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MY LAST MEAL
Gay Talese

Scene and heard New York

Preface

Famed for his bewitching prose, Gay Talese pioneered New Journalism in the 1960s. Yet despite the avant-garde nature of his work he opts for classic dishes that combine sophistication and simplicity.

Writer

Megan Billings

Photographer

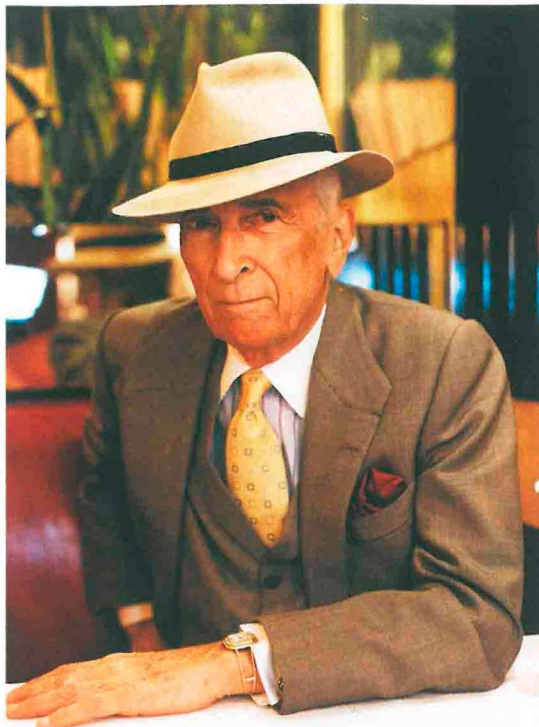
Weston Wells

"When I was perhaps 11 years old and in my hometown of Ocean City, I'd go to the drugstore to buy a milkshake. Sometimes they'd give me the shaker and there would be an extra drop inside. Some restaurants do the same with a martini but not many. What I get when I come here is really a martini and a half. The owner, Catherine, knows that I like a little extra, just like when I had a milkshake as a boy. That's why I come to Le Veau d'Or: because I get a good table and a great martini.

I'm not a demanding food connoisseur. I'm more interested in atmosphere and being in a comfortable environment. If I'm going for a meal I usually know where I'd like to sit before I leave the house. Sometimes I even know the numbers of the tables. The table I get here is a good example of what I like because it's enclosed. It's like a little apartment: a room with a view.

When I was a boy my mother and father both worked late so we went out every night. My mother ran a dress shop and my father a tailor's and they never finished until after 19.00. At the age of three I was in a high chair in some of the best restaurants in Atlantic City. My town, Ocean City, was a dry town but my father liked his wine and a bit of whiskey before dinner so we went there. Now I'm 83 and I still do the same thing I did at three years old. I'm not in a high chair any more but I have a good seat like this one.

I am alone during the day by choice while I work. I never have lunch and I have breakfast on my own so I don't engage with anyone during the day. But by 18.00 I'm ready to go out. I'm not saying I'm



Profile

The always-dapper Gay Talese worked for the *New York Times* from 1956 to 1965 and went on to write for *Esquire*, *The New Yorker* and *Harper's Magazine*. His 1966 article "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold" for *Esquire* is one of the most celebrated pieces of non-fiction feature writing ever published and established the Ocean City-native as one of the architects of New Journalism. He has also published 12 books; the 50th-anniversary edition of *The Bridge* is released in November.

Venue

Located on East 60th Street in Manhattan, Le Veau d'Or has been open since 1937. Its classic white-linen tablecloths and wood-paneled walls have barely changed and neither have its patrons: Talese has been dining here since the 1950s.
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Menu

To start

Mussel soup with sautéed leeks, white wine and cream

Main

Sole fillet with almonds and lemon and served with boiled potatoes and sautéed spinach

To finish

Lemon sorbet

To drink

Gin martini and a bottle of Stella Artois



Recipe

Gin martini Serves 1

Ingredients

8 fl oz of Bombay Original gin (or your preferred brand) – not forgetting another splash
Slice of lemon peel
Ice

The method

- 1 Fill cocktail shaker with ice and Bombay Original until three quarters full.
- 2 Add a dash extra for good measure.
- 3 Stir until chilled.
- 4 Add lemon peel to empty glass.
- 5 Strain and pour from shaker.
- 6 Drink and repeat.



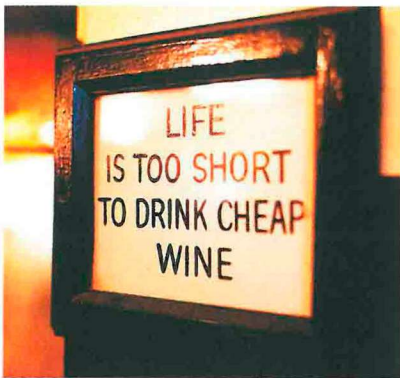
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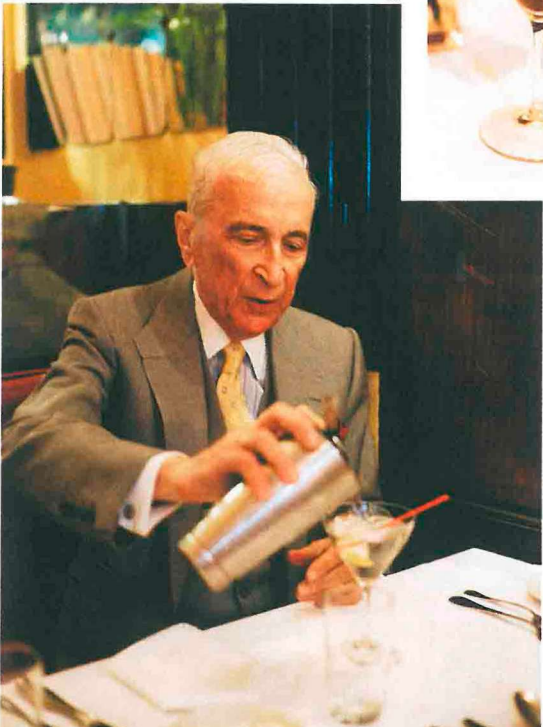
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- 01 Gay Talese's favoured table at Le Veau d'Or
- 02 Le Veau d'Or's exterior
- 03 Dining room
- 04 Mussel soup
- 05 Fillet of sole
- 06 Owner Catherine Treboux delivers the main course
- 07 Lemon sorbet for dessert
- 08 Light beer for the main course
- 09 Telling sign on the restaurant's wall
- 10 House martini
- 11 Gay Talese tops up his martini

ready to have a party – although sometimes I am – but I'm ready to see people. The great thing about a restaurant is you're seeing people and seeing is what makes restaurants special: it's like theatre. There are people interacting: some are beautiful, some not so beautiful; some old and some young; some are talking about getting a job; some are talking about getting married; some are engaged in sexual overtures. Restaurants are show businesses.

I indulge in my curiosity from afar. I want to see people in their scene but I don't always want to talk to them. I am an eavesdropper and a voyeur in restaurants – and in life. When I wrote "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold", in the beginning there was no dialogue. I didn't talk to Frank saying, "Hello Frank, how are you doing?" I sat back. How could I have a question for Frank Sinatra? We were in a supper club in Los Angeles. I sat across the room and saw him at the bar with two women. I was too far away to know what they were talking about but not too far away to see the gestures, how they were dressed, what he was looking at when he looked around. Frank didn't want to talk to me. If he had, I couldn't have written that article. He would have nullified it with his boredom.

I was a scene watcher and he was a scene. I love seeing – whether I'm in a restaurant or if I'm watching Sinatra in a studio session – I'm just a watcher, a voyeur, an eavesdropper and an aspiring chronicler. It's what I do." — (M)