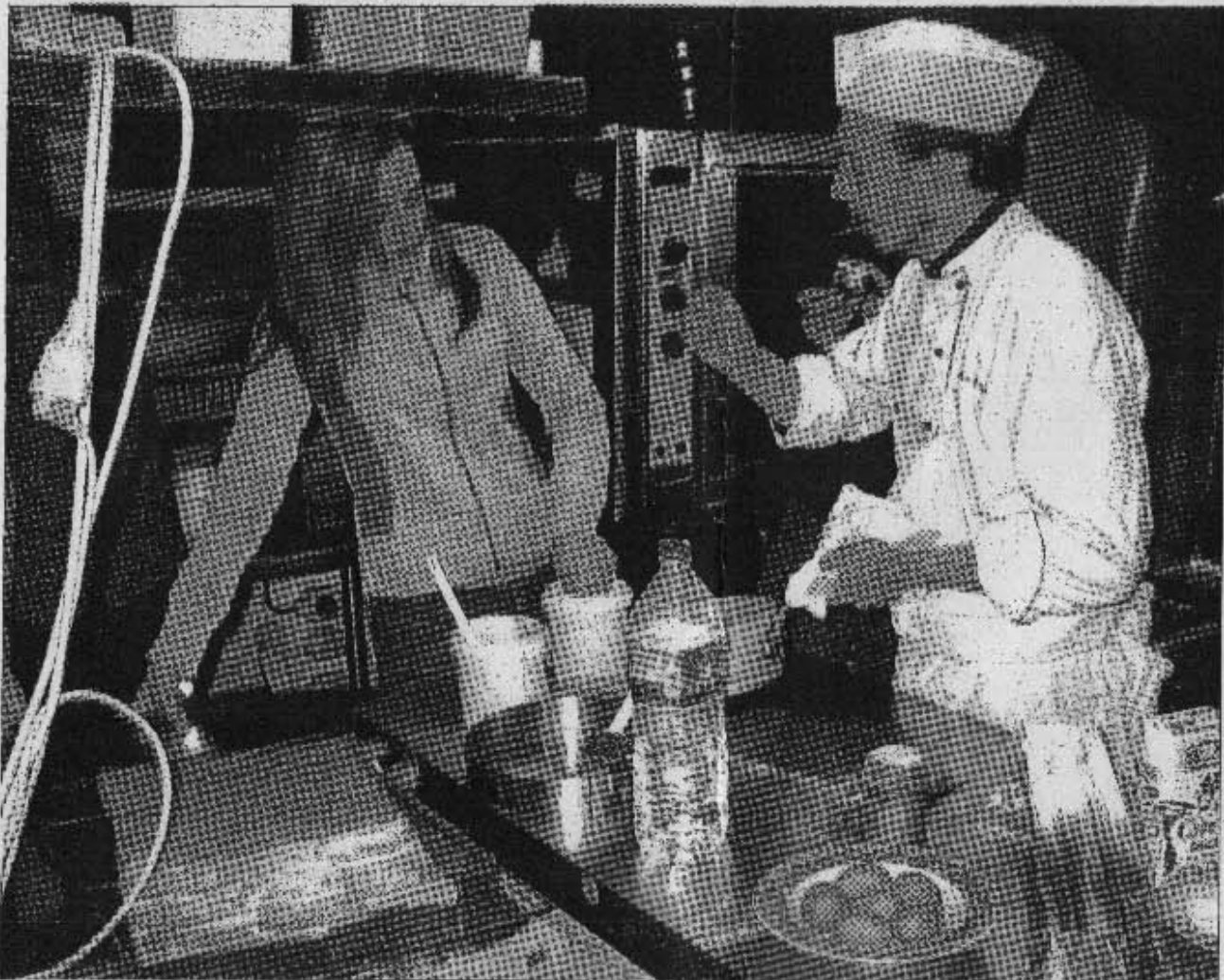


Rendezvous



■ Luc Dreger demonstrates how to make Buché de Noël, a chocolate-filled cake

Picture: Pas de Calais tourist office

It takes a certain amount of guts, if that is the mot juste, to sign up for cookery lessons with a working chef. Most of us are far more scared about looking inadequate in front of a chef than we are in front of a language teacher, an electrician or a short hand tutor. If the chef is French the fear-factor doubles.

Enter Luc Dreger, chef proprietor of La Crinoline at Tilques, just outside St Omer. Luc is a quiet, unassuming man who worked as a lad in Faversham at the old Anne's Eating House.

He speaks good English and accepts groups of a minimum of eight people at just eight euros a head for a four-hour course.

Of course, if you can't find eight people, he'll run the course for four, but double the price.

Gadgets

Probably most encouraging is to see how little room and how few very expensive shiny gadgets he needs to cook for a busy restaurant. Having said that, he is well aware that much of his industrial-grade equipment is more powerful than that found in the normal domestic kitchen and he gives domestic innings and settings when necessary.

He also gives all those invaluable little tips: have all your ingredients for pastry at the same temperature; start beating egg whites slowly.

When caramellising sugar use white sugar, it's easier to see when white sugar caramellises.

If greaseproof paper slips on the baking tray a dab of water on the tray will make it stick.

I could charge much more in Paris or

Learn at the side of the master

London of course, but not round here," he says. He has been running his courses for over six years, attracting groups of up to 25 at a time. They are usually held on Tuesdays, with two options: a morning course spent preparing your own lunch, or a self-contained 2-6pm course, with supper an optional extra. English students can either tack on to a French group or, if they can raise sufficient numbers, have an English-only session (any day except Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday). Luc can also help arrange accommodation in the area.

Go to the Crinoline for lunch on any Tuesday and as you come to the end of your meal the car park will fill up with a (largely female) audience come for his cookery lessons.

"The first time I saw it happen I was there for a business meeting with clients and was speculating like mad over what all these women were doing there, it totally threw my concentration," said one of his regular English clients.

If you have a holiday home in the area, or are renting a gîte for the week, Luc will also do your catering.

"I buy everything you want and charge you only what it costs me, and then I'll come and cook it at your house."

If you want to advertise his presence,

or pass it off as all your own work is up to you. Luc has a booklet of his own recipes (in French) and a CD of pictures and short video clips to both jog the memory and act as a reference check. (13 euros for the package).

Many of his recipes use local specialities, including potatoes with a Maroilles cheese sauce, beer flan, cream of cauliflower with smoked Licques turkey and fried celery, and leeks with bacon as an aperitif. He also pays far more attention to puddings than English chefs.

Seductive

If you have not had a crème brûlée perfumed with peach beer you have no idea how seductive – and light – Northern puddings can be.

Scrummy things to do with chicory (endives caramélisées), how to make haddock smart (effeuille de haddock au chou), or a carrot soup dotted with the blue mountain cheese fourme d'ambert (soupe de carottes de Tilques): the North bubbles with good recipes and these are just a few in his recipe booklet.

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