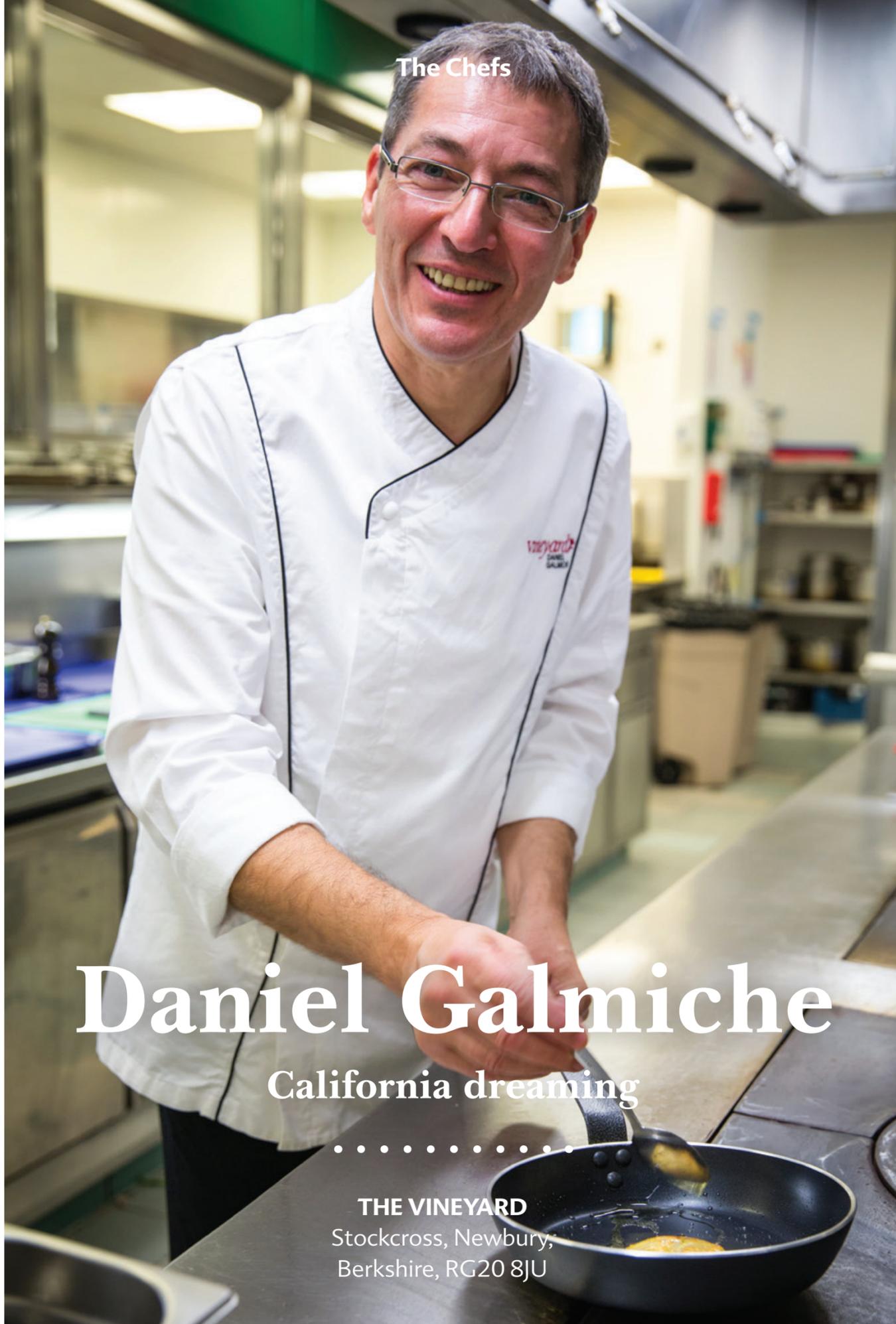


The Chefs



Daniel Galmiche

California dreaming

THE VINEYARD
Stockcross, Newbury,
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Daniel Galmiche



From the eastern French border, to a little piece of California hidden away in West Berkshire. Jenny Linford speaks to Daniel Galmiche about his desires of becoming a chef from a young age.



“ My training was often super-hard, but I learnt because of it. ”

From his rich accent and eloquent turn of phrase to his commitment to maintaining haute cuisine skills in the kitchen, award-winning chef Daniel Galmiche – despite his many years working abroad – remains French to his fingertips. At The Vineyard restaurant, his light, elegant cooking is rooted in the classic world of French cuisine, albeit with a contemporary touch.

The fascination with good food, perceived as an aspect of the French national character, was with Daniel from the start. At the age of five he came into the kitchen and announced to his amused mother that he wanted to be a

chef, an anecdote she still tells affectionately. Growing up, as he did in a region of Franche Comte along the Swiss border, surrounded by mountains, lakes and forests, he learnt from an early age the realities of agricultural life, visiting the smallholding his family kept for their own use every week. “We used to feed the animals. I remember my hand being so sore from mashing potatoes with grain into a paste to feed the pigs and the hens.” His father, a notable shot, took him and his brother hunting in the forest, where he showed them how to track animals such as wild boar and venison. “We ate a lot of pheasant; the freezer was full of pheasant, I remember! In hunting

season you stock up for the whole year.” It was his great aunt, a wonderful cook, whom he credits with giving him a love of food. He talks with deep nostalgia of the “wonderful smells” in the kitchen of his childhood – fruit picked and turned into tarts, wild mushrooms freshly gathered by them in the forests, venison roasting in the oven. Knowing this, whenever he visits his 81-year-old mother in France she phones him to ask what dish he would like, reserves a cockerel or a hen from the farmer and makes his favourite casserole for his arrival.

Despite doing well academically, Daniel’s determination to become a chef saw him, at the young age

of fifteen and a half, begin a three-year apprenticeship at Hotel Beausite, Luxeuil de Bains. “It was hard work,” he says emphatically. “The owner was an ex-chef of Fernard Point, La Pyramide in Vienne, where Bocuse had trained. It was very strict. We all had a classic training. We made everything by hand, so quenelles by hand on ice.” This grounding in haute cuisine was to stand Daniel in good stead when after completing his apprenticeship; he went to London to work at Le Gavroche, as one of the restaurant’s youngest chef de partie. “They, too, were making everything by hand. When you do it that way you see the skill and the passion of the chef.”



The Chef



Daniel Galmiche



Arriving in England “was a shock,” Daniel remembers laughingly. “I thought my English was good because I’d done well at school but I jumped in a taxi and the guy had a heavy Cockney accent and I thought ‘Oh my god!’ I just handed a piece of paper with the address and went to Le Gavroche.” He remembers his time at Le Gavroche with great affection and is still good friends with Michel Roux Jnr. “When you are ex-Gavroche you are ex-Gavroche all your life – it’s like a family.” London in 1977, the Jubilee year, was an “amazing” place to be in for a young man from the country. “So exciting when the carriage with the Queen was passing; you don’t see that in France. It was the time of the teddy boys, Elvis Costello, The Clash – fabulous!”

Daniel’s career as a chef and a willingness to travel, saw him working in restaurants in countries around the world, although always cooking French food himself. Living in Singapore as he did while at Restaurant L’Aigle d’Or gave him a taste for the vivid flavours of Southeast Asian cuisine – “chilli crab, my god, that’s good!” He fondly remembers the food from street food traders and their

skill at making dishes – “not just the speed of how they cook, but how it was always right.” His focus throughout his training and work has always been the world of fine dining. “It’s the discipline, the accuracy of what we’re doing, the quality of ingredients. It’s time-consuming but we’re seeking perfection – I’m a bit obsessive.”

After working at a series of prestigious restaurants including Harvey’s of Bristol and L’Ortolan, he was working at Cliveden when he was headhunted and appointed as Executive Chef of The Vineyard. Owned by Sir Peter Michael, who also owns an eponymous vineyard in California noted for producing “some of the best wines in the world”, the wine cellar at The Vineyard restaurant is a splendid affair, which Daniel fully appreciates. In terms of his cooking, Daniel creates “elegant, colourful dishes but very much focussed on the produce and the flavour,” drawing on his impressive grounding in classic French cooking to create dishes such as this autumn’s skillfully-made terrine of pheasant and guinea fowl. There is an “intensity and a lightness” to his food, he explains. His autumn menu for example, will feature a dish of

scallops with caramelised celeriac purée, flavoured with clarified butter, ‘burnt’ celeriac, apple and the scallops, pan-fried in a little olive oil on just one side, then flashed and drizzled with high quality olive oil. Ninety-five percent of the ingredients he uses are British – “Scottish langoustine, Orkney hand-dived scallops and lamb, grass-fed Aberdeen Angus beef from a small farm in Scotland, Laverstoke Park Farm cheese.”

His arduous training in the demanding world of French, haute cuisine restaurants means that he respects the drive for high standards, the commitment to quality. “My training was often super-hard, but I learnt because of it. It’s like all those chefs who worked for Gordon Ramsay – they had a tough time but they are where they are because of what he taught them.” When it comes to teaching his staff himself, he feels that “you need a balance. Training properly and being strict is important, but it’s not necessary to swear, or throw pans at them.” A charismatic figure, he observes “when you’re passionate, you inject that into a team. People will follow you.” Confident and relaxed in front of a camera, he enjoys his time on

Saturday Kitchen, relishing the challenge of cooking live. “When I get back to the restaurant, I discover half my customers have been watching me,” he says happily.

When it comes to the British food scene, he admires “the mix of cuisines you have here – a mix of all my travels in one place.” Thinking back to how it has changed since he first arrived as a teenager, he exclaims, “the difference is huge!” He credits influential French chefs – the Roux Brothers, Raymond Blanc, Pierre Koffmann, “a little bit myself because I trained a lot of people” – with “injecting passion” into the British dining scene through their example, “reminding people of the great produce you’ve got here. Chefs are now foraging here, as we’ve always done in France; there is a love of food among British chefs.” He appreciates the recent move to make fine dining more relaxed and welcoming. “At weekends, at least 60% of the clientele is from London. People come here and they love it, the informality, the lack of stress, the way they can relax after a busy week at work. We are a London spirited restaurant in the countryside.”