

Pardon MY FRENCH

*Discover how the Show-Me State
does the archetypal European cuisine.*

BY JONAS WEIR



BEFORE LEWIS and Clark ever stepped foot in the territory of Missouri, it was a French settlement, and vestiges of that era can still be found around the state. St. Louis is marked by the fleur-de-lis. Ste. Genevieve has faithfully preserved its French heritage. The Missouri wine industry still touts that its rootstock once saved France's beloved grapes. And Kansas City is sometimes called the Paris of the Plains.

Just as France's influence can be seen all over the Show-Me State, classical French cuisine has been embedded in the very fabric of modern cooking. From technique to recipes, French cooking is inarguably the base of contemporary Western culinary education.

So there is no better state to celebrate French food than Missouri. Many epicureans here still uphold the rich tradition of this classic European cuisine. From a Louisiana, Missouri, resident who traced her family history to the forefather of French cooking to a pair of French natives who do things the old-fashioned way to a Cottleville restaurant that ranks among the best in Midwest, the Show-Me State is re-imagining what *bon appétit* can mean.

Karen Blumensaadt-Stoeckley proudly displays a photograph of her grandfather Axel Blumensaadt, a historic map of Paris, and vintage larding needles and cutlery.

COURTESY OF CURT DENNISON



“I could see her passion, but I thought, ‘Could this be real: the story of a young man who came from Denmark at age sixteen to cook in Paris?’”

—Michel Escoffier, President of the *Escoffier Foundation and Museum*

Karen Blumensaadt-Stoeckley named the bakery at her bed-and-breakfast after her grandmother Josephine—Axel’s wife.

The Gourmet Genealogist

When Louisiana, Missouri, resident Karen Blumensaadt-Stoeckley wrote *A Culinary Legacy*, she not only revisited her family history, but she also returned to the very genesis of modern cooking.

The story of Karen’s recipe book begins at the twilight of the nineteenth century. A sixteen-year-old Axel Eugene Blumensaadt left his home town of Odense, Denmark, in 1896 and traveled to Paris to pursue a career as a chef. After a year and a half, he took his first internship in the Grand Hotel du Parc in Heyres, France, near the Mediterranean. From there, he went on to cook at the 1900 Exposition Universelle on the Champs-Élysées and a restaurant called La FERIA in Monte Carlo, France. Sometime during his years in Paris, Axel trained under one of the most influential chefs of all time—Auguste Escoffier.

Many people credit Auguste Escoffier with giving the world the gift of French food. He was called the king of chefs and the chef of kings, and his impact on modern cooking is immeasurable. He was a restaurateur, chef, and author. He rose

to prominence as the director of kitchens at the Savoy Hotel in London in 1890, a post he held until 1899. However, he cemented his legacy in 1903 when he published *Le Guide Culinaire*—a classic work that catalogued French recipes and



Karen says that this version of an orange soufflé is the perfect way to end a French meal. You can find the recipe for this and seven other desserts in her cookbook.

technique of the day. The book is still a major resource for aspiring chefs.

After Axel spent time with the king of chefs, he was undoubtedly influenced by him, and he continued to work as a chef. Over the following decades, Axel took a long and winding path that led him to the United States, where he met Josephine Amelia Kramb, his future wife. After years as a professional chef, he and Josephine settled in Oak Harbor, Ohio, where Josephine’s family owned a dry goods store. There, they had two sons, Ernest and Christian, and lived out the rest of their days.

In 1980, at age eighteen, Karen was rifling through her maternal grandparents’ attic, where her father, Christian, had been storing his father’s belongings. She came across an old ledger book. The book turned out to be a wealth of recipes, all handwritten in French, dating back to 1904. Next to it sat a packet of letters of recommendation from restaurants in France where Axel cooked. Karen decided in that moment that she was going to one day translate and publish those recipes.

“I think things happen for a reason,” she says.

COURTESY OF CURT DENNISON



Karen carried the book with her for decades, but she finally had the opportunity to translate the recipes in 2012 when she embarked on what she calls “a much-needed sabbatical.”

That year, she traveled to France, Les Arcs to be specific, less than thirty miles from the Mediterranean. There, she met Max Callegari, owner of the hotel and restaurant Le Logis du Guetteur. The two made a connection and began working through her grandfather’s recipes, using Max’s skills and occasionally referring to *Le Guide Culinaire*. Her dream was finally coming to fruition. Within a year, *A Culinary Legacy: From Escoffier to Today* was complete.



COURTESY OF CURT DENNISON



From left, Karen Blumensaadt-Stoeckley, Michel Escoffier, and Max Callegari all contributed to *A Culinary Legacy: From Escoffier to Today*.

Today, Karen has returned to running The Eagle’s Nest Winery, Inn, and Bakery in Louisiana. However, Karen’s main passion has become promoting her cookbook.

Karen should take pride in the book. It is a trove of delicious French recipes, and it has even received the stamp of approval from Auguste Escoffier’s great-grandson, a skeptic at first.

“I could see her passion, but I thought, ‘Could this be real: the story of a young man

who came from Denmark at age sixteen to cook in Paris?’” Michel Escoffier says.

Michel is a man who speaks boldly, jokes often, and isn’t afraid of offending. Despite the old adage, he’ll talk both politics and religion at dinner. However, with the book in hand, even a person with this much bravado only had good things to say. He even wrote the foreword.

“Thank God that Karen found the notebook, so we can now all share those recipes, but even better, try them and enjoy them,” he wrote.

With over a hundred recipes, scores of notes, and a complete history of the book’s origins, *A Culinary Legacy* is full of great dishes, from savory seafood to sweet soufflés, Steak Béarnaise to herbed mayonnaise. Karen is doing everything she can to pass down her grandfather’s legacy.

In fact, Karen now plays the part of a culinary expert. She’s assured in her abilities and recipes. A Francophile no doubt, she may be dismayed if someone doesn’t know a French cooking term, but she only wants to educate. She lives and breathes French cuisine and even returns to Les Arcs each spring to teach cooking to American couples on vacation. With the same vitality that brought Axel to Paris, she is dedicated to preserving his legacy and keeping the tradition of French cuisine alive.

Karen slices into a leg of lamb cooked Provencal-style. Although it was not one of her grandfather’s recipes, the recipe can be found in her book, *A Culinary Legacy*.



The Traditionalists

Amid white tablecloths, candles, and bouquets of fresh red roses in the two small dining rooms that overlook historic Main Street in Parkville, less than twenty minutes north of Kansas City, Café des Amis delivers an authentic French dining experience in a classic nineteenth-century building that dates back to the 1840s at least.

“It kind of takes you back in time,” says owner and pastry chef Guillaume Hanriot. “We don’t try to be a modern place. We are embracing this old building.”

Aside from the classic setting, Guillaume and his wife and head chef of the restaurant, Ingrid, also provide an authentic menu in the rich culinary tradition of France. From elegant entrees like *Jarret de Porc* and *Os a Moelle* to a lunch menu of crepes and omelettes, they offer dishes you won’t find on many menus in Missouri, or in the Midwest for that matter. And as French natives, they both know all the ins and outs of French cooking.

Both Guillaume and Ingrid hail from the

Champagne region. Guillaume is from the small village of Château-Thierry, and Ingrid comes from the Châlons-en-Champagne, a regional hub. Both have been cooking since they were teenagers, and both went to culinary school for five years where they learned the most traditional French dishes, styles, and techniques.



The Bavarois à la Fraise is a signature dessert at Café des Amis. It is a light strawberry mousse on top of almond pistachio cake, served with a strawberry sauce.

The St. Jacques dish at Café des Amis features pan-seared, wild-caught sea scallops in a basil and red pepper puree with roasted vegetables and lemon as a garnish.

“When you go through school, they don’t teach you any other countries’ foods,” Guillaume says. “We just do French cooking.”

While Guillaume was finishing school, he did his dissertation during an internship at Napoleon Bakery in Kansas City in 1999. A few years after his internship, he was offered a job there in 2003. In the months leading up to the job offer, he and Ingrid had started dating, so when the offer came in, they decided to stay together and start a life in Missouri.

Now, twelve years later they own and operate their own restaurant and work closely with each other every day. While they both miss France and they visit their families there every year, they have also grown very fond of Kansas City.

“We love the Midwest,” Guillaume says. “It’s our home now. People are just super, super nice.”

ANGELA BOND

Although Missouri is now the Hanriot family’s home, they still notice many marked differences from where they grew up.

“The relationship to food is quite different,” Guillaume says. “As most people know, in France, we take our time, and it’s really a part of our daily lives. Here, it’s more of a function. You eat because you have to eat. That was one of the differences I saw. I mean people eat in their car. That is something that you will never, ever see back home in France.”

People’s relationship to food isn’t the only difference, though. Guillaume says that he has also noticed a good deal of difference with the ingredients, and most of these differences are for the better. He and Ingrid love using American meat. They consider the pork and beef to be much better than in France. However, Guillaume is adamant that factory-farmed chicken doesn’t meet their standards, so he has worked out a relationship with a local farm that will suit their needs. In fact, Guillaume says he has seen a dramatically higher quality of produce during the nearly fifteen years he has spent in the United States as a result of the local food movement.

However, some food items found in France cannot be matched here in the Midwest. For example, Guillaume and Ingrid import all of the cheese, wine, and escargot on their menu.

They believe using wild French escargot, traditional French cheeses, and French wine is paramount to providing the authentic French dining experience offered at Café des Amis; it’s not that there’s not good wine here.

“I would agree with you that there is a lot of good wine coming from the United States, but being a French restaurant, we try to deliver a pure French restaurant experience,” Guillaume says. “It’s not that you want every wine to taste like the ones from California or France. You want them to have their own personality. We have to be thankful for Missouri wine, though. They provided all the rootstock a couple of centuries ago.”

Although ingredients that fit into the flavor palate of traditional French cooking are crucial to what Ingrid and Guillaume are trying to accomplish at Café des Amis, the preparation of the food is another big factor. Almost every item found on the restaurant’s menu is done in the old-world style and handmade in house. The only items made outside of the restaurant walls are the cheese, bread, and wine. And to Guillaume and Ingrid, there is no such thing as molecular gastronomy. The only modern cooking technique that they incorporate is *sous vide*—a method of cooking that uses airtight plastic bags to steam food for lengthy amounts of time and trap in flavor; the pro-



ANGELA BOND



Guillaume Hanriot and his wife, Ingrid, won the Community Development Award from the Platte County Development Council for their work at Café des Amis.

cess can take more than ten hours for certain dishes. However, even *sous vide* has become a staple in French cooking over the past thirty years, especially when cooking foie gras, which is a staple at Café des Amis and one of the many items to look for on the menu.

However, with the traditional French dishes, it might be difficult to pronounce some of the menu items or even know what you’re ordering. It might be a good idea to pick up a *French Cuisine for Dummies* or a pocket translation dictionary for a night out at Café des Amis. If that’s too much trouble, Guillaume and Ingrid have a suggestion: try the bouillabaisse.

A traditional French Riviera dish, the bouillabaisse is Ingrid’s favorite to cook. It’s a light saffron seafood broth with salmon, monkfish, clams, mussel, and prawns served with a Herbs de Provence crostini and rouille sauce.

“It’s our signature dish here,” Guillaume says. “We’ve been doing it now for four or five years. I don’t think we can take it off of the menu or we’re going to have a riot at the restaurant.”

Split into two dining rooms, Café des Amis has seating for up to fifty people indoors. For lunch service, the bistro offers an additional fifty seats outdoors.

The New Guard

Many self-help books and articles state that getting laid off can be an opportunity. For Carl McConnell, that opportunity was opening an ingredient-focused, intimate, French-inspired restaurant.

“It was always a dream of ours to do it just like this,” says Carl, owner and chef of Stone Soup Cottage. “We didn’t think that we would do it so soon, but I was laid off from my job. So those plans had to be hurried up a bit, hence the creation back in 2009.”

It’s true that Carl and his wife, Nancy, had wanted to open a fine-dining restaurant since the day they met aboard a Russian icebreaker, but they were both in the international travel business at the time. Carl was aboard the ship as the executive chef, and Nancy was the cruise director. When the cruise ended, Carl didn’t want to part from Nancy, so he, a Massachusetts native, decided to move to St. Louis.

“Nancy told me that I had to come here,” he says. “She wasn’t going to come to Boston, so I had to come here.”

The two settled in Cottleville, which turned out to be the perfect place to open their own res-



taurant. In rural St. Charles County, just a short jaunt from St. Louis, the location had everything they needed for their vision of hosting intimate dinners with elegant European food, local ingredients, and a set six-course menu with two other small-plate dishes and a glass of sparkling wine.

Before opening the restaurant, Carl—in the true spirit of Midwestern neighborliness—approached Norman Wiese, who lived nearby and operated a long-standing, family-run nursery.

“I just came over one afternoon and talked to Norman, and I said, ‘Hey, I’m opening this restaurant just up the street, and I’d love to have some homegrown produce to offer my clients,’” Carl says. “He gave me a seed book and said, ‘Hey, pick out what you want. I’ll put it in the ground and see how it goes.’ And that started a wonderful, wonderful relationship.”

Since then, the restaurant has grown into one of the most notable in the state. Within a year of its opening, Stone Soup Cottage had already garnered the respect of local food critics. By 2010, *The Week* named it one of the top five regional restaurants in the United States. But

Carl and Nancy also host private functions at Stone Soup Cottage. The summer is an especially busy time of the year for them because they host many small weddings.

Stone Soup Cottage has grown in other ways outside of name recognition.

In 2013, Carl and Nancy moved to a 6.5-acre plot of land on the Weise family’s property, less than a mile from their original location. On the land, the restaurant moved into a refurbished nineteenth-century barn, which adds a level of ambience that takes the McConnells’ dinner service one step closer to the dream they always had in mind.

To that end, nearly all the produce is now grown on site. Norman and his family still do all of the growing according to what Carl and Nancy want to see on their menu. And recently, they have placed an emphasis on year-round growing in heated greenhouses.

“We grow every year, no pun intended,” Carl says. “Our produce program, our farming program, it grows every year that we’re here.”

However much the new location has added

to its success, Stone Soup Cottage’s location in a larger sense makes the restaurant a success.

“I think French cuisine is far more familiar here,” Carl says. “And of course, it makes sense to do it in St. Louis because of the great French influence here of the mid-eighteenth century into the late-eighteenth century.”

While French cuisine works well in Missouri and Carl loves using local ingredients, his cooking style comes from a lifetime of training.

He is classically trained in northern Italian cuisine, and while working for a private jet travel business based in Seattle, he had the opportunity to extensively travel France. There, he gained a deep knowledge of the classic cooking style by visiting different markets and meeting different chefs. His time there piqued his passion, but that passion had lived within him since he was a child.

“On afternoons when I got home from school, my mother would allow me to put the homework off until closer to dinner time, so I could catch Julia Child on WBEZ channel nine at four o’clock,” he says. “Cooking is something that I’ve always loved to do and wanted to do for a profession. So once I got to culinary school, of course all of the education is rooted in French cuisine and French technique.”

Now, he gets to apply those techniques he has learned since he was a child to creating a new six-course menu each month. He works



This smoked duck cannelloni with brown butter, fried sage, toasted pine nuts, and petite vegetables is made with produce harvested on Stone Soup Cottage’s property.

on everything from seasonal soufflés and crepes to *gougères* and charcuterie boards in the winter. And lately, he’s been focused on savory, French pastries.

“We’ve been working with a lot of filled pastries,” Carl says. “Tonight, for example, I have this really beautiful cured and smoked Missouri trout that we’re wrapping in a pastry with red onion and *crème fraîche*, and then

we deep fry them. And we’ll serve that with greens out of my greenhouse and baby carrots, also out of my greenhouse, and French breakfast radishes, as well.”

Despite all the growth and natural evolution of the restaurant over the past five years, one thing will remain the same: Stone Soup Cottage’s dinners will stay true to their intimate nature. Thursday through Saturday, no more than thirty-four people will be seated at six thirty, and at seven, Carl and Nancy will personally serve their guests a multi-course meal with a menu that changes each month, adjusting to the season. It’s McConnell’s original vision for their culinary institution, and nothing will change that.

“We view dining as a ... how should I put this ... it’s a very personal thing, of course,” Carl says. “Eating is the one thing that we all have in common. We all have to eat. It ties us to the earth. And it’s a very, very personal thing. Nancy and I wanted to create an environment where people could come to us and sit with their loved ones for three hours, three and a half hours, undisturbed, creating memories and getting spectacular service in an incredible atmosphere.”

This rustic farm house can seat up to eighty people, but Nancy and Carl seat only thirty-four people for their regular dinners, Thursday through Saturday. Reservations are required.



This *pitsou* soup with tomato, zucchini, and cream is Stone Soup Cottage’s take on *pitsou*, a cold sauce native to the Provençal region of France that’s made of garlic, fresh basil, and olive oil.



CARMEN TROESSER

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