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Mike Hale: Fandango inspired by generations

Mike Hale The Grub Hunter

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Pierre Bain knows a thing or two about consistency and longevity. The Frenchman has lived and breathed hospitality for 26 years as owner of Fandango in Pacific Grove (one of the oldest family-run restaurants still in operation on the Peninsula).

But that's just a blip in time compared to his family's Grand Hotel Bain in Comps-sur-Artuby, Provence. They've owned the hotel since 1737, and appear in the Guinness Book of World Records as the longest-run, family-owned and operated hotel in existence. (For perspective, George Washington was 5 years old when they opened).

As the firstborn son, Bain seemed destined to follow in his father's footsteps, carrying on a father-to-son tradition played out since the 18th century.

But a young Pierre had other ideas. Following three years at hotel school in Nice, he was to complete his training during a one-year internship at an English-speaking country. He chose Bermuda — and stayed six years. From there he ended up in California on a 90-day working visa. While waiting tables in San Francisco, he served Aime Michaud, president of Del Monte Properties. Michaud was opening a restaurant at The Lodge at Pebble Beach and wanted Bain to join the team.

So much for returning to France. The job of managing the Grand Hotel Bain went to Pierre's brother, leaving the legacy in place. But another legacy was just beginning. Bain worked for more than two decades (as waiter, captain

and manager) at Michaud's restaurant, Club XIX, until one day he met new Pebble Beach resident Al Shugart, founder and CEO of hard-drive giant Seagate Technologies. The two became friends, and one night over dinner, Shugart asked Bain and his wife Marietta how much money it would take to open his own restaurant.

"\$200,000," Bain said.

Shugart handed him a check. And the rest is history.

So 27 years after leaving France for Bermuda, Bain took over a Basque restaurant in Pacific Grove (started by the Georis family of Casanova fame). Over the years Pierre and Marietta have defined service and hospitality (several original Fandango employees from the 1986 opening still work there), serving European comfort food that is simply prepared but exciting to the palate.

"I like being here more than being on vacation," said Pierre, now in his 70s. "I still love what I do. I truly mean that."

And to think, I just called Fandango to ask for a recipe in honor of Bastille Day, which is Saturday. So enjoy this recipe for a cold Grand Marnier soufflé. But I think the story is even sweeter.

Cold Souffle Grand Marnier
(Makes 6-8 servings)

1 qt. whipping cream

12 eggs (yolks and whites separated)

1 lb. sugar

½ cup Grand Marnier

Steps: Whip the cream until stiff. Beat egg yolks, 8 oz. of sugar and the Grand Marnier until fluffy. Beat in egg whites and remaining sugar until stiff. Fold together lightly. Wrap the soufflé dish with wax paper around the rim, extending the dish by 3-4 inches. Fill the dish and freeze for four hours. Add fresh, seasonal fruit or raspberry sauce when ready to serve.

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