

Lauréat 2000

Background

One year ago, when I sent readers a letter announcing the first of my “less ambitious” guides, I also asked them to complete a section on the order form called “Favourites”. My letter included these words: “I would dearly love to know your six favourite hotels and restaurants in *French Leave Finesse (FLF)*.” I added the following thought: “If many hundreds of you submit entries then the winning hotels and restaurants, say the top 20 or so, could be the subject of a more than interesting and useful chapter in *Binns Breaks volume 2*.”

The response was fantastic. I received thousands and thousands of nominations. Within a week or two, after the first 100 or so letters arrived, a distinct picture of the likely winners emerged. The picture hardly changed as a cascade of nominations continued to arrive during the following months.

The 20 winners, listed in place name alphabetical order, are the subjects of a special 12-page supplement which I’ve enclosed with *Binns Breaks 2*. The top three winners are clearly identified; number one won by a handsome margin. I was so pleased with the huge enthusiastic response that I asked my brother to design a “Lauréat 2000” diploma for the winners. He produced 20 diplomas, A4-sized and in colour (see the mini black and white version on the supplement cover). All the winners have received a copy and, hopefully, have hung the diplomas in prominent positions in their hotels and restaurants.

Please read the entire 12-page supplement. All 20 deserve your support; I can guarantee not one will let you down. They cover the entire price spectrum – though I do appreciate five or six will be a touch too expensive for some readers. The “dearer handful” would be ideal for an anniversary or a special celebration, where those of you who have a tight budget would then have a valid reason for splashing out extra francs for something special. (One suggestion: bedrooms at the “dearer handful” are indeed dear, so stay at nearby less-expensive hotels, including those belonging to large chains.)

Free aperitifs

I’ve got some good news for you. I put the following question to each of the 19 winning restaurants and hotels with dining rooms (one is *sans restaurant*): “If a reader visits you with my new guide (*Binns Breaks 2*) and the 12-page supplement in his or her possession – which could be shown to you before the meal – would you be prepared to offer a free aperitif (a *kir* for example, or any house aperitif) to each guest with the reader?” (The reader, too, *bien sûr!*)

All nineteen agreed, in writing. All you have to do is to follow the instructions given above: show both *Binns Breaks volume 2*, plus the supplement, to *les patrons*. The 19 are identified by a wine glass printed in the margin below the establishment’s name. Alongside the wine glass is a person’s name: in the event of any difficulty ask to see the named individual. But really, they’ll not be problems as all the favourites are run by in-place, hands-on owners.



As a big thank you, on your behalf, I’ve sent 50 copies of the supplements to each of the 19 who accepted my “idea” and to Pégomas as well. They can give the supplements to other clients, of any nationality. Alas, the free aperitif is not available to the latter as the supplement says not a word about the scheme; all that shows are mysterious wine glasses. Only the 2,000 or so buyers of *Binns Breaks 2* can take up the generous offer – 19 times, or far more if you revisit!

20 runners-up

You will be interested by the following list of 20 establishments, a “reserve” team of runners-up, listed in place name alphabetical order. They are: Bannegon (Aub. Moulin de Chaméron); Beuvron-en-Auge (Pavé d’Auge); Boulliland (Host. du Vieux Moulin); Boulogne-sur-Mer (La Matelote); Brantôme (Moulin de l’Abbaye); Chablis (Host. des Clos); Chinon (Diderot); Conques (Ste-Foy); Les Eyzies-de-Tayac (Cro-Magnon); Kaysersberg (Remparts); Laguiole (Michel Bras); Mailly-le-Château (Le Castel); Montreuil (Chât. de Montreuil); Montrond-les-Bains (Host. La Poularde); Mougins (Feu Follet); Pailherols (Auberge des Montagnes); St-Père-sous-Vézelay (L’Espérance); St-Vaast-la-Hogue (France et Fuchsias); Saulges (Ermitage); Tammies (Laborerie).

That’s quite a reserve team: one three-star chef (Bras) plus a two-star cook who surely will win back his recently lost third (Meneau at St-Père).

Frédery Girardet

One point of note: Crissier, in Switzerland, included in all my guides from 1980 onwards, would have been in fifth position in the Lauréat 2000 winners list. However, Frédy retired just after I published *FLF*. In view of this and because of the “French” nature of the diploma I decided not to include the restaurant in the top 20. Frédy’s successor, Philippe Rochat, who worked with him for many years, has also gone on to win three Michelin stars.

Cooking ratings (My long-used, foolproof system; I know of no better.)

Cooking 1 Simple, straightforward fare which, more often than not, will consist of *cuisine Bourgeoise* (home cooking) specialities.

Cooking 2 Good, competent cuisine (of the Michelin Bib Gourmand type). When standards vary, up or down, I use **Cooking 2-3** or **Cooking 1-2** as a rating.

Cooking 3 Very good cooking. Some faults but close or equal to Michelin one-star standards. If the latter are sometimes higher I use **Cooking 3-4**.

Cooking 4 Excellent cuisine, often innovative and ambitious and rarely flawed. A few exceptional chefs win a **Cooking 4-5** rating.

Cooking 5 Superb, flawless cuisine (only Girardet has ever won this rating).

Abbreviations

All but two abbreviations are self-explanatory. “Region”: for details of regional cuisine, specialities and cheeses see p397-416 in *FLF*. “Mich”: the page number and grid square on which the entry is located in the *Michelin spiral-bound atlas*: first set (editions 1987-97); second set (editions 1998-2000).