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Executive Chef Clement Gelas Forages for Waldorf Astoria Park City's Gourmet Menu

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Photos Courtesy of Waldorf Astoria Park City

Chef Clement Gelas is the Executive Chef at the fine dining restaurant Slopes at the [Waldorf Astoria Park City](#). Three years ago I met Chef Gelas and had a dinner prepared from his sampling menu. I understood then how important vegetarian and vegan choices were for this young chef, who provided many vegetarian and gluten free choices on his menu. My introduction to his epicurean methods began with a salad that I remember to this day, three years afterward. It was a beef salad and it had an ingredient that I had never seen or tasted before or since: yellow female cucumber flowers with a tiny cucumber attached. I was amazed by this choice of vegetables, not only because it was in mid-November, but also because the flowers and the tiny cucumber tasted as fresh as a spring garden. When I asked him about this ingredient, he said quietly, "Well, I have a greenhouse."

That evening in November was also memorable for his other creations: the Squash Soup with Rockhill Gruyere and Burgundy Truffles, the Green Tea sorbet, the local Elk, the Bulgur Risotto with Cardamom jus, and the ginger/lemon verbena Crème Brulee. Chef Gelas is a master at creating diverse tastes from farm-to-table produce and fresh (often foraged) herbs, allowing memorable tastes to remain, even after three years!

Born and raised in Boège in the Haute-Savoie region in the Rhone Alps of [France](#), he got his start by working at La Maison de Marc Veyrat, serving an upscale mountain cuisine in the French Alps. Then it was on to [L'Oxalys](#), a Michelin-starred, fine-dining restaurant located high in the mountains of Val Thorens in Savoy. Already used to cold

mountain landscapes, he came to Park City about ten years ago and decided to stay. Now, he is the Executive Chef of Slopes, but prior to that he was the Club Chef at the Tuhaye Table café, part of the renowned Talisker Club. It is the combination of casual and fine dining that has allowed Chef Gelas to create unusual, casual vegetarian and vegan fare, as well as more traditional non-vegetarian cuisine.



I recently had the opportunity to interview Chef Gelas and again eat his exceptional dishes. I'm pleased to report that even after three years, the taste combinations were still as dazzling as that first Cucumber-Flower experience.

Susan Kime: What are your favorite signature dishes that you create at Slopes? Why are they your favorites? Also, are there any dishes that you have created for consumers that are reminiscent of earlier times in your life?

Clement Gelas: Our menu changes four times a year, both spring and fall are a slow incorporation of the next season's menu. However, my signature items are always created on a twist of traditional French cooking, like the Game Hen Wellington or the Mountain Tea Crème Brulée served with warm chocolate Madeleines.

SK: What is your favorite, most essential kitchen utensil — something you really need in the kitchen as you prepare food or teach others to prepare food?

CG: It would be the *Chinois*, also called bouillon strainer...to me it's the element of perfection, again a traditional twist on a French cooking.

SK: When did you first start to cook? Was it out of interest of necessity?

CG: I learned out of necessity — then out of passion. My parents were average cooks but I wanted to learn how to cook special things, in addition to learning the basics.



SK: This may be an odd question, but how long can you actually be away from the kitchen without feeling uncomfortable? Many artists, in all disciplines, really can't be away from their creative work very long — I wonder if it is the same with you.

CG: It is the same with me. I must get back to the kitchen in a day. Sometimes maybe a few hours. My home is in the kitchen and my second home is outside when I go foraging for mushrooms and fresh herbs.

SK: If you had one last meal on earth, what would it consist of?

CG: A garden composed salad...it's already my daily diet!

SK: What are your favorite taste combinations, textures and colors for your food presentations?

CG: My creations are inspired by the ingredients that surround us. I am always bothering my farmers and food suppliers for something new. Nonetheless, I like to keep it simple — tasty, bright flavors and colors. Lately, I have been passionate about how Native American Indians use ingredients and their cooking techniques. I am learning more about them now.

SK: The emerging trend of the past few years is an evolutionary movement toward slow food and greater food authenticity. We have written extensively about these ideas and would like your perceptions on how these trends have affected your culinary procedures.

CG: I have always prepared fresh food with techniques that do not mask flavors. This trend is such a good thing. I am a strong believer in the farm-to-table idea, and to that end most all of our fish, game, other meat, cheese and dairy are locally sourced and produced.



SK: What character or personality traits does it take to make a great Chef?

CG: You have to be really patient and be a great multitasker. You have to know what is going on every second and split your focus between four or five sous chefs and cooking stations. And a multiplicity of meal orders, all having to be prepared and plated at different times.

SK: I would like to know about what you think of taste memory and using it to remember the taste of various ingredients before you create the dish — we have heard that many great chefs have this. How have you used your taste memory recently?

CG: All good chefs know what the meal tastes like before it is cooked. We can tell what it tastes like when we read the recipe! And even before that — halfway down the recipe when he looks at the ingredients!

SK: And finally, what is your culinary goal with each served and plated meal?

CG: To touch the soul as well as the tongue.



And with that, our meal was served.

My choice was a type of Steelhead Trout called Koosherem, caught just a few hours before in the river near Koosharem, Utah. Plated on a river rock, the trout was one of two food items I had never eaten before. Chef Gelas then put the sauce for the fish, a delicate green Sorrel, in a beaker so I could have as much or as little as I wanted. They were both elegant, fresh and complemented each other in an elegant and authentic way.

The dessert was a strawberry-rhubarb Mille Feuille, the second dish that was new to me. This dessert had no added sugar or dairy. Chef Gelas used thinly sliced whole wheat bread that was baked until crisp, then finished it with a strawberry-rhubarb mousse, fresh strawberries and strawberry frozen yogurt — all handmade at the restaurant.

Other taste combinations that were on the Summer menu: a Summer Corn Bisque with crawfish emulsion and cilantro essence, a Juniper Dusted Elk Carpaccio with Quail egg, Granny Smith Apples and young herbs, Game Hen Wellington with buckwheat, foraged mushrooms and anise hyssop.

Chef Gelas' work is highly creative and in the best tradition. Though it initially sounds improvisational, it is carefully orchestrated to make both soul and tongue equally satisfied. This is one diner who will definitely be returning!

