

# Bertrand Grébaut

STORY by ANDREA PETRINI  
PHOTOGRAPHS by BENJAMIN SCHMUCK

At times it's impossible to know if Bertrand is smiling or if a cloud of misgiving is passing over his eyes. These are times of reactionary thought, culminating in the piazza behind banners of "NO to Marriage for All", foreshadowing public penance over an openness towards others.

Bertrand found the first sign of alarm one morning when he arrived at work. "I parked the scooter in front of the restaurant. I was half asleep, it was eight in the morning, when I saw what someone had written in the middle of the night on the ground in front of the entrance. There was an outline of a horse and the sentence: Shame on you for eating horses!"

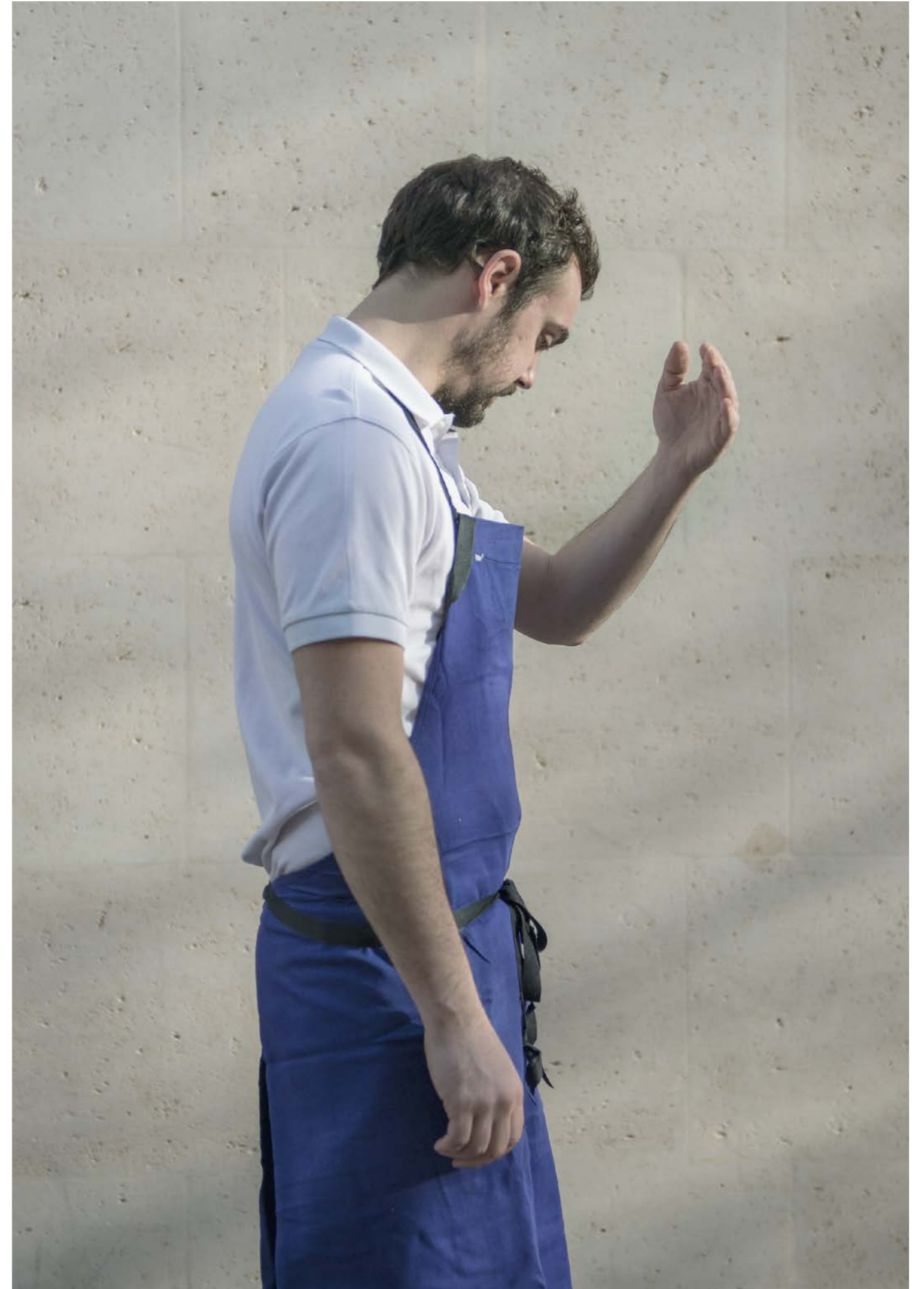
Will there come a day when cooks entering the kitchen have to be escorted by police officers for protection against the Right to Life Leagues for Sea Urchins or the Pro-Snail Coalition, legacies of the tumult of modern life? When food

fundamentalists are like the hyper Catholic protesters who prayed in front of cinemas showing Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ".

Watch out from behind those stoves for the boycotting hooligans of Romeo Castellucci's controversial show *Sul concetto di volto nel figlio di Dio!* [A theatrical show thought to be offensive to Jesus, and contested by many Catholics]. Be on your guard in the kitchen, as at the theatre, for the voices of those who invoke the seven plagues on sinners. Those who wish the eternal flames of Hell for the gastro-hipsters of decadent multiculturalism, whom they consider worse than the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorra; like those who love the Tataki of horse heart with herbs and vegetables that Grébaud serves every now and then under the table - a bit like the Eucharist - and those who are after something even more hardcore...

The noisy Gallic majority doesn't know that - even more than Giano Bifronte - Bertrand Grébaud has two faces. One, the official one, is that of a successful thirty year old who, since the day he opened in the late spring of 2011, has made Septime into a beacon of revival not only in EstBa, the hipsterland east of the Bastille, but in the world of French dining. To uncover his other side requires a little more work.

A lot of water has passed under the bridge since he cut his teeth on the knives of Alain Passard's Socratic school. "Alain has his own way of giving you a lot of freedom. The best method is making you confront your own contradictions, creating in a nonchalant way real climaxes of tension in the kitchen, that put you to the test," he says, recalling his time at the 'legume' cook's atelier. This is also where he met Tatiana one fine day, his guiding light and the woman of his life. "She has just finished working for Pascal Barbot, and now she's looking for a place to open a restaurant too..."





But wait, we were talking about the other Grébaud. The one who is not exactly an ideal brother-in-law. With his two daily performances inside those four walls, Bertrand has become reliable. Everyone cheers for him, including the bank manager, who is surprised by his rapid repayment of debts. He has even perhaps begun to grow up. But he has certainly not forgotten the wild times before all that. When, with Theo Pourriat, his then schoolmate and now current maître d' in the dining room, they plastered the university with street art.

That is the B-side, the dark side of the lunatic Grébaud. The Hyde side of the esteemed Jekyll, when he wore the same basketball shoes he wears today, wreaking havoc in the wake of the graffiti gangs of Paris. Urban art in movement, on walls, in hangars, on roofs and in the metro. "It was an artists' collective of film makers and graffiti artists. Together with Theo, they have remained my best friends. Romain Gavras was a film director like his father Costa, who made *Z*, *An Orgy of Power*. There was Vincent Cassel, Monica Bellucci's companion. There was Kim Chapiron, who was also an extreme filmmaker, the son of artist Kiki Picasso. In the group's first short films, I did a little of everything, including the cooking. They were the first to tell me that maybe it wouldn't be bad to make my cooking into a real job. But they were also the first to be surprised when I disappeared for two years to work as an apprentice, when I took this new path," he says.

Don't listen to the *Gastronomy Encyclopaedia*. Bertrand's entrance via the front door didn't begin with *Septime*. It was in fact when he led the kitchen for the 2007 opening of *Agapé* in Paris, where he was applauded for the net contrast between the smoked veal carpaccio, classic of the classics that has been pirated by half the world, and the prim atmosphere of an upmarket restaurant. A place that was both boring and breath-taking (in its dishes) and exaggeratedly prized by tyre manufacturers (Michelin). It was a lightning success. *Agapé* saw Bertrand climb the Parisian firmament more rapidly than a star to then disappear, almost slamming the door, for half a year when he travelled through the Far East with his partner Tatiana. A fleeting sabbatical of existential reflection, while the *Septime* project took shape: "I knew what I wanted. A place that not only reflected me, but my whole generation. More informal than elegant, where you could cook without restraint, without enforced formats, without menus that had heavy obligations. Where you could follow the feeling, capture the instant. I worked out everything with Theo. Thick as thieves from school, we agreed on everything".

Just to repeat it again: as far as the encyclopaedia goes, we've been through all that. The real manifestation of his uninhibited vitality in the kitchen can be found surfing the net. Click on the *Blogothèque* site ([www.blogotheque.net](http://www.blogotheque.net)) to see the episode - unplugged and uncut in the sense of the *Chef's Cut* - of the series *Chefs à Emporter*, that was refused by the *Arte* television channel. Chef Grébaud departs at night, followed by his pal Theo, penetrating the Paris metro like a clandestine foreigner with the cops on his heels. Shut inside, he was a fugitive for a night in the darkness of the tunnels, amongst metallic clicking, deafening silences and mournful screeching, for a cooking performance captured by the solo camera of Colin Solal Cardo. One performance. Like Ben Shewry, who fried Cantonese rice while riding a bicycle, Blaine Wetzel who smoked a



salmon in a shoe box, and Redzepi who was filmed cooking fish on red-hot rocks under the sand. "I wanted to do something extreme using the third high voltage rail of the metro to cook meat. We hid inside the whole night between Saturday and Sunday morning only to discover that after the last train passed by, unfortunately, the electricity is automatically cut off. I originally wanted to cook horse heart, which is very quick to execute. But I hadn't been able to find it and I had to use veal heart, which takes a little longer to cook. More so because without electricity we had to use a flame to re-heat our griddle, the red-hot track, which was the only technology of this natural but extremely brutal kind of cooking". With the first stirrings of the morning, after a night in the belly of the underground in a setting worthy of a John Carpenter horror movie, the three stove hackers crept out discreetly in single file to find, like Dante, the stars. They slipped back in the Sunday pre-dawn to the daily routine of a restaurant that had been caught by the boomerang of its own success.

Septime is a unifying force that brings people together. Those who want cooking that pushes the boundaries and those who want to eat according to the mood of the moment. The partisans of the elegant gesture, of the condi-

ment and light cooking, and those of the destabilising pairings. The Taliban of the only vegetables and those of the natural wines. Those of the neo-bistro generation and even those (and there are legions of them!) who can see beyond the wooden tables and the open kitchen, beyond the decor of Nordic simplicity with a post-industrial touch, the respect for the rules and the innate capacity for making. The delicacy of the cooking, the consistency of the dishes, the faithful service that is always delivered with a smile, and the active presence of many actors on an open stage. It's where penniless youngsters and tempered gourmards are a reply to journalists, artists and winemakers, with the backing of the whole neighbourhood behind them.

"The problem, and it's the same with other restaurants, is that bookings never fall off. You want to do two services, to put a table aside for friends and frequent clients, but you are always walking on glass. People get angry, and rightly so, when you tell them there is no place for two months. The same thing happens in other places, in all categories of restaurants from L'Astrance to Greg Marchand's Frenchie and obviously Chateaubriand. It's as if, all of a sudden, the public needs other things, other cooking, different places," explains Theo, trying to get to the heart of the restaurant's transversal differences.

Don't do as we do. Don't criticise him about the system of pairing menus, the forced pairing between food and wine that are beginning to get on our nerves. He will reply that it is a waste of breath, that obviously we are right. In fact, at



## Smoke cured venison / strawberries / tarragon-watercress

*wood-smoked venison (sirloin)*

*wild strawberries*

*tarragon puree*

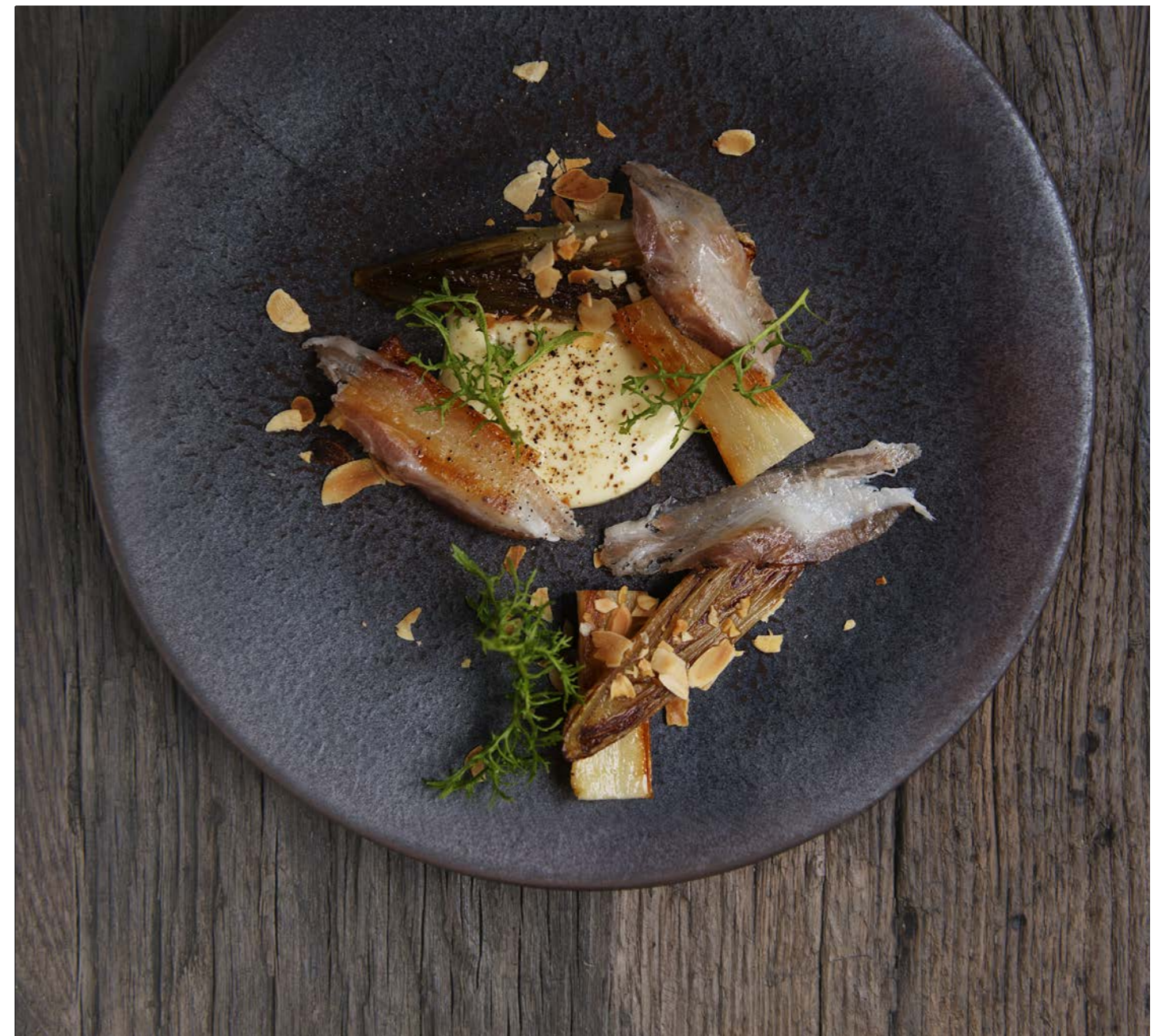
*watercress oil*

*bittercress and sorrel shoots*

*olive oil, Banyuls rancio vinegar, sea salt flakes, fresh ground pepper*

The venison meat gives texture, smoking emphasises the wild taste, but it's the flavours that finish the dish. It's a simple dish that plays on the combination of the almost metallic green of the herbs with the acidity of the strawberries and Banyuls rancio vinegar.

The menu always starts with a raw dish that has a predominant note of acidity.



## Endive in season / Comté cheese / Colonnata lard

*Endive, vacuum cooked then caramelised on a hotplate*

*Scorzoneria, vacuum cooked and then caramelised*

*Colonnata lard, thinly sliced*

*toasted almonds*

*cream of Comté cheese, aged 24 months*

*green mustard shoots*

A quest for flavour and sweetness, free from acidity. The fat from the lard and the cream from Comté cheese counterbalances the bitterness of the endive. Despite its contemporary styling, this dish is drawn from classic rustic cuisine (almost classifiable as junk food) such as endive with ham, tartiflette or carbonara.

**"KINKS, BEATLES, STONES, I LIKE THEM ALL. THE MUSIC I LISTENED TO WHEN I WAS IN THE GRAFFITI PERIOD AND WHEN I STARTED IN THE KITCHEN WAS OBVIOUSLY HIP-HOP. I COME FROM THERE"**

Septime, the option of food and wine pairing is not even listed next to the price of the menu. Homo or hetero, the pairing should be a guarantee for all, but never forced. "In fact we do not offer it. I make suggestions of wine by the glass, without seeking the perfect communion with the dish. Perfection does not exist and it is thus ultra-subjective. I don't follow the idea of a different glass for every dish. The good thing about natural wines is that they change so much with the passage of time. A white wine with a smoked venison tartar and begonia leaves with oil infused with watercress and mounted with valerian might be a lot different a half hour later, with salsifies and braised/grilled endives and almonds, Comté cream and Colonnata lard", he says, more than a little proud of his wines and Italian products as he opens a Slovenian Ribolla Gialla from Dario Princic.

With the Bacchus debate closed ("We will open the very first 'Septime Cave' in January, a wine bar next door where nibbles are served while you taste the wines that we like. Pierre, a friend who is crazy about wine but a professional DJ, will be tending the bar. We need to put in a CD player and sound system to really get the evenings going"), Bertrand also closes the debate on his interpretation of cooking. "What do you want... written recipes? Really? Don't even think about it! At the most I'll give you indications with a list of the ingredients. You cannot fix a dish on a piece of paper. Mine change continually, every day there are variations on the basis of the market and on the basis of suggestions from the kitchen brigade. When you do cooking that is as simple as that of Septime, the recipe is never closed, never finished. I'll give you what will make your mouth water, the ingredients and a couple of basic suggestions. It's up to the readers to interpret them". It fell to Ms Morelli, the editor of the magazine you have in your hands - between a duck heart with egg yolk and crystallised broccoli leaf and a formidable salted cod with shiitake and black turnip with a compote of bitter oranges - to publicly dissent. She took a position on this lengthy diatribe that I have replayed here for you:

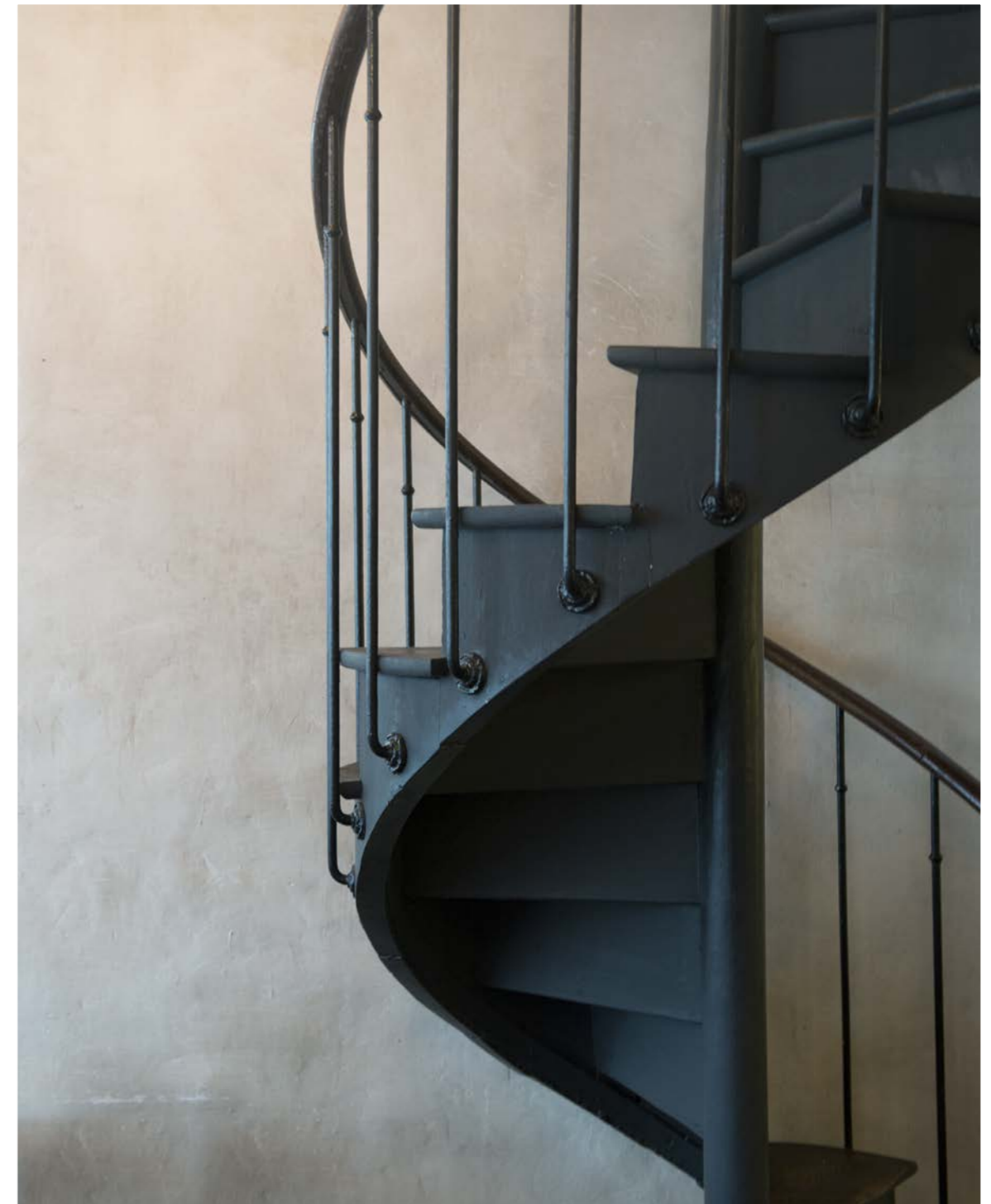
Petrini: "Grébaut's cooking and Septime, the restaurant, minimal but elegant, is a bit rock n'roll but with arrangements so melodious that they seem the culinary Beatles. While the Chateaubriand of Iñaki Aizpitarte, similar but different, I would say is more towards the Rolling Stones. Do you agree?"

Ms Morelli: "No, not at all! Nothing to do with the Beatles! The Rolling Stones are here! Feel the rhythm, the riff in the dishes! For Iñaki the Rolling Stones are trifles, he surely finds them too commercial. For me Chateaubriand is punk!

It's like a political talk show on TV, and Theo intervenes while pouring: "There is nothing more punk than the Chateaubriand. Personally I adore the Beatles and the Stones. Even though I find that Septime has an energy that is a bit soul and a bit rock but always harmonious, like the songs of Ray Davies in the Kinks era. And you Bertrand, what do you think?"

Grébaut, too busy plating up, takes his time before launching into his musicology deliberations at the end of the service. "Kinks, Beatles, Stones, I like them all. The music I listened to when I was in the graffiti period and when I started in the kitchen was obviously hip-hop. I come from there," he says, adding a minute later: "Iñaki is punk, there's no doubt about that. Look how he cooks, vrraaang! vrraaang! Two or three ingredients thrown together and what a marvel, everything he touches is a success. More than punk, he is hardcore. For me he is like a brother. We have the same tastes. Like me, he adores Raquel del Baratin, René and Passard. We haunt the same winemakers, the same producers. This is why we made a blood contract. When the staff of Septime go to eat at the Chateaubriand, they never pay the bill. And when the Chateaubriand comes here they are our guests".

Speaking of the Wolf... It's Monday, the restaurant is closed and Iñaki, a cultured man of the world, has just returned from an opening. He parks his Lambretta while we chat and smoke the last cigarette on the sidewalk with Theo, Bertrand and Morelli. "Is this the time to arrive for dinner?" jokes Grébaut. "No, I've already eaten, I'll just have a drink with you then I'm off to bed. Tomorrow is Tuesday, we re-open and it's the hardest day of the week," replies Iñaki, lighting up. You have never seen a punk that smokes like Iñaki... Marlboro Light, girly cigarettes! "Every now and then he tries to act like a man. If the



Chateaubriand hadn't opened the way there wouldn't be, along with Septime, half the places there are now on the Parisian scene. Ten years ago, the first wind came through from Barbot. L'Astrance was the first to propose a single degustation, without a menu and without bells and whistles. Signature cooking that was fresh and full of ideas, accessible, open to experiences accumulated during travel, faithful to a product but also creative. Then Chateaubriand came along and broke down walls and doors. Then René shortly afterwards. More than influences I'd say we were on similar wavelengths. This is why I am not keen to theorise. I cook with my fingers in the plug of the moment. Seeking a balance between technique and fantasy, an eye on research and the other necessarily on the market".

Between avant-garde and mainstream, Septime aims for reason and for the heart. When you love, you don't count. One, two, three glasses. When we went to Grébaut, we stayed right in front of the restaurant at 71 of the same rue de Charonne. Hi-Matic, a low cost design hotel, seems put there on purpose. To return from Septime even on four legs, it's not even twenty metres as the crow flies. Bob Noto

would leave with his full glass still in his hand, saying "I'll bring it back next time". There's no need to pay for delivery. The next day, at eight in the morning, Grébaut is opening the shutters, while we sleep the slumber of the righteous in rooms across the street. When you book, don't forget to ask for the room normally occupied by Fulvio Pierangelini, a habitual customer. The Supreme Master knows what he's talking about, and not just about cooking, also about beds. Try it to believe it.

### Septime

80 Rue de Charonne,  
75011 Paris,  
France  
Ph: +33 1 43 67 38 29  
septime-charonne.fr



## Divine Creazioni. Trovane un'altra uguale.



www.smeraldiniemenazzi.it

**DIVINE  
CREAZIONI.**

*La pasta senza uguali.*

- Ogni pezzo diverso dall'altro, come nella pasta fatta a mano.
- Ripieni inediti scelti tra i migliori DOP italiani.
- Interpretata dai più grandi chef italiani.
- 26 referenze con formati esclusivi e grandi formati.
- Sapientemente surgelata quindi senza conservanti e sempre disponibile.
- Studiata per darti il massimo del servizio e il pieno controllo del food cost.
- Sempre integra perchè confezionata in un esclusivo plateau.



S.p.A. - Lavezzola (Ra) - Emilia Romagna - Italy - +39 0545 80328 - www.surgital.com - surgital@surgital.it



## Dry duck breast / muscat pumpkin / seeds

*raw Provence Muscat pumpkin in  
mousseline sauce*

*dried duck breast*

*flaxseeds, sunflower seeds and buck-  
wheat*

*Treviso radicchio leaves*

A comfort food where the sweetness of the pumpkin veloute is offset by the saltiness of the duck and the toasted notes of the seeds. A few slightly bitter leaves give balance to the dish.



## Duck heart / mustard / broccoli leaves

*freshly seared duck heart, cooked rare*

*broccoli leaves*

*red mustard sprouts*

*juice from the meat, beurre noisette,  
Orléans mustard*

*soft boiled egg yolk*

It is important that the heart is just seared, keeping the inside rare so that it remains juicy. The balance of the dish comes from the contrast between the fat and the acid tang of the meat juice flavoured with the mustard, and the bitterness of the broccoli leaves grilled almost to the point of being burnt. To make the dish richer, giving it a gourmet touch, I nestle a soft boiled egg yolk under the grilled broccoli leaves to bring the flavours together.



## Pink Paris champignons / oysters / bittercress

*Consommé of pink Paris mushrooms*  
*Raw Paris mushrooms*  
*3 special Roumegous oysters*  
*bittercress or mustard*

A happy meeting of land and sea. We have tried to extract the purest and most distinctive flavour of Paris mushrooms to set it against the salty flavour of the oysters. The consommé is obtained through rapid extraction, avoiding sharp temperature rises, which allows us to keep the flavor of the raw mushrooms unaltered.



## Caramelized apple and pear / crumble / bread ice cream

*mousseline cream of caramelized apples and pears*  
*muscovado sugar crumble*  
*ice cream made from naturally rising rustic bread from our local baker (Rodolphe Lendemaine)*

This dessert almost feels like going back to our roots. What's interesting is mainly the quality of the ingredients used to prepare it. Dishes that represent simplicity taken to extremes are always my favourites.