bold brothers had decided to make an almost impossibly high Cloudberry soufflé, with an egg replica made of cloudberry and a home made vanilla ice-cream, topped by almond crumble. To match this sweet bomb we were served a generous glass of Reserve Mouton Cadet 2013 Sauternes.

The dishes perfect in their apparent simplicity and balance, the wines very good matches in generous amounts and the service impeccable, the meal had truly fulfilled our every hope and expectation. This was reflected in the very positive food review, supported by cheers from the participants.

Almost in a religious mood, we moved to the bar to enjoy a nice cup of coffee, a brandy and, for some, a few cocktails later in the evening. Rather late, we went to bed in our very comfortable beds and slept like babies until the smell of coffee and freshly baked bread woke us up, just in time for breakfast.

If anyone should wonder, a visit to Bekkjarvik is highly recommended!

Best regards,

Bjarte Askeland  
Bailli Regional de Bergen, Norway