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## THE GANNET

# moreish mauritius

Combine Mauritian cuisiniers and ingredients with top European chefs for taste perfection.

I was lucky recently to be cooked for by Patrick Bertron, the three-Michelin-starred chef at the lovely Relais Bernard Loiseau in Burgundy. We drank Deutz champagne and Delas wines as we feasted on lobster and Challans duck. Next to us were Jean-Luc Naret, Michelin's grandest *fromage*, and the charming Dominique Loiseau, widow of the eponymous, visionary chef Bernard.

So far, so normal, you might think, for the perpetually spoilt Gannet. Except that we weren't in Burgundy, we were in Mauritius, at a dinner to mark the end of the Festival Culinaire Bernard Loiseau, an annual event in the great chef's memory at which six Michelin-starred chefs from Europe do battle at the stoves for the chance to win another week at the splendid Constance Belle Mare Plage Hotel, which hosts the competition. "Aha," I hear you mutter, "that's typical of the French, invading a former colony with their foie gras and fancy wines. Why can't they have a fish curry and a rum cocktail on the beach, like normal people?"

In fact, each of the six chefs is paired with a local chef, and the point is to promote an exchange of knowledge and ideas between the two cultures. Dishes must include local ingredients - this year, pineapple in the starter, the local bourgeois fish and freshly ground local spices in the main - and the final meal is prepared only by the duo's local chef.

Britain's hopes rested with Bruce Poole, chef/proprietor of the much-lauded Chez Bruce in Wandsworth, and his partner, Belle Mare Plage chef de partie Patrick Travady,



Above: host of the competition, the Constance Belle Mare Plage.

who had entered the competition four times before without winning. Pineapple is rarely found on the menu at Chez Bruce, so a little compromise was necessary, but Poole is a sensible chap and let Travady cook the sort of food he knows best, contributing the occasional aesthetic tweak.

The European chefs strutted their culinary stuff at a special dinner: most impressive were a dish of smoked eel in foie gras *mi-cuit*, from Bordeaux chef Nicolas Magie, and a sublime dish of lamb with local beetroot from Copenhagen's Kristian Møller. I'll try to visit both their restaurants - La Cape and Formel B, respectively - and urge you to do the same.

And the winners? Poole and a teary-eyed Travady, whose dishes (cannelloni of pineapple and tuna with coconut chutney, and fillet of bourgeois with spiced onion breadcrumbs) won unanimously. Travady's prize includes a stint at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Europe, so don't be surprised, when next in Wandsworth, if you see a cheerful Mauritian chap in a chef's jacket striding across the Common on his way to work. As Poole remarked proudly, to a predominantly French audience, "Vive les rosbifs!" **BILL KNOTT**

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