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AUTUMN/WINTER 2018

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THE ART OF COOKING

Instantly recognisable, Mauviel cookware performs as well on screen as it does in the kitchen – and while steeped in tradition, the brand continues to innovate

BY AMY BROOMFIELD

It's a classic scene: a bustling kitchen, enticing wafting aromas and a dozen cooking pots overflowing with sauces to be tasted by exacting chefs via the tilt of a large ladle. From *Ratatouille* to Meryl Streep's *Julie & Julia*, this is the image most of us have of professional French gastronomy. It's an image that is enhanced by the presence of a stack of copper pans from Mauviel, the storied brand that inspired the props in both films, and acted as exclusive supplier of all cookware for the latter. ►

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP Mauviel artisans, famous for their copper pans, blend handwork techniques passed down through generations with modern technology to create beautiful, high-quality cookware; **Mauviel** M'stone 3.5-piece cookware set £845 and M'ISO C saucepan £909 for set of 3

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Le Guern Gilbert says she wanted to be part of the family business for as long as she can remember: "I would visit the factory at five or six years old and, as a young adult, I dedicated all my studies towards joining the company." She became an employee in 1992 and took over from her father as CEO in 2006. Back then, though, the company

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was still very much a business-to-business brand. "We were selling our pans with no branding, and in plastic bags. Can you imagine?" she says. "Our trade was slowing down, so we faced a choice: go out of business or turn to retail." Put in such stark terms, it wasn't really a choice at all.

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To boost sales, she began appearing on television, including on the popular French cooking show *Le Petit Chef*, which became an international success. The brand's expansion started by P

With their reflective beauty, warm, soft glow and preferred status with a host of top chefs, the celebrated cookware ensures those associations aren't too far from the truth.

The French tradition of producing copper pans dates back to the 11th and 12th centuries, when Turkish traders would bring copper to Rennes. Family-run Mauviel, based in nearby Normandy, runs one of the last surviving copper-cookware factories and has long been the brand of choice for fine-dining establishments across France. Today, its cookware is no longer just the backbone to great cookery; it is as high profile and esteemed as the chefs who depend on it. But the fact that Mauviel has become a global company whose links now extend beyond Michelin-starred restaurants and into homes around the world is down to a seismic change initiated a decade ago by its innovative seventh-generation CEO, Valérie Le Guern Gilbert.

Le Guern Gilbert says she wanted to be part of the family business for as long as she can remember: "I would visit the factory at five or six years old and, as a young adult, I dedicated all my studies towards joining the company." She became an employee in 1992 and took over from her father as CEO in 2006. Back then, though, the company

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Le Guern Gilbert set about promoting the brand to give it a proper identity. "When I took over, it was around the time that chefs were coming out of the kitchen and becoming stars," she explains. "But the new generation of foodies didn't even know our name. I wanted to connect with them and remind them of the importance of the saucepan. It's like my good friend Yannick Alléno [chef at two three-Michelin-starred restaurants] always says: 'My saucepan is a continuation of my hand, like a paintbrush is for a painter.'"



To boost the brand's visibility, Mauviel began appearing at international events including Maison & Objet in Paris. It also became an official sponsor for Bocuse d'Or, the international gastronomy competition started by Paul Bocuse, a leading figure in the French 'nouvelle cuisine' movement during the 1960s and '70s. It was through this that Le Guern Gilbert began to make connections with eminent chefs such as Alléno and Alain Ducasse. The brand most recently partnered with L'Orangerie's Château Lafaurie-Peyraguey hotel and restaurant in Bordeaux. "I chose Mauviel because I know its products are of the highest quality – hard-wearing and high performing," says head chef Jérôme Schilling. "And like L'Orangerie, it shares a rich French heritage of craftsmanship."





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Incredibly, given Mauviel's now huge global output, each pot and pan is still produced by hand, and the brand has never wavered in its commitment to handmade quality and craftsmanship. With a team of 90 in the factory, Mauviel produces between 500 and 1,000 pieces a day. Each stage of production is managed by one or two artisans at a time, from shaping and hammering to hand-attaching the steel handles. And if customers want their pans reconditioned, repaired or relined in tin, as the original pots once were, they can send their wares, however old, back to the factory, where there is an artisan dedicated to that job.

So why copper? "Because it is simply the best conductor of heat – perfect for controlled cooking," Le Guern Gilbert says. That has never changed. Nor has the generation-to-generation evolution of the company, in terms of both family ownership and staff. Recently, three craftsmen came out of retirement to train some new apprentices. "I am nothing without my guys," Le Guern Gilbert says. "No-one is more important than the other."

Yet while the company remains committed to traditional modes of production, the thinking behind it is anything but archaic. Recently, Mauviel has been pursuing a more design-led approach via a partnership with French art and design university ECAL (École cantonale d'art de Lausanne), which has previously collaborated with Hermès and Baccarat. Overseen by Le Guern Gilbert, Alléno and product designer Tomas Kral, the Cooking the Future programme invited students from all over the world to address the evolution of gastronomy and modernise Mauviel's designs. "Most of the students had never worked



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CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT Mauviel M'150C 24cm sauté pan £398; each piece is handmade by the brand's artisans in France; all cookware props in *Julie & Julia* (featuring Meryl Streep) were supplied by Mauviel; Mauviel M'150C 7cm sauté pan £45.50; CEO Valérie Le Guern Gilbert with friend and world-renowned chef Yannick Alléno

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on cookware – in fact, they had never even cooked!" Le Guern Gilbert says. Yet three months later, they had produced nearly 40 creative proposals. Some were as simple as adding a ridge to a pan to separate out cooking areas, while others created a smoker or a steamer. "It was an incredible opportunity for us and the students to look at how to inject modernity into a traditional French company

without compromising on quality," Le Guern Gilbert says. In the end, 23 prototypes were made, with some of them set to join the production line next year.

Beyond ECAL, Mauviel already makes products that suit different parts of the world – woks for parts of Asia, smaller pans for the Netherlands. It is also working towards broadening its offering to include tableware and tables.

"The food industry has really changed," Le Guern Gilbert says. "It's not just about the tools – it's also about service and education. And what am I doing? I have a responsibility to pass on my knowledge and heritage to the eighth generation so we can continue to try new things while preserving our identity." ■

Cookshop, Second Floor; and harrods.com ■