

# Critic's Notebook: If you missed star chef Olivier Roellinger's feast, here's a taste

By Lesley Chesterman, Gazette Fine Dining Critic May 7, 2010



## Chef Olivier Roellinger

**Photograph by: Relais & Chateaux,**

MONTREAL - Located on Brittany's northern coast just east of Saint-Malo, the fishing village of Cancale is famous for two things: its wonderful oysters (some 25,000 tons are harvested annually) and Olivier Roellinger. With the only restaurant in Brittany to have ever earned three Michelin stars, Roellinger is one of those chefs renowned in haute gastronomy circles, who remains an enigma because he works under the radar.

His original restaurant, for which he earned that ultimate three-star honour in 2006, La Maison de Bricourt, sits at the top of a hill in Cancale. Yet in 2008, Roellinger, who many believed should have got his three stars years before they were awarded, surprised the cooking world by handing them back. Then 53, he said he felt he was past an age where he could continue to give his utmost behind the stoves.

He closed La Maison de Bricourt and focused his energies on other projects, most prominently his seaside villa hotel, Château Richeux. His restaurant Le Coquillage, a

wood-panelled room furnished with bright white tables, offers seafood-laden menus and views of the gardens and the bay of Mont Saint-Michel.

Having dined at La Maison de Bricourt four years ago, I sampled Roellinger's cuisine at its peak. It's miles away from what you'd expect from French cuisine. This is a cuisine rich in sea flavours, diverse textures, bright colours and a true purity of ingredients either fished or picked locally. Famous Breton ingredients like artichokes, oysters and butter play a large role in the chef's repertoire, but it is his use of spices that is his trademark.

Roellinger was the draw recently at the second annual Les Grands Chefs Relais et Châteaux dinner benefiting students of the Institut de tourisme et d'hôtellerie du Québec. Some 200 Montrealers graced a ballroom at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel to taste a five-course dinner prepared by Roellinger. Dishes included coquilles St. Jacques bathed in mango sauce, a seafood bouillon filled with tiny escalopes of sole, lobster with cocoa and spices, and Camembert soup with green apple and red radish julienne. Finishing off the meal was a dessert duo featuring a rich chocolate cream and a fluffy coconut mousse paired with the ultimate of ultimate wines, Château d'Yquem.

Priced at \$1,500 per person, the dinner was not only a luxury feast, but a benefit to fund three-month-long stages in Relais et Châteaux hotels and restaurants run by star chefs including Eric Ripert, Daniel Boulud, Anne-Sophie Pic, Michel Roux and Montreal's Normand Laprise. The stage experience is crucial to the training (or, as the French say, "formation") of up-and-coming chefs, sommeliers and service staff. Last year's dinner, featuring the cuisine of chef Michel Troisgros, raised \$291,000. This year's raised an astounding \$432,000.

Obviously Montrealers are willing to pay a high price to enjoy fine wines and taste the food of a genius chef. But for those who did not attend last week's event or cannot travel to taste Roellinger's cuisine, here is a recipe that fits right into the early summer season for a dessert that epitomizes his ethereal and aromatic cuisine.

### **Strawberry, Rhubarb, and Madagascar Vanilla Cream with Forbidden Powder**

Serves 4

The forbidden powder is one of Roellinger's spice mixes made with ground green anise, ginger and cinnamon. Substitute with a mix of powdered cinnamon and ginger if you like. The original recipe calls for a few drops of kaffir lime oil just before serving, but unless you are extra adventurous, feel free to leave it out.

Rhubarb Compote:

*1 lb (500g) rhubarb, peeled and cut into small pieces*

*1/2 cup (125 mL) sugar*

*1/2 a vanilla bean, split and scraped*

Combine the rhubarb pieces with the sugar and vanilla in a pot. Cover and allow to steep for a few hours. Drain off any juices, then cook for a few minutes over medium heat until softened. Remove the vanilla bean and purée in a blender. Refrigerate.

Strawberry Spice Compote:

*1/2 lb (250g) strawberries, washed and stems removed*

*1 heaping tablespoon (18 mL) sugar*

*1/2 teaspoon (2 mL)*

*powdered ginger*

*1/2 teaspoon (2 mL)*

*powdered cinnamon*

*pinch ground green anise (optional)*

Cut the strawberries in quarters, then toss with the sugar and spices. Cover and set aside for 15 minutes.

Madagascar Vanilla Cream:

*1 cup (250 mL) 35 per cent cream*

*2 tablespoons (30 mL) icing sugar*

*1/2 vanilla bean split and scraped.*

Combine the cream with the sugar and vanilla bean seeds. Whip at high speed with an electric mixer until it reaches soft peaks. Refrigerate.

To assemble the dessert: in a small glass, layer a tablespoon of the rhubarb purée, followed by a tablespoon of the macerated strawberries, and finish with the whipped cream. Serve chilled.

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