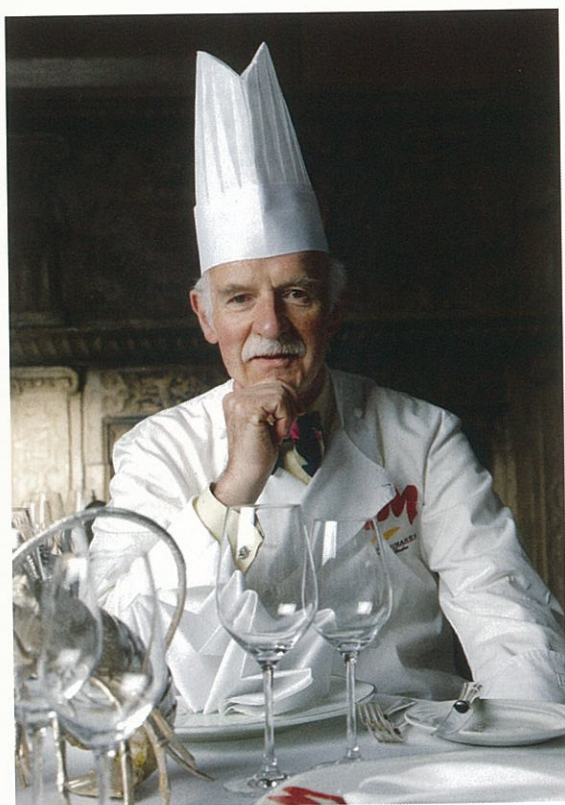


THE DOYEN

OF THE DORCHESTER



He's been described as 'the man who reinvented the restaurant' in the UK, and to whom a host of chefs owe their inspiration, but **ANTON MOSIMANN** is modest about his achievements.

He spoke to John Radford.

England in the 1970s was not a place you'd have come to find fine food. The infamous 'brown-Windsor-scented dining rooms' of even the most luxurious hotels offered little in the way of excitement, and that was what Mosimann discovered when he joined the Dorchester in 1975. "Great changes were afoot in London – the Roux brothers had arrived a few years earlier, Peter Kromberg was at the Intercontinental and Michel Bourdin had just joined the Connaught, and there was a 'wind of change' sweeping through the culinary world," says Mosimann. That change was certainly needed. Anton remembers his first banquet at The Dorchester when he arrived: the saddle of lamb was roasted at 5:00 am, cooled, sliced and put back on the bone and wrapped in aluminium foil until being reheated for service at 8:00 pm. "I couldn't understand how the hotel had such a reputation for quality, but, in reality, almost everyone in London was cooking like that in the 1970s."

Anton Mosimann was born in Berne in 1947, the son of restaurateurs, and spent much of his childhood learning how to peel and chop and how to select produce from the markets with his father. It never occurred to him that he would be anything other than a chef and he was apprenticed at 15. "I worked for a Swiss-French chef called Lucien Cornu and he was a wonderful teacher. The work was very tough but very professional and he taught me all the basics: traditional and classic dishes, how to steam, poach and grill. I worked 12 to 13 hours a day but I didn't mind, it was a wonderful experience. He was also a fatherly figure to his brigade and a perfect gentleman, unlike his sous chef who was always shouting and screaming at the staff. I resolved then that I would never shout in the kitchen, and I never have."

He moved around Switzerland after his apprenticeship, working in the kitchens of the various Palace hotels in the ski resorts. He was a commis at the palace Hotel in Villars for the winter season of 1964/5: "the chef was incredible – only the best ingredients, freshly cooked, everything had to be perfect, 40 young people in the brigade." The first stirrings of Mosimann's ideas about modernising cookery came at the Palace Hotel in St.-Moritz. The head chef had worked under Escoffier and his style was very traditional: "he would reduce cream to 10 per cent and mix it with butter to make his sauces. I thought then that whatever taste the ingredients in the dish had, it would be totally smothered by the sauce and that seemed a waste of good ingredients."