

Five Dials



NUMBER 18

A Bouquet for Sybille Bedford

ON THE CENTENARY OF HER BIRTH

featuring

ROAST FILLET OF PORK WITH FRESH SORREL MELTED IN COOKING JUICES

BRAISED ENDIVE

A SALAD OF PEACHES AND REDCURRANTS

SOME GOOD CHEESE

A GREAT TROCKENBEEREN AUSLEESE CABERNET TYPE OF HOCK

... and indeed a few bites more.



CONTRIBUTORS

SYBILLE BEDFORD was born on 16 March 1911, in Charlottenburg, Germany, and died in 2006 in London. In the course of a free-spirited and peripatetic life she lived in New York, Mexico, Rome, Paris and the Côte d'Azur and wrote ten books in English, all of which are classics of their kind, from her debut novel, *A Legacy*, to her 2005 memoir *Quicksands*, dedicated to Aliette Martin. In the words of Bruce Chatwin, 'When the history of modern prose in English comes to be written, Sybille Bedford will have to appear in any list of its most dazzling practitioners.' You can read more about her at www.sybillebedford.com.

ALIETTE MARTIN lives in Paris. She started her career by working for les Editions Plon and as an English–French translator. She entered La Comédie-Française, the first French national theatre, in 1975, where she is still working as directeur de la programmation. She met Sybille Bedford in 1992, when she translated her biography of Aldous Huxley into French. She later translated *As it was* and *Quicksands*, and is Sybille Bedford's literary executor.

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On Sybille Bedford

Aliette Martin remembers a writer for whom food and wine were a way of life

I love the world – the Mediterranean, the countryside, friends, wine and food, architecture, art, the riches of life. Why else does one write or paint, except to try to hold a little of that?

—Interview by Susha Guppy,
Paris Review, Spring 1993

YES, Sybille Bedford loved life. Novelist, biographer, essayist, journalist, she wrote often about the past, about the tragic century she survived – she died in 2006 and would have been a hundred years old on 16 March 2011 – but a deep *joie de vivre* is perceptible in her descriptions of the greatest and simplest pleasures of life, love, friendship, art, travel. She admired the dignity of daily tasks; she delighted, as her friend Amalia Elguera said, in ‘the wonder of light and water’ (‘A Brief Visit to Sybille Bedford’, 1989). ‘Her understanding of food and wine,’ Amalia continued, was ‘a communion with earth and sea and climate, particularly the earth and sea and climate of the Mediterranean shores that are for her the supreme instance of grace dissolved in place . . .’

Sybille’s interest in food and wine went back to her childhood when her eccentric father introduced her to superb clarets, never doubting that little girls already possess a good palate. He also told her tales about great French chefs he had known, and taught her how to cook. She first practised by trying to add flavour to the dogs’ food. Later, her interest went far beyond amateur practice. She would have published a cookery book, had the manuscript not been lost or stolen when she was travelling in Mexico in 1946, and she had a nearly professional knowledge of wine. On *Desert Island Discs*, her chosen book was Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, while her luxury was a French restaurant in full working order. When asked what other occupation she might have had in life, if not writing, she says she wished she had been a cook, ‘or in the wine trade – making, growing and selling wine’ (interview in the *Journal of the RSL*, Summer 1995).

In her writing as in her cooking, everything had to be true, authentic.

Her integrity was intrinsic in her every thought and action. Her tastes were both simple, even spartan, and sophisticated. Cooking was an art, hospitality sacred, sharing food the best opportunity for developing friendship and sparking off stimulating conversation.

She was fascinated by the influence of geography, soil and climate on wine and impressed by the craftsmanship of wine-making, by the mysterious process of growing, maturing, resting. She relished the nuances of colour, of tastes, the richness of the vocabulary, the poetry of labels.

With an accountant’s punctiliousness, she kept detailed inventories and stock certificates of her claret reserves, which she stored in the cellars of a London wine merchant. Her wine records bear coded signs meaning drawn, swopped,



sold, bought, not ready to drink; the wine is classified as top, highly recommended, recommended, borderline, poor, not recommended. The best bottles she had drunk were exhibited on top of her bookshelves in Old Church Street in Chelsea.

She had fun marking her wine catalogues with interrogation points, enthusiastic YESes and ferocious NOs. She adored debating with wine sellers, and in restaurants with sommeliers, who when she was in her nineties often finished the evening kneeling at her feet, amazed by the vitality, enthusiasm and knowledge of this imperious and shy elderly guest. But she could be difficult too, especially with wine waiters who didn’t know how to pour properly. Wine for her was a serious matter, part of a ritual, imbued with a sacred, almost mystical dimension.

In her account of a wine-tasting trip in Bordelais (*La Vie de Château* 1978), she describes the procedure:

We look, we chew, we think. It is a slow process (one is standing, if not always standing still), utterly absorbing and near an ordeal – the raw tannin puckers the inside of the cheeks, rasps the throat like claws, while at the kernel one finds a notion of . . . what? texture, structure, multiplicities of scents, analogous tastes; divine staying power, future harmonies. [. . .] Lafite makes one think of a cathedral. No stainless steel here, Lafite still vinifies its wine in those immense, plain wooden vats, and in the cellar a great range of barrels looms in Rembrandtesque penumbra where quiet men – maturing wine need silence – move about their skilled, deliberate tasks.

At the beginning of 1974, about to move from the south of France to London, she offers to exchange wine with Gordon Taylor, an English wine buff who was settling in the south of France. On 19 January she writes him a long letter from Les Bastides, la Roquette sur Siagne, to prepare the operation. She is obviously enjoying herself:

About the great wine swop. I am enclosing a list of what is available. About 18 dozen claret and a dozen and a half or so of last growth sauternes. You can

have as much, or as little, or all this as you choose or your drinking goes. How to work it all out? I think this may be rather fun. There is no need for you to provide large quantities of claret in England. Nor need it be ready to drink. (All my major stocks, if I can call them that, of claret are in England, cellared at wine merchants. Most of it is not ready to drink, but I have enough to go on.) I would be very happy to have some burgundy, and equally, or perhaps more so, to get some Hock, Moselle, champagne, of which I have none in England. All we need aim at is some rough equivalent in quality. With I expect a bit of give and take; there is a lucky-dip element in wine swapping which rather attracts me.

The only thing I'm keen to swop in exact kind are the 1961 1st growth Sauternes. I suppose this is easy, as my stock is so small.

Nor would I want all the wine at once; and this is rather essential, as I shall certainly be camping in London this summer, and am not too certain about my wine storage prospects after that. So probably no wine at all from you before the autumn (or indeed before your own return, if more convenient to you) and some of it to be kept by you for me to draw at reasonable intervals. Does it seem feasible to you?

The one problem here, as you can see from the list (I've kept a copy) is readiness to drink. When I proposed the swop, I had not been thinking of the fact that you were here for but one year. I had bought these wines for what I thought would be a future in France. Strictly speaking, I suppose, only the 1964s and both the Sirah and the Clos des Jacobins at Louis, and the 1967 Haut-Batailley are ready now. I haven't tasted any of the 1966s, 69s & 70s at Bordeaux. The 1962 Haut-Batailley, I have here, is ready; but there may only be 6 bottles left by the time I leave. (All the listing gives quantities actually available for

you. I'm not quite certain about exact figures of wine at Louis Le Brocq's, as I've drawn mixed cases of these over so many years.)

I have been drinking the 1966 Talbot and Gruaud-Larose, and if I'd stayed on here wd have drawn probably on the 1966 Gloria this year and some of the 1969 (after taking advice), simply because one needs wine, and anything in these categories is either unobtainable or chiefly so astronomically expensive in France, far more so I find from the latest price lists than in England. You will follow your own choice and instincts, no doubt.

[...] Getting the wine to you is no problem. If you want anything I have kept here, it can be ready for you in



cases to pick up when you come. [...] Any wine from Bordeaux can be sent – at my request – in any number of cases at the time; it comes by rail, takes about a fortnight from the time one writes, and is delivered to the house. Some of this, too.

One thing to bear in mind though is the weather. It might be wise not to have wine sent from Bordeaux after May; and to start sending for winter supplies after mid-September.

[...] If there is anything, I, or any of

us, can do for you before your arrival, do let me know. And also your decisions about the swop. Forgive abominable typing. Also haste: I'm spending most of my time trying to get my teeth into some new work. I do hope for you that you will get your new book in order before leaving.

I do hope we shall meet in March either here or in London.

For her ninetieth birthday in 2001, Sybille was invited to dinner by her neighbour, a great wine connoisseur, who had devised an exceptional succession of wines: Veuve Clicquot La Grande Dame 1990, Puligny Montrachet Clavoillon 1993 1er cru, Château Pichon Lalande 1982, Château Ducru Beaucaillou 1982, Château Ducru Beaucaillou 1989, Chambertin Grand Cru 1985, Chapelle-Chambertin Grand Cru 1990, Château Rieussec 1986 1er cru. It sounds like the litany of grands crus recited as lines of poetry by Simon in *A Favourite of the Gods* (1963).

Throughout the dinner, her pleasure and interest were intense. Already very frail and in poor health, she revived and, eyes sparkling, discussed the wines with enthusiasm, analysing the subtleties of their sequence. It was clear that she still retained an exceptionally fine palate.

Sybille Bedford kept 'wine books', listing the names of the dinner guests, the location – at home or at friends' houses – the menu and, opposite each course, the wine carefully chosen to accompany it. She adds comments on the wines,

an anecdote about a guest, or describes the mood of the evening. Many wine labels, often inscribed at the back with the names of the guests, have been carefully put away in her wine files.

A collector's mania? No, a passion, a conviction that knowing wine is an experience of a lifetime, an inexhaustible curiosity, with the constant hope of being happily surprised.

Sybille made friends with several cookery writers: Elizabeth David, Julia Child, M.F.K. Fisher. She was very close

to Richard Olney, the editor of *The Good Cook*, a Time-Life 28-volume encyclopaedia to which he asked her to contribute, putting her in charge of the guide to world wines. She also had what she called 'her brothers in wine' – friends, professionals or not, whom she loved dearly, who shared her interest and expertise, and with whom she went to dinners and wine tastings, and compared notes.

Paragraphs about food and wine abound in her novels, some of them already anthologized: in *A Legacy* (1956) there are the sea-urchins, described as if in a painting by Uccello; the *loup de mer* grilled with rosemary and fennel; and of course the Merzes' breathtaking second breakfast in Berlin. In *A Compass Error* (1968) there is the brief and memorable description of a soup: 'They had sorrel soup – sharp, frothy, refreshing ...' A typically Sybilline sentence, concise, imperative, rhythmic. The taste of sorrel is vividly there, as you read it.

All her life, Sybille insisted on carrying her own food when travelling by road, train or air. There is a delightfully epicurean picnic scene on a train early in *A Visit to Don Otavio* (1953):

I had packed a hamper and a cardboard box. Whenever I can I bring my own provisions; it keeps one independent and agreeably employed, it is cheaper and usually much better. I had got some tins of tunny fish, a jar of smoked roe, a hunk of salami and a hunk of provolone; some rye bread, and some black bread in Cellophane that keeps. That first night we had fresh food. A chicken, roasted that afternoon at a friend's house, still gently warm; a few slices of that American wonder, Virginia ham; marble-sized, dark red tomatoes from the market stands on Second Avenue; watercress, a flute of bread, a square of cream cheese, a bag of cherries and a bottle of pink wine.

For Sybille Bedford, food and wine were a way of life, a philosophy, an art – which is why she was able to be so sure and incisive in her judgements. Browsing through her copy of Richard Olney's *Simple French Food* (1974), I discovered, opposite his recipe for Gratin Dauphinois and the instruction 'put the peeled cloves through a garlic press' – these last words

fiercely underlined by Sybille with the green pen she used to mark her books – a peremptory inscription in the margin, in capital letters and doubly underlined: 'NO!' She had firm cooking principles. *Never* press garlic, always finely chop the cloves.

She was a great letter writer. The green pages, less glaring than white to her fragile eyes, are most of the time typed. But whether typed or scribbled by hand, they are frustratingly difficult to decipher. Selina Hastings, who is working on Sybille's biography, has dug out from Harry Ransom Center archives a selection of them. Here are a few excerpts about food and wine, from her correspondence with her friend Evelyn Gendel. Her tone is spontaneous, easy and colloquial, as in a conversation. She uses abbreviations, like 'din' for dinner, and French and Italian words pop up throughout. It is absolutely Sybille's voice, instantly identifiable, with its particular staccato rhythm, its wit at her expense and others', and its passion.

EXCERPTS FROM SYBILLE BEDFORD'S LETTERS TO EVELYN GENDEL

4 August 1955 (Paris)

Delicious din with E last night at Beulemean's [*sic*] the Belgian place in the boulevard. Best boiled chicken I ever ate: it is served in a deep plate in its essence of broth, new boiled potatoes, carrot, celery, beans, and – very lightly – bound with cream ...

10 September 1955 (Les Bastides)

I dressed – ma robe – and very reluctantly like going to hairdressers, muggily drove off to Cannes. [...] The bay and the evening sky (Dali coloured), the stucco of the Carlton, the Esterel range at the Theoule Cape looked exquisite; light as air. 2 whiskeys, w glasses of champagne ... and then with smooth transition we went to one of the good restaurants on the port opposite the yachts (Le MALAASIS). Brian [Howard] ordered (wanted to make it surprise). 'Only say whether fish or meat.' So we had Soupe de Poisson again; then Langouste a l'Americaine with rice; Pouilly Fuissé. Fresh sliced peaches with icecream. Cooking very very good. Brian patient, charming. (Only you know Sam is a no-goodnick: arrested, bumptious,

hardly human. He reminds me of Terrence: not entirely his fault or making. But utterly obnoxious: not sortable.) We had coffee Place du Noailles: B left on his own suggestion at 11. Drove home rather cock-a-hoop as if the niceness had been my damn merit. Which was not ...

7 October 1955 (Tomar)

Thank Bone for having taught one to love Baroque. Then see it here. Happy here ... Thought I would crack in Spain – the sadness, violence, misery, & magnificence ...

Din ... Thick veg soup. I Beef Steak ... 3 whole partridges with pancetta, huge dish of mashers, lettuce, sliced tomatoes. Could not finish partridge. Then ... cheese, grapes ... All the wine one could drink ...

Listen IS A LEGACY impossible? I don't like it much. But must have something that links up with The Narrator, & the story having a consequence ...

9 October 1955 (Oporto)

Did I write that in Lisbon I gave myself one of the best luncheons I ever had? By myself ... I ate: 2 Atlantic langoustines (saporito) boiled, tepid, with olive oil and salt ... 2 is nice but not insolent: followed by smoked Chava ... ham ... and a small cheese omelette, with it a half bottle of iced Vinho Verde. Ended with melon (Iberian melons are transparent amber fleshed and delicious), and small cup of boiling black coffee. (It cost a dollar ten with tip) ...

9 December 1956 (Les Bastides)

[...] we shop chiefly at La Roquette now, on foot ... No petrol ...

You do seem to eat well. I am glad. Ours is a bit dull and awkward: as A [Allanah Harper] cannot eat peas, pud, lentils, beans, cabbage, cauliflower, sprouts; will not eat sausages, and complains about meat (never touches veal or pork) as Eda [Lord] is sensitive about this, we seem to have indifferent beef, hot, cold, re-heated ... spaghetti (no fresh tomatoes any more), carrots, baked potatoes. Bull [Allanah] can't eat raw salad ... But when I pass something to Eda, Bull says 'as bad as you and Evelyn always whispering about the food to each other: "won't you have a little itsy-bitsy dropsy of orrl?"'

[...] I've been looking forward to

writing you about the journey to Italy, Evelina. I was light with joy [...] Allasio at 5pm ... I thought we couldn't do better than this friendly hotel, had already been in kitchen. We had ... taglierini in bianco ... more trips to the kitchen, look at the meat, fish. Bull had fritto mist de mare: which was the best, fresh as fresh, sweet crisp: scampi, fresh sardines, octopus, piping hot not greasy, lemon a discretion. Mrs S a good sole al burro, sweet and nutty. E and I magro de vitello grilled. We had ordered a bowl of green salad, and oil and lemon were brought separately; they also brought unasked a dish of finnochio al forno. Grissini and rolls, surprise: v good butter in large chunk unasked on table. Platter of cheese: parmiggiano strachino, bel paese e groviare. Ate the first two and a kind of fontina. We refused frutta, later learned it was included. Bull and I had due mezzi of rather thick purplish but pure local wine; then we all had coffee. It was all so innocent, opulent, and I did love it ...

Next morning, Thursday, one of those young eager gay dark slip of girls brought in a groaning tray: tolerable tea, cold milk, a slab of sweet butter, a mound of fresh rolls in all shapes and a dish of plum jam. Ate and read the Sunday papers.

13 January 1957 (rue de Lille, Paris)
Thursday Madge Garland came to dinner (here for dress shows) only us girls and a bang up dinner: scallops on rice; roast duck, green peas (tinned), potatoes, salad, cheese, homemade ices. She ate next to nothing and would have preferred one important or chic person to us and all the food. Dull and frigid ... Friday... to din at Mme Arnoud. [...] Din: delicious hot cheese-ham on bubbling thin toast, delicious white wine. Gigot, flageolet (now garlic salad). Crème caramel. Coffee. Left at 12.

3 April 1957 (rue Madame, Paris)
Oh the din ... I sat between Noel [Murphy] and Janet [Flanner] ... We had hot clams, just put under broiler in their half shells, with butter and parsley and a little pepper. Brown bread and butter. V good indeed. Then escalopes de veau à la crème, bello bianco, with a perfect sauce if you like that kind of sauce ... with rice ... watercress, salad of romaine. Cheese and biscuits. Dry Anjou, and quite a good 4ieme cru claret ... followed by une

bombe de glace ... from le Vieux Paris. One of the best ices imaginable ...

10 August 1957 (Pensbury House North, Shaftesbury, Dorset)
We were away for two days ... in London, to see Brian who left for a cure in Switzerland ...

[...] Tania [Stern] has something of a central European taste: rich coffee with cream and sugar and cakes ... And Jimmy [Stern] likes good things ... We had them – I might just as well interpose here – to din last night ... We had what I should call a simple, wholesome well-cooked dinner ... Pot roast of beef with it own string [sic] clear sauce, new potatoes in their skins, a dish of broad beans (double peeled), a salad of garden lettuce with a trace of garlic, oil and lemon and farm cheddar cheese. Hot baked apples with brown sugar and cream, with it a bottle of Yugoslavian Riesling ... Italian coffee. They stayed till 1.0 am. Talk mostly about Brian ...

11 November 1958 (Les Bastides)
Duck, all lemon-butter sauce will curdle if the egg yolks allowed to cook. A luke warm bain marie. Test all the time if needed. Just warm enough to melt the butter with vigorous stirring, then when the sauce is there, ready and smooth, you may gently increase the warmth of the water to heat the sauce. Watchfully. Really, I am not proud of you ...

25 November 1960 (Little Wynters, Hastingwood, Harlow, Essex)
Dinner Party at Sylvester's [Gates]. Slept at M's [Martha Gellhorn]. It was a perfect part [...] The food and, above all, the wine was great ... This was in honour of Cyril [Connolly].

[...] Well, we ate: consommé madrilène: really jellied with lemon, and pepper mills. Boiled turbot (first rate) with sauce hollandaise. Piesporter Goldtröpfchen Auslese 1953 (Moselle) a beautiful wine, well chilled, Oliver going round filling the glasses as fast as one could drink ... New round of assiette chaude: grilled chicken ... a half chicken – not small – for each, with dry crisp pommes frites ... a salad of plain lettuce, v lightly dressed with discreet olive oil and v little lemon. With it Chateau Cheval-Blanc 1951 (claret), unlimited supply circulating in decanters, good but not superlative.

Cyril said 'a bit peppery, Sylvester' and so it was ... That took a long time to eat and drink. Then an awfully good iced pudding, something creamy and smooth, but one paid little attention, except that it was the right background: there was a third glass, a beautiful small tulip shaped Georgian glass. Reverence: Chateau Yquem 1921. Almost non existent nowadays ... it is amber coloured, yet refined, earth and grape and age; fine and distinguished yet still full of vigour. Very potent, you sip it like a liqueur with reverence. We gave ourselves to it (the wives kept quiet; I don't mean to be nasty at all. They knew it was some tiresome mystique 'like that hideous place Oxford', as Pauline calls it). There was even a second half glass for the men (and S). Then still at table, coffee and 1915 Armagnac.

It was memorable. Chateau Yquem is of course something out of this world. I had not tasted it for 30 years. But note also that all was made to suit this peak, everything in bounds. Moderation. There were no cocktails: you were offered sherry or gin & Italian Vermuth (no ice). No salted almonds, canapés, cocktail biscuits, chocolates, marrons glacés. To let the superb food speak for itself and to help the wines. Toast and butter there was. No extra vegetables, cheese. A lesson in what to avoid. Also an almost maigre dinner, except for the hollandaise with the fish. All save for the one lush richness at the end: the pudding to go with the great white wine from Bordeaux. And after eating the crisp dry chicken slowly, and the wholesome red wine, one was quite ready for it. Not stuff on stuff as is so often with dinner parties that mean well. (If the richness is in the middle: roast goose; aiouli, well fine, then end with freshness, fruit, a bit of Roquefort or goat cheese.) Well, one was elated ...

8 April 1961 (Les Bastides)
[at Aix] Robsons [Robson-Scott] arrival ... Dinner en masse at a little Spanish place ... MF [M.F.K. Fisher], Eda and I ate their rabbit ... [Robson-Scotts] cld not understand why we loved this food ... I'm afraid the R-S did not take to the South. Their first journey. They could not see it, seemed bewildered by bareness ... They did not say much, they simply did not say enough ... They seemed duller, dimmer, heavier in Provence. Those

who love the Mediterranean feel a lack of kinship with those who do not have the passion. That which makes Cyril's writing luminous. A great divide. MF was being the gracious American lady hostess. They were fascinated . . .

[...] Dinner was MF's treat at the Spanish restaurant (the RS begged off) . . . The atmosphere was good. To my joy, as I had been a bit prickly before. Censoring the children, the choice of wines, that kind of nasty thing I am apt to fall into.

9 October 1964 (Les Bastides)

Thanks for the Romanée-Conti label. It must be one of the greatest wines there is. Even if one is like myself, a Hock and claret person, one would bow to this unique wine. I drank it once in my life. Allannah bought a bottle from the restaurant de la Poste a Saulieu. That was a '34. I would have drunk it – preceded by an opener, which is essential with the big wines – slowly with a hot meat course, game preferably: the great reds open up with hot meat. Then saved the final 1–2 glasses each for slowest enjoyment indeed with the cheese . . .

21 March 1965 (14 Sutherland Street, London)

Ivy [Compton-Burnett] dinner party went off very well. The food was exquisite . . . huge pasticchio di lasagne, candle-light, claret, then a vast platter with juicy arrosto de vitello contornato de broccoli verde scurro, pisello verde legero e patatine dorati – a picture – a moulded ice pudding with fresh oranges . . . cold white Austrian Riesling with it. 'Oh what a lovely pudding' Ivy said. She had 2 helpings of each course. Drank soda water with food. Laughed a great deal, was nice to the Robsons, scathing about Blanche Knopf and kissed me on leaving. Can you ask more.

Next week I hope to have Elizabeth David . . . I did tell you about the dinner she gave me here in November? In her kitchen: own fish soup, Greek shish kebab, marvellous salads, cheese, fruit. With the Beaujolais, a rarity, Gewurztraminer and 1 cru Sauterne. At table till 11.30 and v v tipsy . . .

8 August 1966 (21B Devonshire Street, London)

[Elizabeth David] is an extraordinary character . . . I admire her more and more . . . We had her for dinner here. Poor Eda, she cooked the din . . .

28 April 1967 (Les Bastides)

A casserole of veal cooked with bell peppers, black olives and white wine. Hot pepper, some tomatoes. A pungent Sicilian dish, adapted by Donald Downes in his excellent cookbook, and further adapted by me. (I don't cook the strips of pepper for the good hour it takes with the meat; or rather only a few of them for flavour. I grill the peppers at the last minute, a roasted charry taste, then put them on top of the dish.) Rice, plain

sauté zucchini; a green salad. Cheeses. Stewed peaches and cream.

[...] The garden flourishes . . . garlands of leaves and young grapes on the vines we planted. Flowering scented tobacco stands high; the serynga [*sic*] bushes, planted in January, are in blossom; geraniums out. Ipomea just coming up from seeds. In the vegetable line we've been eating a profusion of mangetouts every 2–3 days since the end of April; 4 strawberries; zucchini, first own (exquisite) 2 days ago. Profusion also of lettuce, a supply of Swiss chard, delicious when picked young, and some [illeg]; parsley, sorrel. Tomatoes . . . Peppers sill slender plants. Faggiolini flowering but meagrely . . . Anne Duve [*sic*] made me a present of American specially treated sweet corn



seeds. They are up: such a tender green green green . . .

Which brings me to a serious proposal. I want to do a slender, but well-written, well-commented cookery volume on vegetables . . .

27 November 1967 (Les Bastides)

James Beard? I liked him, simpatico (up to a point . . .) Michael F just made me squirm. Julia and Paul Child are back. I was really delighted to hear their voice on the telephone, they asked us to din within 3 days of their arrival (last Saturday) we went: roast pheasant and vintage claret and log fire and welcome. One likes them immensely. She is so warm spontaneous – so unbelievably tall . . . I asked them back for dinner on Dec 6th. No, I don't feel nervous cooking for them (not as if it were Elizabeth David, a real master). J.C. is competent, enamoured of French food and style, an imitator. All her home cooked food, served with great charm and ease, tastes like first-rate mass-produced. I think they practise all the time how to make a roast fowl ahead and how many hours it can wait while hostess dresses or mixes drinks (she doesn't). Don't let it go further . . . as one has such affection for them.

9 December 1967 (Les Bastides)

Julia Childs: cold egg mollet in individual

cocotte with Danish cod's roes, black, mixed with sour cream under egg, some of the stuff, all black, on egg. Wine (wh) Muscadet 1964 (Loire). Roast fillet of porc with fresh sorrel melted in cooking juices, green lentils, endives braises, salade de mache (garden). W[inel]: (Red) Chateau Malescon Exupery-Margaux 1961. Cheeses. Pears, apples, grapes, own almonds. 3rd wine (wh) Chateau Climens 1961; ier Gd Cru Sauternes. Café. Poire William liqueur . . .

3 February 1968 (Les Bastides)

Owe you a describer of Paul Vail's birthday dinner. He & Julia asked, only guest: we sat by their open fire eating hot paté en croute made by her drinking a bottle of the single vineyard 1959 Phillipponat Champagne . . . a wonderful wine, dry but full-flavoured. Then we sat down at table and had roast duck with ROMANECONTI (I was overwhelmed). Our last glass of it we took out into the kitchen where Paul, Ed [Eda] and I sat round the table while Julia donned apron, pulled up sleeves and like the dear unflappable, slightly clumsy, St Bernard she looks she began whisking up things in a great copper bowl for making her own pudding, her version of baked Alaska. It is a superb chocolate ice cream (Julia made) on some cake with a cap of whipped white of egg baked for seconds in a hell-hot oven, then

you sink an empty egg-shell into the mountain crust, fill it with rum, strike a match and the flames leap up, burning Vesuvius, she calls it, I call it Pelion on Ossa. That was borne flaming back into the dining-room and we ate that with a bolt of Chateau d'Yquem (not tasted for over thirty years). Later we finished the bottle by the fire. Memorable, even more than the wines, was the generosity and spirit of our hosts. It was lovable. Alas, they've been called to America for some editing of the Hite [sic] House film (on a banquet at the White House) . . .

1 July 1968 (Les Bastides)

When I woke we were well out of the Gare de Lyon, well into the night. Slept log like till Marseilles and then raised blinds on that miraculous swept clarity of the Mediterranean . . . Put on linen skirt, first of the year, a cream cotton shirt . . . Cannes station . . .

[...] Julia and Paul Child's last night but one . . . they gave us a feast of roast faux filet of beef, creamed potatoes, salad, Romanée Conti with the bottle inscribed for Sybille, cheese and peaches with Alsatian Traminer . . . London seems like a kaleidoscope . . . din with Elaine Green . . . a good girl . . . Dinner in restaurant the two of us with Elizabeth David. She looked so beautiful, it was all rather dreamlike . . . Sunday I went to see Ivy, v



frail now with all her broken hips . . . but so affectionate . . . I have become so fond of her . . .

Toni for din chez moi same evening. She has become very dull and empty; less difficult in a way to get on with, less demanding, but somehow there is the harvest of a dull, ingrown life. I make an effort with the food – thick veal chops, fresh green peas, new potatoes in sour cream Austrian Hock, strawberries with sugar . . . But found it hard to talk.

?May ?1969 (Middleton Court, 15 Sloane Gardens, London)

I am enjoying the preliminary parts of my Elizabeth David job. We had a long dinner in a new French restaurant . . . My chief memory is ordering wine upon wine and sending them back. Just like Peter T. But with more smiles. She is a very strange person, but what a professional. Our childish cookery efforts wld not last a minute with her. Neither in print or at the stove. She was a great friend of Norman's [Douglas] whose last years she helped to brighten by her company. . .

21 December 1969 (Les Bastides)

On Christmas Day we plan traditional celebration at Allannah's . . . for the four of us [including Fay] . . . two roast guinea hens . . . with I think brown lentils, very likely en pyrée; birds plain roast no stuffing. Vegetable? Braised endive goes quite well but kills good wine. Choucroute not like by Al & Fay. Remains Brussels sprouts or cabbage. I think cabbage: fresh green cabbage that is very lightly and quickly boiled then roughly chopped and heated through in some boiling cream. Pinch of salt, a little pepper, a touch of paprika. [. . .] A green salad of corn salad (mache) from the garden. Some good cheese. Roquefort if I can find a good one. I suppose a Christmas pudding . . . with hard sauce. I shan't even pretend to eat it, and look forward to a plainly baked apple, baked very soft uncured. WINE. My department. Chateau Ducru-Beaucaillon, 1959 . . . Either two bottles, or

one preceded by a leader upper – which I always prefer – possibly the Malescot-St. Exupéry '61. With the pudding . . . some luscious and chilled to the bone. A ler Grand Cru Sauternes, I think, rather than a Staetlese Gewurztraminer. I have a Ch Suiduraut '62. Or a Ch Lafaury-Péraguey '59 . . . I ought perhaps . . . save the L-P '59 for you because of its literary associations: it was the wine Sebastian gave Charles Ryder that June morning in BRIDESHEAD. They drank it in a field with a basket of fresh strawberries . . .

5 July 1971 (23 Old Church Street, London)

Last night Eda and I had dinner OUT OF DOORS in the little garden – I in shorts and shirt. T'imagine . . . We ate fresh crab with own mayonnaise, new potatoes and fresh lettuce from Sylvester's Wiltshire garden; then hot cauliflower . . . then raspberries with thick cream from Sylvester's cows . . . I think the best food in London is the Connaught Hotel . . . I haven't been for years . . .

24 April 1974 (23 Old Church Street, London)

I am much better. Though . . . always the hint of nausea after breakfast and lunch . . . wine [a] help. Patrick Woodcock encourages wine (for me), he says it is a good tranquillizer, and one I am used to and trust . . . I went to a party at Anne's a few days ago . . . Hock and Cote-du-Rhone flowing. [. . .] I enjoyed it all, and drove myself home in Simmy [her car] only slightly foxed.

I also went to a man's wine-tasting luncheon at André Simon's. 5 Hocks & Moselles shown before and tasted . . . the Hocks were very fine. The whole quite a strain as I was the only woman and it was a gt honour but also something of a novelty and some of the men may have disapproved. 6 men and your T . . . We sat down to lunch at a polished table, all in the same back office with cases of claret stacked up the wall most sympathique. I had to be at the head of the table. More polished glasses. Lunch was delicious . . .

cold haddock mousse, followed by excellent roast cold pork with its own jelly for sauce (everything was cold of course, we were in a wineshop behind Bond St), with it a cold dish of delicious fresh green sliced cooked zucchini en salade, home-baked bread and butter, brie & double Gloucester, fruit pudding, Nescafé. We drank what ever each one chose of the five hocks tasted. [. . .] with the pudding we had a great Trockenbeeren Ausleese Cabernet type of Hock. Slightly rich and sweet . . . I rode home in a cab . . .

19 April 1977 (23 Old Church Street, London)

Dinners with Richard [Olney]. luncheon with Richard for a reunion with Elizabeth David last Sunday 1 to 7.30 pm. It was a charmed occasion and one loves her as dearly as ever. And such a wit. Luncheon was light as light, smoked salmon, bread & butter; followed after an interval by a mound of freshly cooked faggioli . . . all eaten off white Bastide plates I had brought in a basket as Elizabeth cannot bear pattern plates. A little fresh white cheese, then a salad of peaches and red currants. Cd not have been lighter. BUT we had 5 wines . . . and although I drank most sparingly as I always do in daytime with great tumblers of water in between, I began to feel pretty mouldy by half past eight pm . . . I tried to garden but felt too heavy . . .

2 September 1977 (23 Old Church Street, London)

I've always had this conflict between wanting to be hospitable and dreading the execution – will it be good enough – and the aftermath . . . Also I think I know that I have to come to terms with the clearing and washing after dinner at lowest physical ebb, when I long to sit or drop off to sleep, having eaten and drunk. Also have to come to terms with the limited kitchen arrangements, the lack of working surface is the worst and not remediable . . . If one had room to carve a roast etc one cd have freshly cooked hot meat, fresh vegetables . . . ◇