



# A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

By Cindy Eisenmenger, *Southeast Chargée de Presse Provinciale*



WHEN BERTRAND DE BOUTRAY LEFT FRANCE SIXTEEN YEARS AGO, HE HAD NO IDEA THAT HE WOULD BECOME SEATTLE'S FAVORITE PARTY CHEF OR AN OFFICER IN THE CHAÎNE DES RÔTISSEURS. HE JUST KNEW THAT HE WAS WILLING TO LEAVE HIS NATIVE COUNTRY FOR THE WOMAN HE LOVED.

Although Bertrand met his bride in France, Brooke—a Seattle girl—soon discovered that she missed America. The couple moved to Paris in the hope of connecting with the American community there. It wasn't long before Bertrand's work with Avon brought them closer to the United States; he and Brooke relocated first to Montreal and later to Vancouver. However, in 1992, Brooke was offered a job in Seattle. The de Boutrays moved once again, this time with two daughters in tow.

Bertrand took a position with Microsoft, translating files from English to French. Yet cafeteria lunches with barefoot coworkers held no appeal for this elegant Frenchman. Neither did searching for reliable nannies as Brooke, an investment portfolio manager, moved up the corporate ladder.

So, the Parisian became uniquely American, quitting work to become "Mr. Mom." For nearly three years, Bertrand cared for his young daughters and ran the household. "It was tough," he admitted. Even more difficult was the fact that his homemaker status embarrassed his aristocratic family in France. What was unusual in America was virtually unheard of in France.

After the de Boutrays's daughters entered

preschool, Bertrand began job hunting again. While money was not a concern because of Brooke's success, he felt driven to work. "As a man, you feel you need to do something," he explained. Yet Bertrand also wanted to feel passionate about his chosen profession. Having already developed a strong interest in food, he decided that it was something that could easily evolve into a passion for him.

Bertrand rejected the idea of opening a restaurant because of the necessary sacrifice of family time. Instead, he began preparing meals in private homes, using the skills he learned at the Cordon Bleu in Paris. However, staying out of sight in people's kitchens made him feel "too much like a caterer," and he turned his attention to teaching, first at community centers and later at gourmet shops.

In a twist of fate, it was the mothers who Bertrand met while caring for his daughters who helped him find his calling. They urged him to teach in private homes, creating cooking parties that ended with a meal. "I felt I filled a niche," he remarked.

Apparently, Seattle agreed, as Bertrand is the successful owner of Bertrand Chez Vous. Chaîne confrères know him as Bailli of the Seattle Chapter and Chambellan Provincial of the Pacific Northwest region. Ironically,

Bertrand had never heard of the Chaîne while in France. He first encountered our organization in Seattle in 1997, while attending a fundraiser at the home of Chancellor National George Brown.

In addition to his Chaîne duties, Bertrand plans cooking parties throughout the United States. He also leads an annual culinary tour of France, which includes a visit to the Paris apartment of his aunt and uncle—the Comte and Comtesse de Fry. Bertrand is reticent to mention his own title—baron. He emphasizes that the title begins with a lowercase "b" and all the males in his immediate family hold the same one. Only his twin brother, born first, is "Le Baron."

Growing up in an aristocratic family was not always easy. Bertrand was terrified of his grandfather—Comte Alexandre de Fry of Longues Sur Mer—whom he described as "ferocious." He recalled his grandfather bringing a Paris restaurant owner to tears with his loud criticism.

Yet Bertrand admired the Comte's culinary knowledge: "As a child, I was always impressed by his degree of perfection." Although he does not advocate shouting, Bertrand believes that patrons should speak up when disappointed by a dining experi-



### Cooking class.

ence. "If something is wrong, we have to mention it," he asserted. "If you accept average, you will get it."

In several ways, Bertrand is following in his grandfather's footsteps. He does the shopping for his parties, carefully choosing the ingredients that guests will prepare under his tutelage. Similarly, his grandfather shopped daily at the market in Longues Sur Mer. The staff cooked the meals, but only the uncompromising Comte could choose the produce. As a child, Bertrand felt honored to sit at the dinner table with his grandfather, although he and his siblings were not permitted to speak and were required to finish everything on their plates.

Bertrand and his family spent summers with the Comte and Comtesse at their manor house in Normandy, just ten miles from the American war memorial overlooking Omaha Beach. He and his siblings played in fields where bombs fell during World War II. In the garage, they wondered at pictures of Winston Churchill and voluptuous "pin-up" girls left

by British soldiers who bunked there.

They also listened to the stories of farmers who thought aliens were invading when the Americans arrived, dressed in camouflage. The farmers shared their cider—which Bertrand recalled was "really awful." Born more than a decade after the war ended, Bertrand now regrets not gleaning more details from the farmers, most of whom have long since died. "I wish we had been more curious as children to extract more information."

Also important were the hours spent around the dining table with his immediate family, whose lifestyle was different from that of his grandparents. Bertrand's father was a soldier, and his mother, who did not have the luxury of a household staff, spent much of her day shopping and cooking. At night, the family lingered at the table, savoring the food and the company.

One of Bertrand's goals is to introduce his American clients to this slower lifestyle while teaching them to prepare classic French

dishes. "Basically, my business is to share with people the French lifestyle," he explained.

According to Bertrand, the French "have [the] ability to stop the clock." When dining with friends, they don't worry about how late it is or what they need to do tomorrow. Even if they arrive blurry-eyed at the office the next morning, he continued, "the French would say it doesn't matter. [They] had a chance to enjoy, is what matters. In America, we are so driven by what we need to do."

The Cordon Bleu graduate also tries to teach Americans not to worry so much about the meals they prepare for guests. "They get so stressed about dinner parties," he observed. "They tend to overdo it. They try to do too much."

"Food should always come second," Bertrand continued. "The most important part is opening the door to have people come into your home. If you do it with your heart for the love of the people around [the] table, nobody is going to find fault." ■