

# F.P. JOURNE Le Restaurant

## The history of the Bavaria

A historic monument of food and drink has just been taken over by Dominique Gauthier and François-Paul Journe. A legendary bistro, a classified gem of the canton of Geneva's bistro heritage and the last remaining witness to the great cafés and restaurants that lined the Rue du Rhône at the end of the 19th century, the birthplace of international Geneva.

Located at 49 Rue du Rhône, the building, aligned with the Métropole hotel, was erected between 1852 and 1860, following the demolition of the fortifications on the Grand Quai, now the Quai Général-Guisan. In 1912, a former druggist, Adolphe Neiger, opened a brasserie on the ground floor of a former Baezner bank branch overlooking both the Jardin Anglais and the Rue du Rhône. Specialized in German beers, it was naturally named the Bavaria. As recounted by Jean-Claude Mayor in his book *La bouteille, la table et le lit à Genève à la Belle époque\**, Madame Neiger, a woman of character who helped her husband in the brasserie also made "excellent jams of Mirabelle plums picked from her orchard in Belotte".

*\*"Drink, food and lodging in Geneva during the Belle Epoque"*

The Bavaria could have remained just another beer house if the fledgling League of Nations, founded in 1919 at the end of the First World War, hadn't held its regular assemblies at the Salle de la Réformation, just one block away. It's proverbial: at the end of lengthy palavers, the international delegate is thirsty. And the Salle de la Réformation had no refreshment bar. So the brasserie became the "stamm\*" for the gentlemen of the League of Nations. Ministers, heads of state and journalists from all over the world sat there. Neville Chamberlain, England's Chancellor and Minister of Health, forgot his umbrella one evening. Aristide Briand, several times President of the Council in France, had his napkin ring there.

\*In Switzerland, a place where a group of friends or members of a society meet regularly.

Derson and Kelen, two Hungarian refugees in Geneva, were caricaturists who liked to sketch all the members of this high society. Their drawings included the brasserie's loyal customers: Briand, Chamberlain and Gustav Stresemann, the German Minister of Foreign Affairs. Over the years, the walls of the establishment became studded with nearly two hundred sketches representing the phoenixes of diplomacy at the time. They remained there until the company changed its name in the early 1980s. The caricatures that decorated the brasserie, much to the pride of the Neiger couple, are now part of the private collection of banker Ivan Pictet.

The first décor of the Bavaria was not refined. It evoked Germanic folklore and the atmosphere of the Bierstuben. The lower walls were covered with wainscoting, while the upper sections were adorned with large mirrors and decorative panels with motifs drawn from folk art: small birds and drinking scenes, medieval or country.

Today's beautiful décor dates back to 1942, when the brasserie underwent a complete renovation by architect Jean Falciola and designer Louis Amiguet. Tall, dark oak panelling and large mirrors adorn the walls. As before, the ceilings were fitted with geometrically patterned formwork. The rounded angles of some of the woodwork, found on the entrance revolving door or the counter, feature discreet incised rosettes, lending a rustic touch to the overall atmosphere.

And when, in 1982, the beer palace became "Le Relais de l'Entrecôte", this sumptuous setting hardly changed. In 2006, after twenty-five years of good, loyal grilling, the address became the scene of several legal battles. In 2012, the Geneva authorities, in a bid to save its name and atmosphere, classified the bistro's décor, from the woodwork to the ceiling, including the tables, chairs and mirrors.

In 2014, Le Relais had to move to rue Pierre-Fatio, just next door. The ex-Bavaria became "Le 49 Rhône" in 2015. Then "Marjolaine" when, in 2018, Philippe Chevrier was called to the rescue by the owners and transformed the heritage arcade into an upscale trattoria. The restaurant was closed in March 2019 to allow for a lengthy renovation of the structure and upgrades to standards, before being reborn as "F.P. Journe Le Restaurant", all the while maintaining its charming decor. In command, Michelin-starred chef Dominique Gauthier and artist watchmaker François-Paul Journe, epicurean and connoisseur of fine wines. And so begins a new chapter in a saga spanning more than a century.

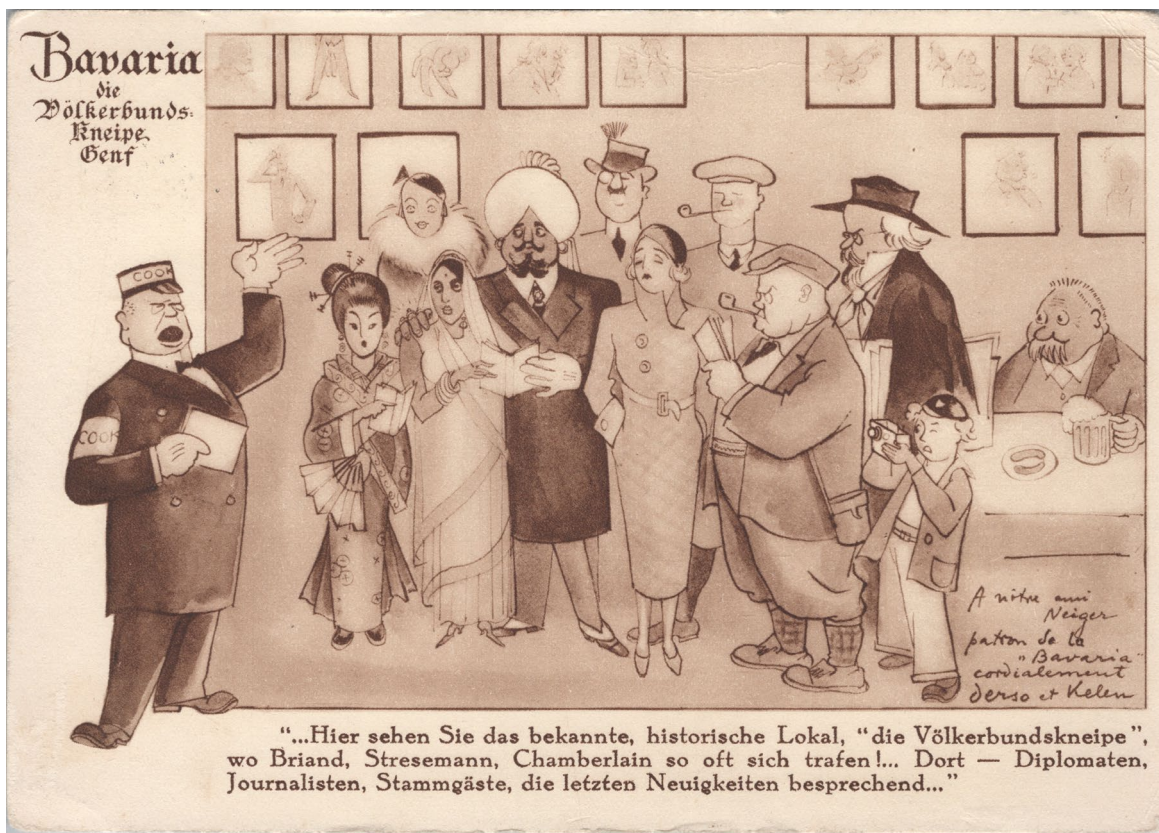


Banque L. BAEZNER & Cie, entrances Rue du Rhône 49 and Grand Quai 30, opposite the Jardin anglais - © Imp. Atar, Genève, Corratier 12

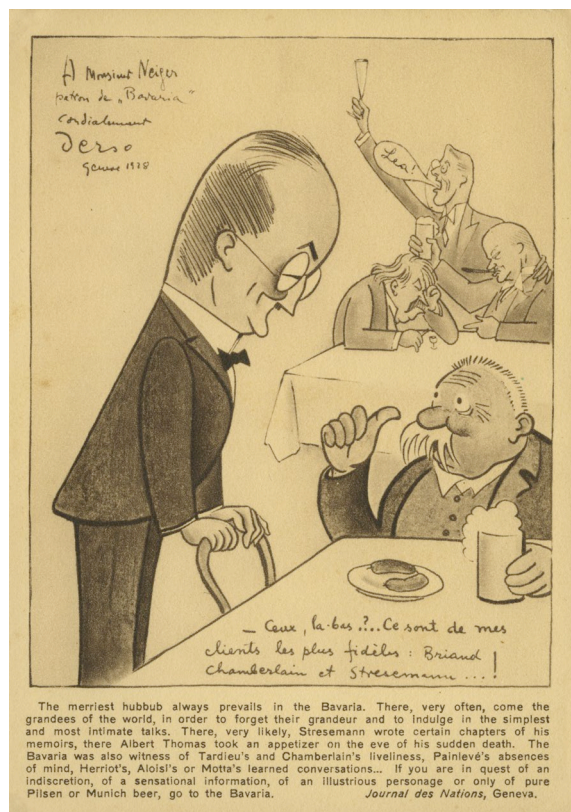


Geneva, le Grand Quai. Restaurant Bavaria and Hôtel Métropole. Press photo © Agence Rol - Bibliothèque nationale de France





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