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From left: roasted pigeon with beets, red-veined sorrel and crushed hazelnuts by Alain Ducasse; visiting chefs take over every element of the New York restaurant.

presents an evolving greatest hits menu of dishes from the visiting chefs.

"We have visiting chefs leave a dish with us for a limited period, so if you're in New York City you can have charred octopus from Matthew Accarrino in San Francisco, prawn toast from Jowett Yu in Hong Kong or fried chicken from Morgan McGlone in Australia," Cowin says.

Elena and his team recreate each dish down to the smallest detail. "It's our job to ensure we deliver it the right way, even if the chef is not here," he says.

Although there are some nervous moments, they're usually the departing chefs'. "Recipes are like your baby and when you give that to someone else, you're going to call every hour to check that everything is going OK," he says.

Upcoming guest appearances include Jacques Pépin, personal chef to Charles de Gaulle. On September 7, he joins Chefs Club as Elena prepares a selection of dishes from his new book *Poulets & Legumes*.

On September 22 and 23, Tomas Kalika of Mishiguene in Buenos Aires will cook dishes reinterpreting traditional Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jewish cuisines through an Argentine lens.

Chefs Club was concocted in Aspen, Colorado. Each year, Aspen is home to the Food & Wine Classic, a culinary festival hosted by *Food & Wine* magazine, where Cowin was editor-in-chief for 21 years.

Three years ago, St Regis Aspen approached the magazine to tailor a restaurant concept around the festival.

The menu originally consisted of dishes by recipients of *Food & Wine's* best new chef awards, but as the concept grew and expanded to New York, so too did the vision.

"We try to give a dynamic experience," Elena says. "It might be through a chef, through a cuisine, or through our recipes, but it must always be fun." **L&L**

*Chefs Club is at 275 Mulberry Street, New York chefsclub.com*

## Columnists



### Digital Life

John Davidson beavers away in the DL Labs to bring you all things tech.



### Motoring

Tony Davis takes to the road here and abroad to drive the latest luxury models.



### Wine

Tim White follows his nose in pursuit of fine wines and alcoholic beverages.



## Star turns

Chefs on the menu.

Above: Zaiyu Hasegawa of Jimbocho Den serves up a DEN Salad.

Below: "It's a concept without rules because there are so many different people, different cultures and different cuisines," says culinary director Didier Elena.

**OLIVIA RIORDAN** | One New York City restaurant is challenging the adage that too many cooks spoil the broth. To the contrary, the Chefs Club in downtown Soho has successfully hosted a roll call of leading local and international chefs – and plans to host many more.

In a dramatic change from the traditional restaurant business model, Chefs Club invites acclaimed chefs from around the world to take over every element of the restaurant – from the menu, to the kitchen, to the bar – for a few nights. Chefs have included culinary icon Alain Ducasse, Mike Bagale from groundbreaking *Alinea* in Chicago and Zaiyu Hasegawa from the tiny, Michelin-starred Jimbocho Den, winner of the 2016 One to Watch award at The World's 50 Best Restaurants ceremony in June. (Sydney's Sepia won the same award in 2015.)

More recently, Morgan McGlone of Belle's Hot Chicken in Sydney and Melbourne paired up with Matty Matheson of Toronto's Parts & Labour for a Nashville-inspired duel.

Curating and corralling the visiting chefs are creative director Dana Cowin and culinary director Didier Elena.

"It's a concept without rules because there are so many different people, different cultures and

different cuisines," Elena says.

Cowin and Elena collaborate with the visiting chefs to determine the scale of each takeover, with the goal of replicating each chef's home concept.

Chefs with a detailed, technique-focused style of cuisine are invited to host studio dinners for 20 diners in the restaurant's private dining room.

Jimbocho Den, for instance, seats only 18 people, so it was important to recreate the intimate environment, Elena says.

Chefs with a more accessible style of cooking are handed the reins to the entire restaurant, seating 150.

The restaurant is a hit with other chefs too. In 2015, it invited Jowett Yu from Hong Kong's Ho Lee Fook. The invitation caught the attention of Ducasse, who was in town then and he jumped at the chance to try Yu's cuisine for the first time.

While Cowin and Elena are hard-pressed to pick favourites, some chefs put on a show that's hard to beat. "We did a reincarnation of a French restaurant called La Caravelle, which operated for 43 years in New York [before closing in 2004]," Cowin says.

"The last owners were Rita and André Jammet, and their restaurant was revered. We recreated the menu and Rita brought in the cheque presenters and the menu holders. On the night, many of the diners were her old customers, their children, and their grandchildren. It was amazing."

When the restaurant isn't buzzing with visiting chefs, it takes on another dimension. Open every night for dinner, it

food

## Message in a bottle

Luca lets the wines do the talking.

**TIM WHITE** | "Vero" is how winemaker Peppe Randazzo describes Luca Martini di Cigala of San Giusto a Rentennano. *Vero* translates from the Italian as any or all of these: authentic, true, unfeigned, genuine, real. He said this was how Luca interacted with the people who worked on the family farm; how he was with all those around him.

This authenticity, I believe, is reflected in the wines of his estate. I love 'em.

To be accurate, they are the wines of the family estate, as San Giusto a Rentennano, in the southern part of Tuscany's Chianti Classico zone, has been managed jointly by Luca, sister Elisabetta and brother Francesco since 1992.

It was Elisabetta who greeted us at our appointment in November 2014. She immediately informed us that "your friend" and "our neighbour" had already been to the estate to see if we had arrived. The friend turned out to be that of my partner, the aforementioned Peppe, with whom she had worked at Isole e Olena, also a fine producer of chianti classico and other wines.

We were a bit nonplussed, and clearly looked it, because she indicated a path leading out of the courtyard and explained that this was the direction in which Peppe and his family lived.

To our surprise, we found out later he lived but a stone's throw from the San Giusto cellars.

Luca Martini di Cigala, whom I had met in Australia, took us on a tour of the vineyard and winery.

He explained what a difficult growing season 2014 had been with its exceptionally rainy summer. This had necessitated meticulous attention in the vineyard and quite a lot of the crop (more than 20 per cent) had been dropped to ensure the remainder ripened evenly.

"I am quite pleased," he said modestly, and with a shrug suggested: "But you see yourself." With that he twisted the valve on a tank and filled a glass with '14 chianti classico. It was delicious, showing hallmark, long, powerful, impeccably balanced San Giusto sangiovese tannins remarkable for the vintage.

He went to another tank and splashed



Luca Martini di Cigala at home among the vines at San Giusto a Rentennano.

into it the wine that would become when bottled the '14 Chianti Classico Riserva "Le Baroncole", and then did likewise with the estate's top sangiovese selection, percarlo. This was one of the rare occasions on my visits to Italy that a winemaker showed me unfinished tank or barrel samples.

Perhaps you can understand how thrilled I am now to see the wine finished, in bottle, shipped to Australia, and showing so beautifully. The '14 baroncole won't arrive until next August, and the percarlo not until 2018.

Being that time of the year – late, late autumn in the northern hemisphere – there were still grapes, the whites malvasia and trebbiano, in the loft above the cellar drying on canes for the creation of San Giusto a Rentennano's vin santo sweet wine, Vin San Giusto.

This remarkable wine is fermented in oak on the *madre* (mother) lees deposits remaining in the barrels from previous vintages. It stays in these small chestnut and oak casks for six years in the loft experiencing the heat of summer and cold of winter.

Because of the berry dehydration, the Vin San Giusto is incredibly intense and loaded with natural sugary lushness (the wine is three times sweeter than a De Bortoli Noble One botrytis). As a young wine it is almost painfully intense to taste, but after

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