



TWO-STAR MICHELIN DINING IN PROVENCE, FRANCE

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF TRACY BEARD, L'OUSTAU DE BAUMANIERE AND MICHEL KAYSER'S RESTAURANT

Provence, France, a sun-kissed region that has it all—lavender-filled hillsides, turquoise waters, delicious wines and incredible food. Recently, I dined in two of Provence's exceptional two-star Michelin restaurants, L'Oustau de Baumanière and Michel Kayser's Restaurant Alexandre.



L'OUSTAU DE BAUMANIERE RESTAURANT

Mr. Raymond Thuilier opened [L'Oustau de Baumanière](#) in 1945, the same day his grandson, [Jean-André Charial](#), was born. The property, nestled between the mountains in Les Baux de Provence, consisted of a hotel, gourmet restaurant, pool and stunning gardens. Today with Chef Jean-André at the helm, the Baumanière boasts an exquisite spa, impressive chateau, a high-end shop, wine cave and two restaurants, L'Oustau and Cabro d'Or.

My friend Connie and I dined on lunch at L'Oustau. We sat by the pool on a bright sunny day. Our dining extravaganza commenced with a glass of Champagne Baumanière Grand Cru Cuvée Jean-André Charial. Chef André paired it with smoked salmon sprinkled with dried apple and homemade oyster crackers filled with cream of mustard. Next, we savored a delicate puree of codfish with a single bite of smoked eel. The flavor evoked memories of my father's

heavenly clam chowder, but the texture was far more refined.

The subsequent course was a delicate slice of raw tuna laid atop eggplant mousseline with droplets of olive oil, specks of fresh dill, and a scattering of fried capers. Chef André produces his own Champagne, red and white wines, and two distinct olive oils. Each course during our lunch arrived with a different bread and wine.

Chef André marries his signature dish of milk-fed leg of lamb with a rich and creamy dauphinois gratin, thinly sliced potatoes layered in a crock with cream and baked until tender. Our appetites began to wane; and although we could not finish the scrumptious lamb, not one speck of the potatoes remained in the crock.

Another spectacular and surprising dish was the chef's creative use of the humble carrot.

Orange carrots were roasted, pureed, and deep fried into chips. The whole carrots sat atop the puree adorned with the chips. Then Chef André decoratively drizzled a thickened balsamic vinegar over the carrots. He, thus, raised this common carrot to new gastronomic heights.

We concluded our meal with a confit of apricots, crushed pistachios and jasmine flowers. Our experience at the Baumanière is something out of a fairytale. I hope to return one day and stay a few days in this paradise.



MICHEL KAYSER RESTAURANT ALEXANDRE

Chef Michel Kayser worked at the restaurant of a converted provincial home in Garons, France, long before he purchased the property in 2001 and opened the restaurant, Alexandre. Today, Alexandre reflects Chef Kayser's personal style and showcases his culinary talents.

I arrived at the parklike setting before the lunch service began. Meandering inside the restaurant, I noticed the elegant organic Mediterranean décor designed from wood, stone, leather and other natural materials. Stunning glass bulbs hung from the ceiling, walls were artistically textured, and the natural earth-tone color scheme gave a perfect segue to the outdoor dining area.

When I stepped outside, sheer fabric swathes swayed in the breeze, lush 100-year-old cedar and pine trees shaded the manicured lawn and statues beautified the garden.

After my stroll, I met up with the assistant maître d' Jonathan in the library lounge where I sipped on a glass of Champagne Duval-Leroy. Chef Kayser soon joined us, and he shared how he learned about cooking from his grandmother.

Chef Kayser grew up like many children wearing hand-me-down clothes. When he achieved success in the culinary world, the first thing he purchased was an expensive shirt which he modeled for his grandmother as a symbol of his success. Jonathan translated our conversation and said, "Chef Kayser inspires. He started with nothing, and now he wants to motivate others."

Before lunch, Chef Kayser invited me into his kitchen. The staff works together in a synchronized manner, and I watched Chef Kayser meticulously inspect each plate before it left for

the dining room. He was firm with his staff but jovial and good humored at the same time.

I dined on an array of appetizing culinary artwork. Standout dishes were the Tomato Island, made with garlic cream, and Walk on the Beach, artfully displayed seafood with toasted bread in the center of a hand-crafted bowl. Foam topped the bread, and a waiter came and poured "the sea," a flavorful broth around the toast island. Other delicious dishes were the zucchini flower stuffed with truffle mousseline and the roasted pigeon breast.

Earning one Michelin Star is a challenging endeavor, but receiving two is quite an accomplishment. If you find yourself in Provence, France, make it a point to dine at these incredible restaurants.