

# the haute couple

Text: Sheena Liang Images: William Furniss

LA couples don't come any better than this. Highly accoladed chef with brooding good looks married to blonde bombshell lawyer fresh off hit TV show "The Apprentice", Ludo Kristine Lefebvre are nothing short of a breath of fresh air in the city's dining scene.



As far as first impressions go, it's a mixed bag when it comes to Kristine and Ludovic Lefebvre. Known as "Krissy and Ludo" to friends, the couple's appealing good looks have attracted rave reviews, and indeed, the column inches devoted to Ludo's floppy locks, surfer's physique and artistic tattoos rival any Michelin three star chef. Perched insouciantly next to his wife at the BreadBar, home to his new dining concept dubbed "Ludo Bites" (more on that later), the French chef is looking suitably broody and potentially tempestuous in demeanour. Despite appearances, as they warmed to the conversation, it fast became evident that they are one of the most endearing couples I've met in a long time and one with a wry and delightful sense of humour.

When Ludo Lefebvre came to Tinseltown from Europe over 10 years ago, he cut a swathe through the local dining scene, causing female patrons in particular to pause their forks in mid air, as well as dazzling gourmets with his distinctive and unique style of cooking. Born in Auxerre, France, Lefebvre recounts in his critically acclaimed cookbook "Crave", that as a teenager he was not one to conform and had indeed shown great promise for becoming a juvenile delinquent. "I had already been kicked out of two schools for locking one teacher in a storage closet and throwing another's handbag out of a second storey window. I was angry, rebellious and always getting into trouble." Letting his 13 year-old son follow his insatiable appetite into a job within a kitchen was in hindsight, a prudent move on Lefebvre's father's part. Marc Meneau's Michelin

three starred L'Espérance in St.-Père-sous-Vézelay proved to be an excellent training ground. A commanding presence who could bring a busy kitchen to a hush, Meneau ruled with an iron fist. He was a demanding boss and the work was equally as relentless. After four years of six day weeks and in place of the rebellious, the sullen child was a talented chef in the making, and was dispatched to Pierre Gagnaire's kitchen in Saint-Etienne with the Meneau's commendation, "Your hands are like gold!", still ringing in his ears.

In the ensuing years, Lefebvre paid his dues to the industry in the currency of blood, sweat and tears. And in return, he was schooled by a veritable pantheon of Michelin three starred chefs. Gagnaire, dubbed the poet chef for his dazzlingly imaginative fare, the master of the culinary sleight of hand was a great influence on the young Lefebvre, although he treated him harshly on occasion. It was a baptism of fire under the intense scrutiny of Alain Passard at L'Arpège and Guy Martin at Le Grand Véfou which completed his education by virtue of being a talented chef and an astute businessman. With that, Lefebvre bid France au revoir and he subsequently crossed the Atlantic to work at famed Beverly Hills establishment L'Orangerie. Within a year, the 25 year-old Lefebvre, who still didn't speak a word of English, was appointed Executive Chef at LA's most celebrated French restaurant.

Lefebvre's unique take on classical French food soon garnered him a substantial fan base. Remaining true to the bedrock of his French training, he also went onto stamp his own creative expression on his cuisine through the addition of exotic new flavours. And it was



during his time at L'Orangerie that he met Krissy, whose name is now tattooed on his chest. Cut to today when his wife picks up on the tale whilst Ludo shakes his head, runs his fingers through his hair that lies in rakish disarray and saunters off. "He's so over the story, but I love it," says his wife with an easy laugh. "I was at L'Orangerie on a date. Ludo was standing at the Maitre'd stand, and for me, it was love at first sight. Now I had never been to a fancy restaurant and didn't know what to expect. Amuse-bouche arrived with compliments of the chef, and I had no idea that every table automatically received that, and in my mind I thought it was a little love note." The entire evening, she saw the chef approaching a neighbouring table and suspected he was trying to sneak a peek. "Either that or I had the most inflated ego in the world, or the most vivid imagination!" she adds with mirthful smirk. "At the end of the meal when the petit fours came, I thought that this was his final message saying that we'd meet again; not knowing any better. So I went home and looked him up on the internet, and sent a male friend in there with my phone number. Nine months later we were married and that was eight years ago," she finishes with a flourish as Ludo ambles back over with a grin.

After six years at L'Orangerie, he took up the helm at Bastide where his gastronomic creations took on an increasingly wild flair and leaned toward "molecular cuisine", leading the Los Angeles Times to describe it as "perhaps the city's premiere restaurant". Unfortunately, Bastide has since closed, but Lefebvre remains the only chef that has received the Mobil Travel Guide 5-Star Chef distinction at two restaurants and has been named one of the World's 50 Greatest



Chefs by Relais & Chateaux. Having chosen to put down roots in Los Angeles all those years ago, he has now been embraced as a hometown chef. He admits today that it's a difficult city for food. "People are not loyal and treat restaurants like movies. They'll come once, maybe again, but then there's some other new restaurant," articulates the chef on the subject of reality.

Lucky for Lefebvre, he has all the ingredients to make it on his own, to take his cuisine to bigger and better things. He has the talent, a unique style, along with endless drive and enthusiasm for his cooking. "Cooking is like designer clothes, with each to their own when it comes to style. And my style surprises people. I'm not interested in safe cooking; I want people to eat what they cannot have at home. I love to be crazy," says the chef in his heavily accented English.

There's also the new concept, "LudoBites", a culinary epic where provenance is a watchword and wildly imaginative "bites" are the key. A limited engagement, Ludo cooks dinner in the BreadBar three times a week. Clearly relishing the challenge, he declares, "I come from a Michelin starred restaurant and now I cook in a bakery! And I love it. It's fun and I want to break this image of chefs taking themselves too seriously." The concept has proven to be a hit with his fans and others, who are now coming in droves to enjoy his constantly-evolving food (the menu changes daily), made all the more attractive by the modest prices.

And as they say, behind every great man is a great woman. Having just appeared on the hit TV series "The Apprentice", Krissy might just outshine her husband on the limelight front. She may have modelled at one point, but she's no dumb blonde. An entertainment lawyer by day and restaurateur by night, Krissy has the cunning and guile, with the personality and the looks to match. Recently she's put her own career on hold to support that of her husband's. "I'm a control freak and I need to make sure he's protected. So at home, I read the contracts and he cooks the food." Now it just doesn't get any better than that...  
[www.ludolefebvre.com](http://www.ludolefebvre.com)