

MONDAY, APRIL 8, 2024

PERSPECTIVE

'Diet Coke with my Duck a L'Orange, s'il vous plait'

By Joel Bertet

It was April in Paris and the Charlie Parker classic was playing in my mind as I stood in front of Notre Dame. Brian, the American company President, Franz, the French/Swiss business investor, and I had spent all morning walking the streets of Paris discussing our negotiation strategy with a large French fashion brand. (Individuals and company names have been changed due to a subsequent confidential settlement agreement.) After several years of successful business, tensions were high amid a territorial dispute and a looming expiration of the contract term. Negotiations had stalled and we were at an impasse with the French company. Lawyers had been consulted and lawsuits were beginning to brew. Franz, the Swiss Investor asked: "Have either of you ever experienced La Tour d'Argent?" La Tour d'Argent is a monument of French cuisine. In France, it's almost akin to a haj. You have to make the pilgrimage at least once in your lifetime. Michelin Rated and founded in 1582, it is the most recognized culinary institution in France. Getting a reservation can take months. "Let's walk over and see if we can get in for lunch," said Franz. This isn't the Cheesecake factory, and you don't just put your name on the waiting list and get handed an electronic device that buzzes and flashes when it's your turn for deep fried avocado eggrolls.

"Bonjour messieurs, bienvenue a La Tour d'Argent." We entered and were immediately ushered to



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the vestiaire where we were sized up and given jackets and ties. Franz explained that the iconic dish was the pressed duck, "Le canard a la presse." The ducks are raised at the restaurant's private farm and each patron that orders it is presented with a postcard and a serial number for their duck. Brian and I ordered the duck. A few minutes after our orders came the sommelier, "alors les messieurs on commander le canard a la presse"

and then turned to Franz "et monsieur a commander le poisson." He opened his book of spells and suggested a white wine that would pair well with both the duck and the fish. Brian blurted out: "I'll have a diet coke to start." The sommelier slammed the book closed and said: "We don't have ze diet coke here!" and stormed away. Franz was mortified. He tried to explain to Brian that it was very insulting to order diet coke at such an estab-

lishment. Brian dug in: "Well I am the client, and the client is always right. If I want a diet coke dag nab it that some bitch is gonna bring me one." The meal continued in heated debate. After our main course the arrival of the salads added more fuel to the fire. Brian started cutting up his lettuce with his knife and fork. Franz, already irritated, told Brian that we do not cut our salad we fold it. Brian responded in kind that he was going