

The New Criterion

Notebook March 2001

Once upon a time in France

by David Fromkin

Musings on the history of restaurants in France.

It is widely believed, and with reason, that, in the art of cooking, the French are supreme. France gave birth both to the techniques of the haute cuisine—its many ways to slice, peel, combine, heat, and the like—and to its repertoire: its basic sauces and traditional dishes. France produced the seminal theorist of the culture of food and taste, Brillat-Savarin, and the authoritative reference work of the culinary arts: the Larousse Gastronomique. The things themselves come from France, but so do the names for them. A consequence is that, as an air controller must understand English, however narrowly specialized the vocabulary, and an opera star must be able to sing in Italian, so a chef, ambitious to excel, ought to become fluent, if not in French, than at least in “Kitchen French.”

France’s leading position where food is concerned may be explained, at least in part, by the range and excellence of...

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David Fromkin was a lawyer, professor, and historian. He was renowned for his chronicling of the history of the Middle East and the Ottoman Empire.

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 19 Number 7 , on page 72

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