PROFILES

THE AMBASSADOR IN THE SANCTUARY

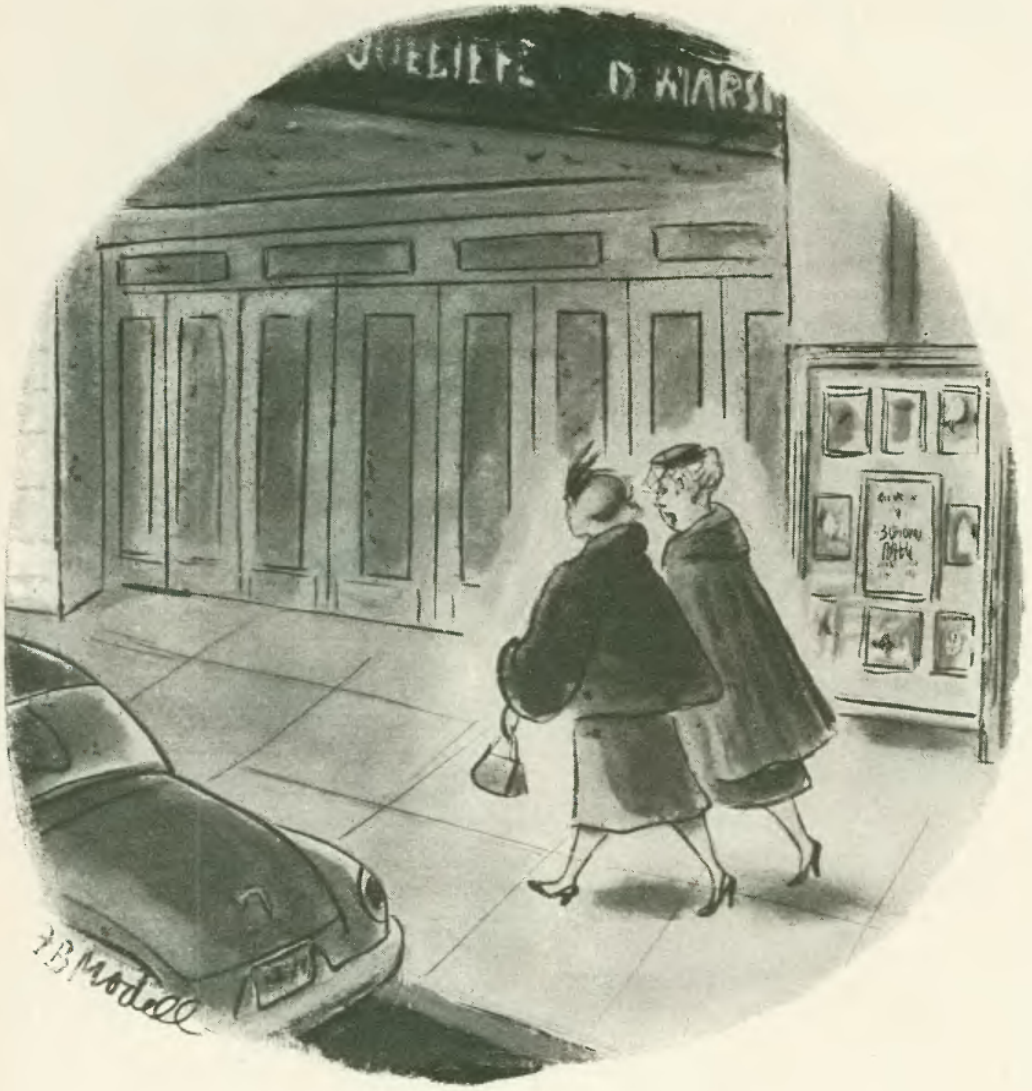
OVER a period of years I have, on my occasional visits to France, spent many a delightful hour in the company of one or another of that country's great chefs, a thoughtful, wise, and witty group of men who consider themselves the guardians of French civilization. In the land of Brillat-Savarin, where cooking is regarded as one of the major arts, these celebrated practitioners of the *haute cuisine* easily eclipse Cabinet Ministers, novelists, and members of the Académie Française, and are almost as popular as the bicycling heroes of the Tour de France. The great chefs are interviewed by newspapers on problems of cuisine and life in general, asked for advice by young people and for comfort by old, invited to state functions, and decorated by the President of the Republic, and they are the friends of kings, former kings, statesmen, composers, philosophers, and poets. These chefs constitute a small, select circle; there have hardly ever been more than a score of them at any one time. Admission to the circle is gained only after years of strict devotion to the severe, exalted standards of the best French cooking. The great chefs have a low estimate of cooking, eating, drinking, or, for that matter, living anywhere but in France. They often wonder about so-called French restaurants in the dreary, unepicurean world beyond the borders of France and are disturbed by rumors drifting back from that void—rumors substantiating their suspicions that there is practically nothing French about such establishments except the names of some of the dishes on their menus, and that even these are frequently misspelled. "French restaurants abound in New York," Raymond Baudouin, a member of the Académie du Vin de France and one of his country's most respected wine experts, wrote in the December, 1949, edition of *La Revue du Vin de France*, "but their family connection with French cuisine is usually fairly remote, their gastronomy is Americanized, and the sign on their doors is there simply to attract customers."

One of the very few French restaurants outside France that French connoisseurs accept as worthy of the name is Le Pavillon, at 5 East Fifty-fifth Street, whose proprietor, Henri Soulé, is a member in good standing, *in absentia*, of the illustrious circle, despite the fact that he is a maître d'hôtel rather than a chef. A maître d'hôtel, so the great chefs say, is apt to think first of making money, whereas a chef, although he, too, must bear in mind the cost of things if the establishment he works for is to stay in business, thinks first of cooking. Soulé, who has spent a quarter of a century in the faithful service of the *haute cuisine*, is undeniably far from absent-minded about income and outgo, having built up the thriving Pavillon almost singlehanded during the last twelve years, but his heart lies in the kitchen and he has not let the success of his restaurant lull him into lowering his standards—standards that apply as much to good wine as to good food. He was given the supreme accolade three and a half years ago, when he was invited by Fernand Point, the owner of the Restaurant de la Pyramide, in Vienne, in the Département de l'Isère, and generally considered the greatest chef in all France, and Alexandre Dumaine, the chef and proprietor of the Hôtel de la Côte-d'Or, in Saulieu, Burgundy, and a worthy runner-up for the title, to share a Cuvée des Dames Hospitalières of the Hospices de Beaune, in Burgundy; he accepted, and the three of them became co-owners of the 1949 vintage of a distinguished vineyard. M. Baudouin, in striking contrast to his disparaging opinion of most French restaurateurs practicing here, refers to Soulé as "*le Fernand Point des Amériques*." Simon Arbelot, of the Académie des Gastronomes (France is the only country that has academies devoted exclusively to the study of wine and food), has called Soulé "*l'ambassadeur de la cuisine française*." A transplanted Frenchman, C. C. Philippe, who is the successor to Oscar at the Waldorf-Astoria, has gone so far as to describe the Pavillon as "unquestionably the foremost French restaurant in New York."

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm of Soulé's fellow-countrymen who have seen him in action, some of the great chefs of France remain skeptical. They are ready to grant that he has ability and the best of intentions, but they still have their reservations about any French restaurant that is located three thousand miles away from its source of inspiration and the finicking demands of French customers. On my latest visit to France, M. Point himself expressed this view, saying in his slow, musing way, "I'm convinced Soulé has done well by the French cuisine, but after all how French can *any* French restaurant be in America?" It seemed a reasonable question, and when I returned to this country shortly afterward, I decided to find out.

Henri Soulé

ONE'S impression upon entering the Pavillon is that it is unmistakably French. The décor and the atmosphere of its three dining rooms are like those of a first-class restaurant in Paris. As is the custom in many French restaurants, the diners, instead of facing one another, sit side by side on banquettes that run along the walls. The dominant colors are soft red and light green, and there are many mirrors. On each table is a centerpiece of long-stemmed red roses; Soulé buys six hundred of them twice a week. The lighting is at once invitingly dim and bright enough to make no mystery of what one is eating. Confronting the guest as he enters is a *buffet froid* that is notable for its restraint; instead of the overwhelming profusion of dishes so often encountered on an hors-d'oeuvre wagon, here are only a few carefully chosen delicacies—salmon from Nova Scotia, caviar from Russia (Soulé's monthly caviar bill comes to twenty-five hundred dollars), *foie gras aux truffes* from France, and *terrine de canard*, *bœuf à la mode en gelée*, and *langue givrée* from the kitchen of the Pavillon. The official language of the restaurant is French. Soulé has eighty-five employees, practically all of whom either came from France or were born in this country of French parents; several of them have been working with



"Brooks Atkinson said it was awfully good, but he didn't seem to like it much."

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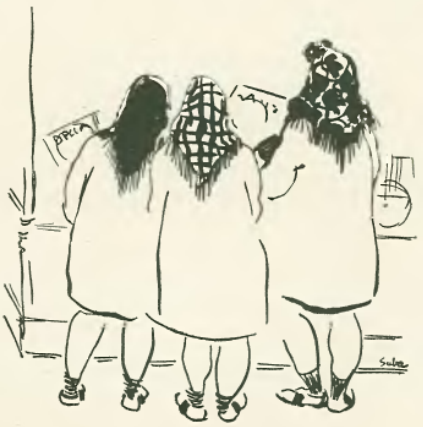
him since 1939, when he got his start in America, as head of the restaurant in the French Pavilion at the New York World's Fair. The waiters can also speak English, but some of them appear to do so with reluctance. The menus are, of course, printed in French. In fact, the only dissonant note—Soulé's concession to native custom—is a large bar at the far end of the *nouvelle salle*, as the dining room to the left of the entrance is called. Here Martinis and Daiquiris are mixed—much too close to the diners, in the opinion of those who prefer wine with their meals. Otherwise, everything about the place runs true to form, and more than one customer has been known to comment on how reminiscent the Pavillon is of the Café de Paris, that celebrated and gracefully old-fashioned Parisian restaurant on the Avenue de l'Opéra. This is no coincidence. The interior of the Pavillon was designed by Maurice Chalom, a French artist who also designed the interior of the Café de Paris. And Henri Soulé, the founder, sole owner, maître d'hôtel, and guiding spirit of the Pavillon, spent several years as maître d'hôtel of the Café de Paris.

It is almost impossible to dine at the Pavillon without encountering Soulé. He tries to greet each guest at the door and to say goodbye to each later. He pilots the customers to their tables or, if he can't take the time for that, instructs one of his captains to do so, and he also pilots them past the unmapped shallows and reefs of the menu, suggesting *plats du jour* and recommending wines. During a lull, he is likely to serve a customer himself—carving a saddle of lamb, slicing a *châteaubriant*, or preparing a *carré de chevreuil flambé* at a table. The rest of the time, he is rushing to answer the telephone, whispering orders to his subordinates, initialling the checks of customers whose credit is good, or placing a centerpiece just so. Soulé is five feet five inches tall and, as befits a lover of good food and wine, inclines to stoutness, but his erect bearing and quick movements tend to camouflage this. His profile has been compared by one of his more admiring customers to that of the Duc de La Rochefoucauld and by a less susceptible one to that of a hardheaded French peasant from the Landes region, which, indeed, is where Soulé was born. His face is round, his forehead high, his nose prominent and curved, and his dark, shiny hair is always brushed back in a smooth pompadour. In moments of contempt or anger, he is capable of a glacial stare so devastating that one impressionable member of his staff claims to have seen a *sauce Béarnaise* curdle under it. Soulé is likely to respond with this stare if a customer makes what he considers an unwarranted request for a choice table; at such times, if the conversation has been in English, he switches to French. He speaks grammatically correct English, and compensates for his French tendency to accent the last syllable of a word by hitting some words hard on the first syllable—"*Ken*tucky," for instance, and "*Con*necticut." His employees are loyal to him, although he isn't always easy to work for, being fastidious in his standards and uncompromising in his demands. During the busiest hours of the day, he is constantly tense, and his eyes, at least, rarely smile; he knows that something may go wrong at any instant, and that a restaurant is only as good as the worst meal one has had there. He makes a point of being at all times impeccable in his attire, his manners, and his handling of business matters. His only hobby, he says, is paying his bills promptly. His lieutenants, though hard-pressed themselves, sometimes wonder how he manages to bear up under the strain. "He would have had a nervous breakdown long ago if he didn't have the constitution of a healthy peasant," one of them said recently.

Since he opened the Pavillon twelve years ago, Soulé has not taken more than twelve days off, except for Sun-

days and legal holidays, when the place is closed, and a working vacation of a month or so each summer, when he shuts up shop and goes to France to reconnoitre the food and wine markets. The Pavillon is his life. He is fond of prizefights and, like most Frenchmen, was an ardent fan of the late Marcel Cerdan. When, on the evening of September 21, 1948, Cerdan fought for the last time in these parts, against Tony Zale in Jersey City, Soulé wanted desperately to attend the fight, but he couldn't bring himself to leave the Pavillon until he had seen the last of his guests properly served. Finally, a few minutes before the fight was scheduled to begin, he was whisked off to Jersey City in the limousine of one of the fight's promoters, a Pavillon client, and, thanks to a police escort thoughtfully provided by another Pavillon client, arrived just in time. He was rewarded by seeing Cerdan knock Zale out in the twelfth round. Soulé feels that his aversion to leaving his restaurant during business hours has contributed to its success; he has witnessed the downfall of a number of similar establishments whose owners didn't feel it necessary to be constantly on the premises. "You don't have to be gone for a week or even a day," he says. "Turn your back on those *types* for only a few minutes and right away they'll start to slow down."

SOULÉ had not been in this country long before he perceived that there are certain fundamental differences between the problems of running a French restaurant in France and those of running a French restaurant here. In France, most of the respected restaurants cater to people's palates and pay little attention to who those people are. Once, noticing that the paint on the ceiling of a fine old Parisian restaurant was peeling, I asked the proprietor why he didn't have it repainted, and he replied, "Monsieur, did you ever meet a Frenchman who looks at the ceiling while he's eating?" The great houses of French gastronomy—besides Point's Pyramide and Dumaine's Côte-d'Or, the names of Raymond Thuilier's Oustau de Baumanière, in Les Baux; the Auberge du Père Bise, in Talloires; Lapérouse and L'Escargot, in Paris; La Réserve, in Beaulieu; Dubern, in Bordeaux; and the Hôtel de la Poste, in Avallon, come to mind—are patronized by so-called "serious" eaters, to whom the location of their tables and the names of their neighbors mean nothing and the *gratin de queues d'écrevisses* and the *râble de lièvre aux raisins*, accompanied by the right wines, mean everything. Moreover, a Frenchman frequenting such a restaurant wouldn't think of devoting less than two and a half hours to lunch, nor, intent on the delicate taste of the sauces and the lingering aftertaste of the wines, would he concern himself with the number of calories he was consuming. To suggest that he smoke while eating would be an affront. Soulé acknowledges that things are not the same here. At the Pavillon, as at several comparable restaurants in the city, some of the steady customers have established a sort of social topography all their own. One of the Pavillon's principal landmarks is a small front room, sometimes perversely called the sanctuary, which opens directly on to the street and is cluttered with the constant traffic of customers making their way to and from the two other dining rooms. For all its hustle and bustle, many of Soulé's regulars regard the tables in the sanctuary as by far the most desirable.



Second choice with them is the *nouvelle salle*, to the left of the sanctuary, with its rattle and clank of cocktail shakers behind the bar, and in last place is what is known simply as the *salle*, a large room in the rear, where the tempo is slower and one may dine quietly and at peace with the world. This is a state of affairs that Soulé has noncommittally, and profitably, come to accept, as he has the fact that a large number of his best customers prefer cocktails to wine, worry about their waistlines, smoke between courses, and are disposed to hurry through a meal in little more than an hour.

Having thus adjusted himself to his environment, Soulé diligently humors his customers, doing his best to seat them where they think they will be happiest and to serve them what they want as swiftly as they want it. His attitude toward his guests is courteous but cool. He never fraternizes with them and would rather be seen cooking with lard than slapping a guest on the back, pulling up a chair, and calling for drinks. In a city where the relationship between restaurateurs and their guests is often informal and on a first-name basis, Soulé remains unbending. Few of his customers call him by his first name, and still fewer are addressed by him in that way. Even outside the restaurant, Soulé treats his customers with a precisely calculated reserve. Last summer, a couple of Pavillon regulars crossing the Atlantic on a French Line ship discovered that Soulé was also a passenger and invited him a number of times to have a drink with them; he accepted only on

CAN I GET YOU A GLASS OF WATER?

OR, PLEASE CLOSE THE GLOTTIS AFTER YOU

One trouble with a cough,
It never quite comes off.
Just when you think you're through coughing,
There's another cough in the offing.
Like the steps of a moving stair,
There is always another cough there.
When you think you are through with the spasm
And will plunge into sleep like a chasm,
All of a sudden, quickly,
Your throat gets tickly.
What is this thing called a cough
That never quite comes off?
Well, the dictionary says it's an expulsion of air from the lungs with violent effort and noise produced by abrupt opening of the glottis,
To which I can only reply glottis schmottis.
Not that I reject the glottis theory—indeed, I pride myself on the artistry
Of my glottistry—
But there is a simpler definition with which I freely present you:
A cough is something that you yourself can't help, but everybody else does on purpose just to torment you.

—OGDEN NASH

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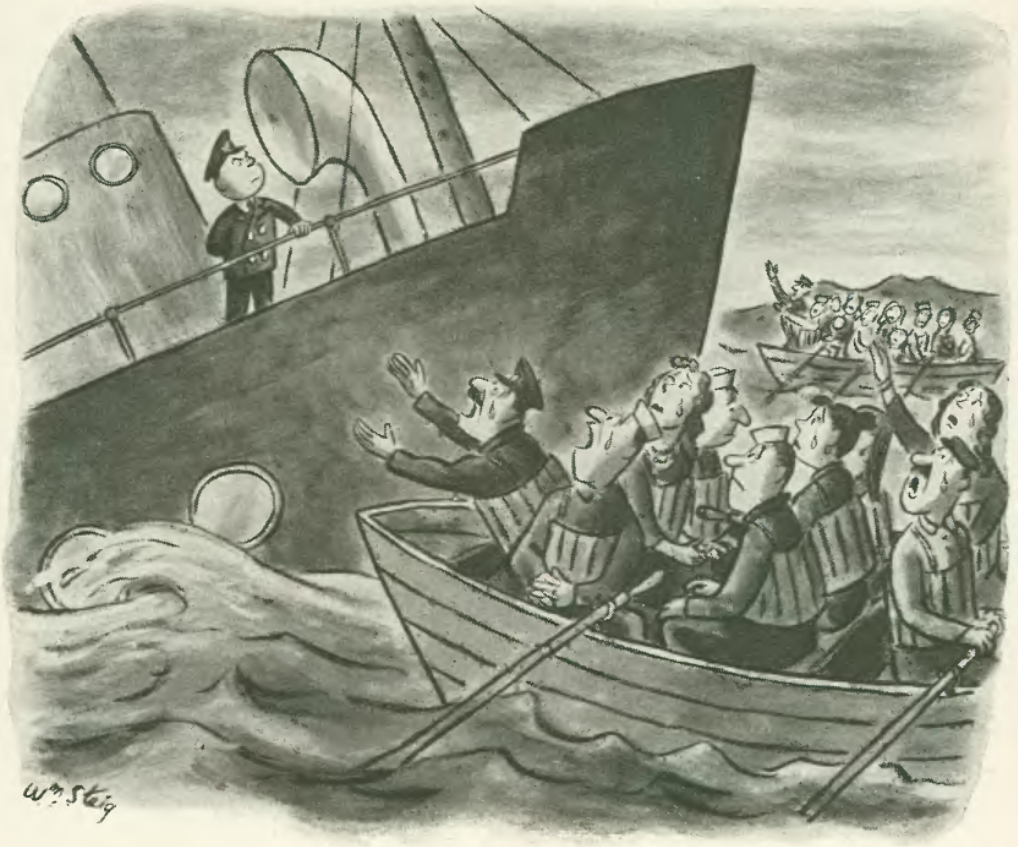
the last day of the voyage, when he felt that any danger of *rapprochement* had passed. Because of his remoteness, some people consider him stuffy, but experience has taught him to be on his guard. People who consider themselves friends of a restaurant proprietor are likely to ask for favors that circumstances make it impossible to grant—a good table, for instance, when all the good tables are reserved—and upon being turned down, no matter how apologetically, resolve to take their business elsewhere.

The Pavillon has sixty tables, with a seating capacity of a hundred and forty, and the demand for accommodations frequently exceeds the supply. Soulé is therefore obliged to require that diners make reservations for the most popular hours, which are from one to two-thirty in the afternoon and from seven to nine at night. Twice a day, an hour before the Pavillon opens—at twelve-thirty, for lunch, and at six-thirty, for dinner—Soulé consults his list of reservations and starts allocating his tables. This is a delicate task, for which he relies heavily on his knowledge of human nature in general and his familiarity with his customers' foibles in particular. As the guests start to arrive, Soulé, who carries the whole seating arrangement in his head, much as Toscanini carries a score, shows himself a true master of the arts of diplomacy—the half promise and the three-quarter assurance, the ability never to say no, saying yes when no is meant, and, when all else fails, appeasing with a smile.



DREAMS OF GLORY

Going Down with the Ship

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Originally, the Pavillon consisted of only two rooms—the one that is now the sanctuary and was then the bar, and the big *salle* behind it. During the winter of 1943-44, Soulé rented the adjacent premises on the west—an office that had just been vacated by Western Union—and broke through the walls, creating the *nouvelle salle*. Then his troubles began. Some of his regulars decided that the old *salle* was too stodgy for them and demanded tables in the *nouvelle salle*, where they could watch the comings and goings at the bar, which had not yet been moved to its present location. In May of the following year, Soulé became involved in a dispute with his waiters, who wanted, among other things, an arrangement whereby their stations would be rotated once a week, so that everybody could have a crack at the preferred tables, at which, as a rule, the more liberal tippers were seated. The waiters went on strike and stayed out forty-two days, creating a situation that still makes Soulé wince. Soulé managed to keep the Pavillon going, after a fashion, by closing down the *salle* and serving meals only in the bar and the *nouvelle salle*, with the help of the non-striking members of his staff—two maîtres d'hôtel, twenty-two chefs and cooks, the cashier, the hat-check girl, and a pantryman. As the days passed and the waiters showed no signs of giving in, Soulé threatened to close the *salle* permanently and to operate a condensed version of the Pavillon, tentatively named Le Petit Pavillon, in what was left of the place; to show the waiters and the union that he meant business, he called in workmen, had the bar moved to its present position in the *nouvelle salle*, and converted its former location into a dining room. At this point, the strike was settled by mediation, the waiters went back to work, and the Pavillon stayed in business, uncondensed.

As matters turned out, the strike was a good thing for Soulé. For some time before the walkout started, it had been his custom to set up a few small tables in the entrance room as emergency accommodations in the event of an overflow, but it was not until he moved the bar out that the room became the sanctuary and a social success—and the Pavillon a full-fledged commercial one. Soulé cannot explain this phenomenon, nor has he reason to complain about it. Today, space in the sanctuary is at such a premium that some people appear delighted to eat at tiny extra tables hastily set up in the middle of the aisle there during the rush hours, or so close to the revolving door that they are constantly fanned by it. "They would rather dine in the telephone booth than in the *salle*," Soulé says, with only a momentary lifting of his eyebrows.

MANY leading chefs and maîtres d'hôtel have learned the elements of their trade in the establishments of their parents, but Soulé is a first-generation restaurant man. The son of a moderately successful building contractor, he was born on March 12, 1903, in Saubrigues, a tiny hamlet situated

halfway between Dax and Bayonne, in the southwestern corner of France—a region known gastronomically for its cabbage soup, omelets with peppers, and foie gras. Soulé's mother was a housewife who was so gifted in the kitchen that her son still thinks of the *brandade de morue* she used to cook—a purée of salt codfish—as preferable to such Pavillon specialties as *volaille étuvée* or *soufflé de homard*. "*Maman* would cut the cod into small pieces and poach them for about ten minutes," Soulé says. "Then, after removing the skin and bones, she'd mix in slices of potatoes she had boiled in their skins, and add vinegar, oil, garlic, and chopped parsley. She always served her *brandade de morue* neither hot nor cold but just tepid. What a dish, what a dish! Sometimes when I went home for a holiday, I'd eat it morning, noon, and night."

Soulé got into the restaurant business by accident. An uncle of his who was a baker in Bayonne supplied *brioches* and *petits pains* to the Hôtel Continental, in nearby Biarritz. One day, he heard that the hotel had an opening for a busboy, and recommended his nephew Henri, who had just finished high school and was looking for something to do. The boy was taken on, and soon, despite his lowly vantage point, became entranced by what he saw of how a restaurant is run. After two years of clearing tables at the Continental, he went to Paris and got a job as waiter in the late and lamented Hôtel Mirabeau, on the Rue de la Paix, which then served an impressive lunch, with three wines, for twenty-five francs (about a dollar and a half in those days). The dining room was under the supervision of Ange Valan, a great maître d'hôtel in the best French tradition, and it was from him that Soulé learned the basic precepts of his present occupation. He learned, for example, that a maître d'hôtel must be, above all, a subtle compromiser, capable of soothing not only the resentment of waiters toward overbearing guests but the far more deep-seated resentment of cooks toward waiters—a resentment based on the cooks' feeling that they do all the work and the waiters collect all the tips. Day after day, Soulé studied Valan's technique, which combined the talents of an actor, a lawyer, a doctor, and a diplomat. Nobody was ever hurried into ordering at the Mirabeau; instead of standing impatiently with pencil poised, Valan appeared to take pleasure in watching a guest ponder the menu, which was scrawled in the traditional violet ink, with the *plats du jour* and *spécialités de la maison* in red and the special *spé-*

cialités written upside down to attract proper attention. Sensing that a guest was unfamiliar with the Mirabeau's cuisine, Valan would tactfully steer him away from dishes that might call for an acquired taste, and recommend something of a deceptive simplicity that could not fail to please. Aware that a customer had a delicate stomach, he would prescribe a concoction that was both bland and succulent. And always, of course, he stood ready to suggest, as the meal progressed, the proper concomitants from the Mirabeau's cellars.

Impressed by the intricacies of the calling, Soulé resolved that he would become a maître d'hôtel. In 1919, to broaden his training, he moved on, still as a waiter, to Claridge's Hotel, on the Champs-Elysées. He was there only a short while, however—just long enough to become acquainted with and marry a Parisienne named Olga Muller—before he was called up for his two-year stretch in the French Army. After ten months of basic training, he was made a corporal and given the job of running the officers' mess at Mülheim, in the Ruhr, and he spent the rest of his stretch there. To hear Soulé tell it, he was an autocrat in a corporal's uniform, and conducted the mess strictly according to his own ideas; he decided what the colonels were going to eat, and there were no arguments. Upon getting out of the Army, he went back to the Mirabeau, and was made a captain of waiters. He was twenty-three—the youngest captain of waiters in Paris. In 1930, he was offered a job as a captain at Ciro's, which he quickly accepted, for the Mirabeau was physically run-down and destined to close and Ciro's was, as it still is, one of Paris's most successful restaurants. It was managed by two of the greatest Frenchmen in the business—Maurice Chambenoit and Julien Rémiot. A few years ago, M. Rémiot came to the United States to visit a granddaughter who married an American soldier in France after the war, and Soulé proudly invited his former employer to dinner at the Pavillon. "M. Rémiot perceived everything that was going on—a perfect maître d'hôtel," Soulé recalls. "He turned to me and said, '*Dites donc*, Henri, haven't I seen that *bombe* before?' I said, 'But of course. We used to call it *la bombe de vanille flambée* at Ciro's—chilled fresh fruit on a base of vanilla ice cream, sprinkled with chopped nuts and topped with heated kirsch, lighted.' He was so moved he kissed me on the cheek and started to cry."

In 1933, Chambenoit and Rémiot

left Ciro's to manage La Crémaillère, on the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, which they had owned for some time. A short while later, Soulé also left Ciro's, to become a captain at the Café de Paris. The Café de Paris was run by the late Louis Barraya, who was simultaneously managing three other distinguished restaurants—the Pavillon d'Armenonville, the Pré Catelan, and Fouquet's—and who in the course of his career educated a whole generation of French maîtres d'hôtel. Barraya was the brother-in-law of the late Jean Drouant, a member of a family long prominent in the operation of Parisian restaurants and himself the owner of three renowned establishments—Drouant Place Gaillon, Pavillon Royal, and Bois de Boulogne. During the next five years, Soulé rose to the position of manager and chief of staff under Barraya. Soulé and his wife were living comfortably in an attractive apartment near the Etoile, and had a car and a bank account. He was doing well. In the fall of 1938, Drouant sent for him and asked him how he would like to go to New York and help run a restaurant at the World's Fair.

"I was stunned," Soulé says. "I'd always wanted to visit America. As a boy in Saubrigues, I used to read all the books about America I could get hold of. But I'd never dreamed I'd really get here." It developed that Drouant had sponsored a plan to operate a semi-outdoor restaurant as part of the French Pavilion at the World's Fair, which was to open the following spring. Barraya and several other restaurant men in Paris had promised to chip in, but at the last minute all of them except Barraya got cold feet and quit. In this crisis, Drouant and Barraya decided to go ahead and, backed by the French Line and by the considerable resources of their own restaurants, started to recruit a competent staff. In March, 1939, Drouant, together with Soulé and ninety-eight other Frenchmen (sixty kitchen workers and thirty-eight maîtres d'hôtel, waiters, carvers, and wine stewards), arrived in New York. Soulé was made general manager of Le Restaurant du Pavillon de France—or, as it soon became known, the French Restaurant.

THE French Restaurant opened on May 9, 1939, and proved to be one of the outstanding attractions of the Fair. By the end of May, 18,401 people had been served there; in June, 26,510 were served. Word of the high quality of its food and wines got around, and by the time the restaurant closed for the win-

ter, on October 31st, it had served a total of 136,261 meals. Nowadays, its menu reads like a nostalgic momento of an earlier century: *Suprême de Barbue Mornay*, $1.50; *Homard Monte Carlo*, $1.75; *Coq au Vin de Bordeaux*, $1.60; *Gigot d'Agneau Boulangère*, $1.60; *Soufflé Palmyre*, ninety cents; *crêpes Suzette*, $1.25; and *tous les fromages*, fifty cents. The wine list featured Perrier-Jouët champagne, at $6 a bottle; Château Margaux '29, at $4.50; Château Cheval Blanc '29, at $5.50; Château Beychevelle '24, at $3; Cos d'Estournel '34, at $2.50; and Clos de Vougeot '34, at $4. Soulé often worked eighteen hours a day; in addition to looking after his regular duties as maître d'hôtel, he was tormented by problems of supply and bookkeeping. Business was excellent until the first of September, when the war broke out. A few weeks later, Drouant called a meeting of all the employees. "There were a few short speeches but no oratory," Soulé recalls. "There was no doubt in anyone's mind about where our place was." At the end of October, when the restaurant closed, Soulé and the others went back to France. Only the fifty-eight-year-old Drouant stayed on in New York, to wind up its business affairs.

Soulé spent a few days with his wife, in Paris, and then left for Bordeaux, where he joined the 1st Machine Gun Company of the 168th Infantry Regiment, resuming the rank of corporal. During the so-called phony war, he spent most of his time doing close-order drill in front of a barracks in Bordeaux, and proved sufficiently competent at it to be promoted to sergeant. In the winter of 1940, he was notified, through channels, that he was to be demobilized and sent to New York on a *commission civile*, by order of Prime Minister Edouard Daladier. The French government had decided to reopen the French Pavilion at the World's Fair and considered Soulé's services more valuable as manager of the restaurant there than as a sergeant in Bordeaux; the restaurant's staff, however, was to be reduced from a hundred men to twenty-eight, all of them over thirty-five. Soulé and the twenty-seven others arrived in New York late in April, 1940, on the Manhattan, which had sailed from Genoa. Two weeks later, France was overrun by the Germans, and on June 14th, Paris fell. Soulé and his men wept, as Frenchmen did everywhere, but then they pulled themselves together and carried on through the summer. The season was not a success. For one

thing, the weather was bad—out of the one hundred and seventy-three days the Fair was open, sixty-five were rainy—and, for another, the fall of Paris discouraged many Fair-goers from visiting the Pavilion. Between May 11th, when the restaurant opened, and October 31st, when it closed, it served only 85,365 meals—a good fifty thousand fewer than it had served the previous season. At the end of that time, Soulé and his men were out of work. Away from their ranges, pantries, wine shelves, and tables, the men felt lost. It was, of course, an unhappy period for Frenchmen everywhere; three-fifths of France was occupied by the Germans, and Pierre Laval was making a sorry spectacle of himself in Vichy. Soulé and his men talked things over, and ten of them decided not to go back to France. "We just couldn't face living under the Boches," Soulé says. "It wasn't an easy decision, for we had no idea what we could do in New York. Most of my men had no money saved and didn't know where their next meal was coming from. All of us had only temporary visitors' visas and were not allowed to accept steady employment. Ah, it was terrible, terrible! We sat around for weeks making vague plans, and every now and then one of the men would say to me, 'Why don't you start a French restaurant here in New York? We'll all be with you. And you made so many friends at the World's Fair.' Well, I began to think about it. It was true I had made friends. I had a book containing over three thousand cards inscribed with the names and addresses of people we had served at the French Pavilion—people who told me they had enjoyed themselves. Everybody I talked to encouraged me. Finally, I decided that I would take my men temporarily to Canada, so that we could reënter this country with the status of refugees, and I began to look around for a suitable place for a restaurant."

Soulé found what struck him as a suitable place—his present premises, on East Fifty-fifth Street—where an establishment called Palmer's 711 Restaurant was up for sale. Actually, it wasn't much of a place; the kitchen was inadequate, and the location was supposed to be jinxed. A few years before the 711 gave up, a French restaurant called L'Apéritif had failed to survive there. But Soulé, who isn't superstitious, was convinced that it was an ideal spot for a restaurant of the sort he had in mind, and he hastily took an option on it before doing anything about the requirements of the immigration authorities. Then, in June, 1941, he

shepherded his men to Niagara Falls, Canada, in order to be able to bring them into the country again on the French quota. The others were readmitted to the United States without a hitch, but Soulé, to his horror, was held up owing to some technicality connected with his papers. He spent three bleak weeks in Canada before his troubles were straightened out, but at last, on June 28th, he was allowed to reënter this country, and without so much as a backward glance at the Falls he hurried to New York. A little over five years later, on August 8, 1946, he became an American citizen.

TAKING stock of his assets, Soulé found himself long on good will but rather short on cash. In the latter department, he had, in fact, only twenty-four thousand dollars—part of it money he had saved and part of it loans from two silent partners, whom he has since repaid—with which to equip and open his restaurant. He spent ten thousand dollars on furnishings and decorating, six thousand on rent, insurance, and the legal expenses of incorporating the restaurant as the French Pavillon Restaurant Corporation (for both commercial and sentimental reasons he had decided to keep the name of the World's Fair show place), and another six to take over the lease to the premises, which left him two thousand dollars on which to operate. He was able to obtain most of his supplies on credit from wholesalers who had dealt with him while he was managing the French Restaurant and were familiar with his hobby of paying his bills on time. The Pavillon opened on the evening of October 15, 1941. Of the forty members of Soulé's staff who worked there that night, eleven are still with him: Cyrille Jean Louis Christophe, the head chef; Martin Decré, Soulé's deputy; Pierre Franey, an assistant chef; Pierre Géraud, Gabriel Jofre, and Henri Rouget, captains; Gaston Large, a waiter; Charles Hubert, a steward; Mme. Marie Casanova, the cashier; John D. Trump, the accountant; and Mohammed Youbi, who is in charge of the pantry. A preamble to the Pavillon's wine card on opening night read, "This distinguished offering of the great wines of France, most of which would be rarities at any time, has been made available through the joint efforts of Messrs. Bellows & Company and ourselves, to keep fresh the memories of happier events in that country, despite the tragedy of present conditions." The card (its tribute to Bellows represented a friendly gesture toward the president of the firm, who was a personal friend of

Soulé's) listed twenty-two champagnes, twenty-six red Bordeaux, and twenty-seven red Burgundies. There had been no advance publicity—Soulé couldn't afford it—but the place was sold out. "I remember the opening-night menu," Soulé says. "Caviar, sole *bonne femme*, *poulet braisé* with champagne, cheese, and dessert. Everybody liked it. When it was over, I went up to my office and started to cry, because my parents were in Saubrigues and my wife was in Paris and there was no one to share my success with me."

Soulé's thoughts of success turned out to be premature. Fifty-four days later, the United States was in the war, and for a few months there were a good many empty tables at the Pavillon. Then, during 1943, as the nation's prospects became brighter, business gradually picked up, and it has gone on picking up ever since. When the Pavillon opened, it had a hundred and twelve seats and forty employees, or one employee for every two and four-fifths seats; today, with its hundred and forty seats, it has eighty-five employees, or one for every one and three-fifths seats. In 1941, a table d'hôte lunch, consisting of hors d'oeuvre, a *plat du jour*, dessert, and coffee, cost $1.75; today a *plat du jour* alone costs $3.50. The payroll the first year was $75,195; the payroll last year was $277,573. Gross income the first year was $263,714; gross income last year was $831,732; In the past eleven years, the restaurant has served over 1,100,000 people, paid out $2,017,022 in wages alone, and taken in a total of $6,582,854. Soulé likes to think of himself as an artist rather than a businessman, but there can be no doubt that, as such things go, he has built up a big business. He now owns all the hundred and two shares of the French Pavillon Restaurant Corporation.

IN moments of introspection, Soulé sometimes dreams of the kind of restaurant he would like to own. It would be a comfortable, unpretentious place, with no glitter and with only twelve tables, seating four people each and arranged in such a way that no one of them could be considered preferable to the others. People would feel at home there, and think nothing of spending three hours for lunch, while the chefs would think nothing of spending six hours or more on the preparation of *fumet de poisson* or *fumet de gibier*. Everything would be cooked to order, and customers would call a day in advance for such delicacies of the *cuisine bourgeoise* as *tripes à la mode de Caen*,

which must spend at least ten hours in the oven. Soulé realizes that a restaurant of this kind could exist only in Paradise, or perhaps in some remote French province where the costs of operating are still tolerable. With wages, prices, rent, and taxes what they are, he has to serve three hundred people a day just to break even, and a good many more than that to make it worth his while to stay in business. On a normal day, there are around a hundred and fifty people for lunch, and two hundred and thirty for dinner. Quite a few of them are in a hurry and ask to be served quickly. Others express requests no less shocking ("Make my omelet on the raw side"), for which they might well be asked to leave a similar restaurant in France. Once, in Saulieu, I heard a customer tell M. Dumaine that he was in a hurry, to which that distinguished gentleman replied, "In that case, Monsieur, I think you had better go elsewhere and get yourself a sandwich." And the management of La Tour d'Argent, in Paris, gently tries to avoid such occurrences by printing this reminder on its menu: "*La grande cuisine demande beaucoup de temps.*"

In becoming resigned to the tempo and customs of his adopted land, Soulé has acquired a pragmatic view of things that cushions the shock as he writes down some particularly barbaric order or assures a guest that he will hustle a meal along. "If I were to insist that my customers take their time, I would be out of business tomorrow," he says. "People here eat before the theatre, not afterward, as they do on the Continent. They arrive at seven, want drinks and a full-course dinner, and expect to make an eight-thirty curtain. Well, it isn't easy, and good restaurants in France wouldn't do it, but with patience, practice, and teamwork we've finally worked it out so that we can serve them a soup or hors d'oeuvre, an entrée, a soufflé, and coffee, all within an hour. We've timed our operations to the point where we can tell a guest that it will take, say, forty-five minutes to broil a saddle of lamb or forty minutes to make a soufflé."

Each day, the menu at the Pavillon lists two *plats du jour*—dishes that are ready to be served instantly—for lunch and another two for dinner; typical of these are *selle d'agneau rôtie persillée*, *cuisseau de veau Pavillon*, *volaille Alexandra*, and *aiguillette de bœuf à la française*. And each day, though it's not on the menu, there is one *plat bourgeois*, which is the sort of thing Soulé likes to eat himself—*tête de veau vinaigrette*, perhaps, or a *choucroute* consisting of

ham and Alsatian sausages with sauerkraut and new potatoes. No more than fifteen portions of the *plat bourgeois* are prepared, and Soulé offers them only to customers he knows will appreciate them. Two-thirds of the Pavillon's clientele order a *plat du jour;* the rest, except for the select few who have the *plat bourgeois*, order à la carte. Soulé's menus are merely suggestion lists; he will prepare anything for a customer, provided he is given enough time. One of his regulars, a sturdy female gourmet of Biblical age, often sends him complicated orders prior to one of her appearances at the restaurant; not long ago, she asked to have a *châteaubriant* prepared in a marinade of vintage Châteauneuf-du-Pape—"just as I used to have it in France back in the good old days." Though Soulé was delighted to oblige, he was a little embarrassed when it came to adding up the bill. "We made the *château*, of course," he later told a friend. "But what with the price of steak and Châteauneuf-du-Pape, we had to charge eighteen dollars a portion. And then the wines and all the rest of it brought that lunch—it was for two—to around sixty dollars." Less expansive customers of the Pavillon find that, not counting wine and other drinks, a lunch for two costs around eight dollars and a dinner around fifteen.

Soulé, who is a great believer in the old saying that no dish can be better than the ingredients that go into it, buys only provisions that he considers first-rate. This, of course, is in the best French tradition—a tradition that it sometimes sorely taxes Soulé's ingenuity to uphold in this country. Fernand Point, to whose restaurant Soulé makes a reverent pilgrimage each summer, once said, "In the *haute cuisine*, you can't think of money or you're through before you start. The chef must be king." Soulé occasionally quotes this dictum, and adds rather sadly, "How pleasant life must be in a land where one never has to consult one's accountant."

Every night at around ten-thirty, as the last of the Pavillon's guests are being served, Christophe, the head chef, takes an inventory of his supplies and compiles a list of his needs for the next day. Half an hour later, the merchants with whom Soulé deals—butchers, poultrymen, fishmen, vegetable men, butter-and-egg men, truffle men, caviar men—start calling up for orders. Soulé has faith in the men he buys from, and they respect his high standards. (A few years ago, a butter dealer who had long held a standing order from Soulé for AA butter—the best grade—began slipping in a few

pounds that were only A. He was warned once but a couple of months later did it again and was dropped forever from the Pavillon's list.) No matter how diligently Soulé scours the markets, he finds that there is a considerable gap between what he would like and what he can get. "If we had everything available to us that they have in Paris, we would be the *ne plus ultra*," he says. "The youngest partridge, the freshest *fraises des bois*, the finest Brie and Pont-l'Evêque when they are in season, the first truffles. The fact, alas, is that we never get any true 'firsts' here. Everything is fresh all year round, so, naturally, it is never *quite* fresh, if you see what I mean. While there are fresh vegetables throughout the year, we miss the *primeurs*—those tender garden vegetables that they have only in the spring on the Continent." Soulé maintains a strict embargo on frozen foods, and buys only fresh vegetables—or, at any rate, what Americans call fresh vegetables—with the exception of canned French *petits pois*, which he considers superior to any peas raised in this country, whether fresh, canned, or frozen.

Soulé rates American sea food as generally excellent but insists that he can find nothing here that approaches the delicacy of the Mediterranean *loup de mer*, or sea perch. He also pines for *rouget*, or red mullet—especially the Mediterranean rock mullet, known as sea woodcock—and for the *omble chevalier*, a member of the trout family that is found in the Annecy region and in the lakes of Switzerland. While he concedes that American beef, lamb, and pork are of unequalled quality, he thinks our veal is inferior. This view is shared by Arsène Tingaud, a French-American whose firm has delivered veal, lamb, pork, sweetbreads, and poultry to the Pavillon since the day it opened. "In France," Tingaud says, "the farmer puts a collar around the neck of a young calf, ties it up inside the barn, and feeds it milk three times a day—patiently, little by little, taking infinite pains, as with a child. The animal never sees the sunshine until it is taken to the slaughterhouse, at the age of four to six weeks. No wonder the meat is white and almost as tender as chicken meat! Here the young calves jump all over the place and are sometimes even fed on grass. Our poultry comes from some of the best farms in New Jersey and Delaware, and is especially good from August to November, but even the best American chicken, no matter when, doesn't have the flavor and tenderness of chickens in the Bresse

region, north of Lyon. There the chickens are kept cooped up all the time and maize is forced down their throats, much as geese are stuffed in Strasbourg and the Périgord region. A goose liver from around there sometimes weighs two pounds and more."

One of Soulé's regrets is that New York State's fish-and-game laws are so stringent that they all but make it impossible to prepare brook trout *au bleu* as it is prepared in France. There, every major restaurant has a small pool stocked with live trout, which are removed as they are ordered, killed by a blow on the head, cleaned, and thrown into a boiling court bouillon of water, salt, vinegar, minced carrots and onions, parsley, thyme, and bay leaves, after which they are served with melted brown butter and boiled new potatoes—as fine a dish, in the opinion of many epicures, as any in the world. Soulé could have a pool in his establishment if he chose, but the difficulties of legally buying the fish to stock it and of removing them from the pool in the off-season make the whole idea impractical.

WHEN it comes to such things as forcibly fed poultry and captive trout, there isn't much Soulé can do about competing with his opposite numbers in France, but he feels that in the matter of beef he has the edge on them, and he drives himself relentlessly to make the most of this advantage. Twice a week, on Tuesday and Friday afternoons, he visits the large meat-packing house of Ottman & Co., at Ninth Avenue and Little West Twelfth Street, where he personally selects every piece of beef that is to be delivered to his restaurant. One Tuesday morning not long after my first visit to the Pavillon, he called me and suggested that I go along with him on his trip downtown that afternoon. "Why don't you stop by the restaurant at three-thirty?" he said. "We'll have lunch together before we start." When I arrived at the Pavillon, Soulé, looking tired but immaculate, was saying goodbye to a party of three loquacious ladies, the last of his lunchtime customers. While waiting

for them to leave, I walked in to the bar, where the barman, André Gros-Daillon, was polishing glasses. André, who is a veteran of the Paris Ritz and the old Ritz-Carlton in New York, joined the Pavillon a few weeks after its opening. "*Ah, c'est dur, le travail ici,*" he told me. "I get here at eleven-thirty in the morning and often I am still here at twelve-thirty the next morning. I've got to serve twenty waiters who carry drinks to the tables, in addition to all the customers who line up at the bar. Everybody with their own tastes and everybody in a hurry. *Oui, c'est dur.*"

The three ladies left at last, and I accompanied Soulé to the kitchen, which is in the basement and is reached by twenty-one steep steps that constitute a real challenge to the stamina of the waiters. At that time of day, a general air of letdown hung over the kitchen. Two or three handymen were mopping up, and a couple of cooks in white *toques* were keeping an eye on some large vessels that contained veal stock and *fumet de poisson.* In one corner, a man was listlessly cleaning fish for dinner. In another, the head chef, Christophe, was conferring with three of his top lieutenants. He left them to come over and join us. A slender, modest man—surprisingly slender and modest for a member of a profession that abounds in well-fed prima donnas—Christophe is a native of Pouilly-Fuissé, the home of the famous white Burgundy wine of that name, and served his apprenticeship in Mâcon, in another good wine region. Later, he worked in Lyon, Dieppe, and Evian-les-Bains, and then at the Hôtel de Paris in Monte Carlo, which is considered a tough postgraduate course for ambitious practitioners of his calling. He was a prominent member of the original French team at the World's Fair. "M. Christophe lives only for his work," Soulé said, with surprising warmth. "He is a bachelor and has no family life. This kitchen"—he made a sweeping gesture with his arm, just missing a stack of plates—"is his life. You should have been here a couple of hours ago. At one o'clock, no one was in the restaurant, and by one-twenty there were a hundred and forty people and all of them wanted their orders taken care of right away."

"And, as always, what orders!" Christophe said. "One man likes strong seasoning and another doesn't want any salt. One wants his *pommes en purée* liquid and another wants his omelet well done." He paused meditatively, and then went on, "I'm sorry to say that no

matter how they want it, we can't make a *real* French omelet. The eggs don't have the color of the eggs in France, and even the best American butter is factory-made. It lacks that mellow, hazelnut flavor of the butter from Isigny, Charente, and Savoie, where the farmers and their wives make their butter in small quantities, by hand. People sometimes ask me whether we use a special skillet for our omelets and whether it's made of copper, aluminum, or iron, but they never ask me about the butter. It's the butter and eggs that make an omelet, Monsieur—not the metal. You know, I have come to the unhappy conclusion that certain things shouldn't be served in this country at all. Take calves' liver, for example. Even at a dollar-sixty a pound, the best American calves' liver can't be given the delicate light taste of a French *foie de veau*. We've tried everything, including preparing it *saisi* instead of sauté. Nothing doing. And fillet of sole. Nothing here can compare with the *limande* from the Channel. To be sure, the sole we serve is flown here from England, but that means packing it in ice, and so it is not perfect. Why, when I worked in Dieppe, we used sole right out of the Channel. It makes all the difference."

"It's a sad thing that even a rich man here can't buy the kind of lunch that every middle-class Frenchman can afford from time to time," Soulé said. "Six *marennes*, a partridge—very, very young—and a piece of Brie."

"And *fraises des bois*," said Christophe.

"And *fraises des bois*," said Soulé.

After taking our leave of Christophe, Soulé and I went to the wine cellar, which adjoins the kitchen. Air-conditioning keeps it at a steady temperature of sixty degrees. Two sides are taken up by Bordeaux wines and champagnes, the rest by Burgundies, other French wines, German wines, and liqueurs. The *caviste*, Aimé Thélin, a cheerful, gray-haired, ruddy-faced Frenchman in a pharmacist's white jacket, was on hand to greet us. "*Voici le petit enfant de la cave*," Thélin said, calling my attention to a Cuvée des Dames Hospitalières '49. "Only three years old—a real baby. All told, we have almost fifty thousand bottles of various wines, but we keep most of them in a warehouse. Here there are perhaps no more than fifteen thousand bottles. Ah, but M. Soulé is the true expert when it comes to choosing wines!"

I was already aware of Soulé's reputation as a connoisseur of wine, having heard in France of the discernment he

shows on his buying forays there each summer. Some time ago, one of the most celebrated châteaux in the Médoc marketed some 1929 wine that turned out to have been "heated;" that is, fermentation of the young wine had been speeded up artificially. Soulé, who had bought quite a quantity of the wine, discovered this flaw in the first bottle he opened back at the Pavillon, tried half a dozen bottles to be sure that he was not making a fool of himself, and returned eleven hundred dollars' worth of the stuff. He buys wines as a speculator buys securities, always keeping a lookout for vintages that are inexpensive at the time of purchase but may gain in value with the passage of time. This is a risky business, but one for which he is equipped by thirty years of experience. As Thélin pointed out to me, it's easy to proclaim that the Château Cheval Blanc '37, now offered by the Pavillon at twelve dollars a bottle, is a splendid wine; it was less easy to spot this wine back in 1941, when Soulé laid in a big shipment of it at three dollars a bottle.

SOULÉ and I had lunch in the *nouvelle salle*. On a small side table were two bottles in baskets—a Vieux Château Certan '45 and a Musigny, Comte de Vogüé '34. Soulé filled our glasses with the Certan and served a *pot-au-feu* that a waiter had brought. In addition to the customary ingredients—beef boiled in a consommé with carrots, turnips, leeks, celery, blanched cabbage, potatoes, and a marrow bone—the Pavillon's *pot-au-feu* contains pork and breast of chicken. With it, we each had a cup of clear consommé. Soulé tasted the *pot-au-feu* and nodded approvingly. He loves to eat, but his tendency to put on weight restricts him to one large meal a day. "Yesterday for lunch I had six oysters, which I shouldn't have had, a small *bifteck*, and an endive salad," he said. "Only a sandwich at night. If I ate Christophe's dishes twice a day, I'd gain ten pounds a week. Still, I think I'll have a little more of this *pot-au-feu*."

The waiters were setting the tables for dinner. As we ate, Soulé told me something about the mechanics of running the Pavillon. The restaurant's sixty tables are divided into ten groups of six tables each, and a team of two waiters is assigned to each group; one brings the food from the kitchen, and the other serves it. There are seven captains, each of whom supervises the service at from seven to ten tables. There are no sommeliers, because Soulé considers them superfluous; he himself suggests and takes the orders for wines, and the cap-

tains serve them. Soulé has contracts with the Consolidated Dining Room Employees Union Local 1, and with the Chefs, Cooks, Pastry Cooks and Assistants Union of New York, Local 89, both affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. In the contracts, the unions recognize that "the employer . . . operates a French-type restaurant of high-class clientele, and in the event that the union is unable or fails to furnish and supply the employer with workers of the type and qualifications formerly employed . . . the employer shall then have the right to employ any other person or persons that [he] may deem necessary . . . even though they are not members of a union at the time they are hired." Fifteen of Soulé's employees—the head chef and stewards, and the like—are not members of any union. The weekly minimum union wage for the dining-room help ranges from $29.50, for a busboy, to $53.50, for a captain; kitchen salaries start at forty-six dollars, for a dishwasher, and run up to a hundred and twenty-six dollars, for a *chef saucier*. "That's one of the things that make life so difficult in New York," Soulé told me. "A *saucier* in France gets less money than a dishwasher in America. Over there, the proprietor can afford to have a man in the kitchen who does nothing but strain the flesh of trout through sieves to make *mousse de truite*. If we did that here, we would have to charge a fortune for the dish. We charge four-fifty now for a *mousse de sole* and we're losing money on it. And there is another problem. Something seems to happen to my people as soon as they come to this country. Over there, they took pride in their work, and had a sense of teamwork and a desire for perfection. Everybody tried to do his best. Here, everybody is just trying to get a bigger pay check. The old sense of teamwork is gone. Terrible, terrible!"

We had cheese and a glass of the excellent Musigny, and then, after coffee, we went up to Soulé's office, which is on the second floor, at the end of a dark corridor. Soulé shares the office with his accountant and his secretary, and the little time he spends there is devoted mostly to signing checks, something he allows no one else at the Pavillon to do. To the right of the office is Soulé's dressing room, which resembles an actor's, what with bright lights, multiple mirrors, and stacks of freshly laundered dress shirts. Soulé changed from the dark-blue suit that is his regular midday uniform to a pearl-gray one, put on a pearl-gray tie and a camel's-hair coat, and picked up a briefcase, and

we went out and got into his car—a chauffeur-driven limousine. During the ride downtown, Soulé leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes. He looked worn. "Last night when I went home, my wife complained that I'm working too hard and that I have time for nothing but the restaurant," he said. "I suppose that's true, but the fact is I *like* to work hard. In my métier, you must never relax if you want to be successful, and only the successful man is respected."

It was clear that Soulé is respected at Ottman & Co., where Henry and Jack Ottman, the owners of the firm, greeted him cordially. They were wearing the traditional butchers' white coats, and brought out two similar coats for us, which we slipped on over our overcoats. Soulé led the way to an elevator, carrying his briefcase. At the fourth floor, Jack Ottman opened a heavy double door and we stepped out into a cool, spacious chamber full of shelves, on which sides of beef were lying like bottles in a wine cellar. Each piece was stamped PRIME and bore a sticker showing its weight. Soulé strode along past the shelves, inspecting the sides of beef and occasionally shaking his head and muttering. "Too much fat," he said as he slid his thumb over a fillet, and, again, "The grain must be smooth, as in fine silk. It must be marbled. Feel those fibres! In France, we call cattle like that *la cavalerie*—cattle that have gone in for gymnastics and overdeveloped their muscles."

At last, Soulé found a side of beef to his liking, and nodded to Henry. "This one," he said. Henry pushed a wooden skewer through the layer of fat surrounding the carcass, to denote that the meat had been sold to Soulé, and Soulé opened his briefcase and took out a pair of pliers and several pieces of wire, to which were attached lead tabs marked "H. S." He stuck one of the wires through the fat and fastened the end to the tab with the pliers. This was to prevent any confusion from arising over the matter of whom the animal belonged to. Then he continued his prowl past the shelves, poking, prying, inveighing against too much fat in one case and too much muscle in another. Presently, he selected another side of beef.

"Forty-seven pounds," he said, consulting the sticker. "By the way, what's the price today?"

"One-forty-two for short loins, and one-ninety for tenderloin," Jack said.

"This side is going to cost me over sixty dollars," Soulé told me. "There will be fourteen portions of meat on it. There is possibly a seven-pound fillet,

but only the center part of it can be used for the kind of steaks we serve. That center part will cost me twelve dollars and will perhaps net three steaks. For each dollar's worth of steak I sell, forty-four cents comes right back here to the Ottmans, leaving me fifty-six cents for salaries, taxes, and all sorts of overhead. The customers think I'm getting rich because I charge them seven dollars and a half for a steak. Why, back in 1941 we used to sell a *châteaubriant* for two that big"—he held up his hands to frame an imaginary *châteaubriant* the size of a desk blotter—"for eight dollars and a half. Today we've got to charge fifteen for the same *château*, which is silly. I say people ought to eat less steak, and more lamb and poultry."

SOULÉ and his wife, who joined him here in 1946, have a four-room apartment on Park Avenue, at Seventy-fifth Street, but he rarely goes there except to sleep, and he refers to it as his "place," never as his "home." Home to him is a house he and his wife bought four years ago at Montauk, on the tip of Long Island, and he persists in thinking of it that way even though he spends no more than seven hours a week there—on Sundays, when the Pavillon is closed. The trip to Montauk, which he makes in his limousine, takes three hours and Soulé finds it restful; soon after crossing the Triborough Bridge, he usually falls asleep and doesn't wake until the car swings up in front of his house. Mme. Soulé usually accompanies her husband on these Sunday jaunts. Every now and then, she returns to France, to visit her family and scout wines for the Pavillon, but Soulé keeps on going out to Montauk every Sunday, just the same. One Saturday afternoon not long ago, shortly after he had seen his wife off on the Liberté, he called me up and asked if I would come along to keep him company on his journey out to Montauk the next day. I replied that I would be delighted to, and he said he would stop by and pick me up at my hotel at nine.

When I met Soulé the next morning, he was wearing a sports coat and slacks, a checked topcoat, a woollen muffler, and a cap. All in all, he looked like one of those fashionable travellers to be seen in photographs taken during the early years of this century. He settled himself comfortably in the back of the car and I got in beside him, and the driver arranged a robe over our knees. As Soulé adjusted his muffler and put on a pair of calfskin gloves, there was a smile of cheerful anticipation on his face such as I had not seen there before. "Nine-

twenty," he said, looking at his watch. "We'll be home at twelve-thirty. A pleasant lunch, time to repose, and then a ride to the very tip of the island. We'll leave at seven and be back in town shortly after ten. We'll have a fine day. By the way," he added with a chuckle, "I've got a little surprise for you out there."

It began to drizzle and then to rain, but Soulé seemed unconcerned. As we reached the open countryside, he became even more affable. "I left Saubrigues twenty-five years ago, but I'm really still there," he said. "I've never really become a city man. I always felt happy back home as long as my mother was there. My father and mother were wonderful people and they brought me up to show the proper respect for the amenities of living. At the table, it was always, '*Papa, permets-moi de prendre le sel.*' Father died in 1943. After the war, I went back to see *Maman* every year until she, too, died, in 1951. I've named the house in Montauk after her—Laetitia." He looked out the window for a while and then went on, "I'm glad I bought the house in Montauk. Until we began going there, I was always miserable on Sundays. I would sleep late, or my wife and I would go to Atlantic City for the day—since the Pavillon was closed, there was no other place to go—but we didn't like it."

As we approached our destination, Soulé told the driver to stop at the top of a hill, from which we could see both the ocean and the Sound. Soulé got out in the rain, stretched, and breathed deeply. The view reminded him of the coast of Bretagne, he said, with its sandy dunes and low underbrush. "I love the smell of the sea in the air," he remarked, and added, "This seems a long way from the sanctuary, doesn't it?"

Soulé's house stands on a slight hill overlooking Montauk Point. The gates to the grounds are flanked by a green and a red light, like a harbor entrance, and these had been turned on. The wind was howling, but inside the house it was warm, and there was the smell of good food in the air. Soulé took me by the arm and opened the door to the kitchen. Behind the small range stood Christophe, tasting a sauce.

"*Voilà!*" Soulé said to me. "Our little surprise."

Christophe and Thélin, the *caviste*, had driven out the previous evening to prepare our lunch. Soulé often invites members of his staff who have been with him a long time to come out for the day, and Christophe and Thélin go there so much that they have their own rooms in the house. Although the house stands

empty during the week, it has a nice lived-in look about it. There were flowers in the living room, and the Sunday newspapers and latest magazines. The plumbing and the kitchen are American style, but the furniture suggests an upper-middle-class house in Neuilly-sur-Seine; Soulé said the dining-room table and chairs were the ones he and his wife had used in their Paris apartment. A gallon bottle of cognac stood on the buffet. In the basement was a small but well-stocked wine cellar, and a pantry with a refrigerator containing a bucket of crushed ice in which Thélin had buried a can of caviar.

"The finest of all, *mon vieux*," he told Soulé.

"That's right," Soulé said, rubbing his hands in delight. "Nothing but the best for the *patron* and his friends." He slapped Thélin's back, and Thélin fondly pressed his arm.

Soulé, Christophe, and Thélin went into an earnest huddle on the subject of whether we should have an apéritif or champagne before lunch, and finally decided on a light Cramant *blanc de blancs*, which Soulé characterized as "stimulating and inspiring." By the time each of us had had two glasses of it, we felt stimulated and inspired, and Soulé removed a pullover that he'd worn under his coat. The table was set simply, with exquisite Limoges plates and glassware but without the usual clutter of doilies, ashtrays, matches, vases, candlesticks, individual salt and pepper containers, and miscellaneous bric-a-brac. Thélin put the caviar on a small table next to Soulé, who served it, and produced glasses of chilled vodka. As the next course, Christophe brought in a large, freshly caught striped sea bass that he had bought down in the village a couple of hours earlier and had prepared according to a Pavillon recipe—braising it in buttered aromatics, white wine, and minced mushrooms, and making a beautiful yellow sauce to go with it. Thélin said, "Ah!" and inhaled the aroma, and then he and Soulé and Christophe tucked the ends of their napkins into their collars and we all ate in silence and devoted concentration.

"In New York, you'd never guess there was fish like this in America," said Soulé, sponging up every last bit on his plate with a piece of bread.

"Real freshness in a fish is all a matter of a few hours," said Christophe.

Next came *bœuf à la bourguignonne*—a beef stew marinated in brandy and red wine, braised with the marinade and a *sauce espagnole*, then cooked gently in the oven in a rich wine

sauce, with mushrooms, bacon, and onions, and served with *pommes en purée*. Soulé sniffed the stew expectantly. "*Dis donc*," he said to Christophe. "What wine did you put into it?"

Christophe laughed and said, "Make a guess."

So Soulé sniffed again and guessed that it was *le petit enfant de la cave*, and both Christophe and Thélin exclaimed wasn't it formidable how the *patron* always guessed right, and there was much slapping of shoulders and raising of glasses, which Thélin had now filled with a Château Cheval Blanc '28. In the midst of all this, Christophe brought in a cake with "HAPPY BIRTHDAY AIMÉ" spelled out on its top, and Thélin, whose birthday it was, started to cry. It was after four when we left the table—"a decent time to finish one's lunch," Soulé remarked with a significant sigh.

We had cognac and armagnac with our coffee, and later more champagne, and what was left of the afternoon went fast. After a while, we drove down to the fishing piers to buy sea food, but the boats had come in early and the catch had already been sent into the city. Christophe stumbled and almost landed in a barrel of crushed ice, and it struck everybody as the funniest thing ever.

By the time we got back to the house, a local girl had washed the dishes. We prepared to leave, and Thélin switched off the harbor lights. Then the chauffeur brought the car around and the four of us got in. On the way into town, the talk was of France and food and wine, while the rain beat hard against the windshield and the wipers sang. Maybe it was the talk or maybe it was the weather, but two hours later we were all hungry again and Soulé had the driver stop at a roadside stand. "Let's get out and have a couple of hot dogs," Soulé said. "They're delicious here." —JOSEPH WECHSBERG

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The tendency, these days, is to base musicals on books that have a literate story.... *Pal Joey*, which has just won two prizes, was based on the stories of that name by John O'Hara; *Oklahoma*, on the Pulitzer Prize stories by James Michenor...—*Theatre Arts*.

Nonsense, it was based on "Green Grow the Riggses."

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PERISH THE THOUGHT DEPT.

[*From the Wall Street Journal*]

Perhaps in no other business is purity as important as it is in the drug industry. A faulty batch of, say, vaccines might not only cause an epidemic but seriously injure the reputation of the firm that made it.