

INSIDE LE MANOIR AUX QUAT' SAISONS: *Celebrating 25 Years of Two Michelin Stars*

By Roger Weatherburn Baker, *Naples Chevalier*


LAST SUMMER, MY WIFE, SON, DAUGHTER-in-law, and I stayed at Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons, a fifteenth-century manor house in the Oxfordshire countryside that Maître de la Confrérie de la Chaîne des Rôtisseurs Raymond Blanc O.B.E. has turned into an incomparable hotel and restaurant. For Monsieur Blanc, 2009 was a banner year. He celebrated the silver anniversary of his legendary venue—one of a few establishments in the world to maintain a two-star Michelin rating for twenty-five consecutive years, and the only one to train a new Michelin-starred chef each of those years.

Our rental car begrudgingly tolerated my gear crushing and was as happy to arrive as we were. We glided past a sentry standing discreetly near a hedgerow en route to the hotel's graveled courtyard. Our tired luggage was handled with the kind of respect ordinarily reserved for the latest Louis Vuitton collection. A bevy of smartly dressed staff members greeted us. After our reservation was confirmed, we were released to the interior, popping out of the tight lobby like corks from champagne bottles.

We were escorted down a brick pathway framed by Relais & Châteaux award-winning gardens, through glass doors, and along padded corridors to arrive at our elegant suites, which preeminent British designer Sir Terence Conran described as "a hymn of contemporary style."

French doors opened to charming brick patios and gardens. Cocktails were served on wooden benches on a lawn clipped close enough to serve as a billiard table. Bees zig-zagged over beds of lavender. Suited young men stood ready to respond to the slightest nod. Bronze sculptures pretended to play croquet. We were then ushered into one of Le Manoir's cozy dining rooms—a sea of white linen and sparkling silver. The four of us opted for the seven-course "Menu Gourmand" so as to sample Monsieur Blanc's seasonal specialties.

Servers as polished as the silver expertly presented the menu, which included such delights as Cornish crab salad with mango, yogurt, and osetra caviar; grilled Icelandic halibut with kalamata olives; and roasted Orkney scallops with curry oil and roasted Aylesbury duck breast.

Having amassed numerous accolades—among them the Order of the British Empire bestowed by the Queen in 2007—sixty-year-old Raymond Blanc is not one to rest on his laurels. "We've just spent 300,000 pounds [\$475,000] upgrading our kitchen ranges," he said. "We're going for that third Michelin star." 



(Above) Executive Chef Gary Jones and Maître de la Confrérie de la Chaîne des Rôtisseurs Raymond Blanc O.B.E.



(Below) Chevalier Roger Weatherburn Baker.

