

TRAVEL

NOBEL NOSHING

Not getting lauded Dec. 10? You can still eat the feast

BY GLEN PETRIE

Unlike Willard Boyle of Amherst, N.S., I will never win the Nobel Prize for physics. Nor for medicine, like Frederick Banting, nor peace, like Lester Pearson. And definitely not, as my old high-school scores will attest, for chemistry. The literature prize is a long shot too, so I never dreamed that I would one day sit down to enjoy the lavish meal that is served to Nobel Laureates at the august banquet in Stockholm.

Yet on a recent business trip to the handsome capital, my Swedish colleagues had arranged exactly that.

The Nobel menu can be supplied by any visitor to Stockholm. Perhaps not in the company of laureates and Swedish royalty, and not in the great Blue Hall of the impressive *stadshuset* (city hall), where the Nobel banquet is served each Dec. 10, but close enough. Directly underneath in *Stadhuskällaren* (city hall's cellar), the same chef and staff will proffer, with the same formality and flair, on the same custom tableware, the same meal created for those greater mortals. The experience has become one of the most popular attractions in the city.

Every year, the *Stadhuskällaren* chef de cuisine and notable guest chefs prepare three menus that are tasted and secretly chosen by members of the Nobel Foundation. By reserving one day in advance, diners may enjoy the Nobel menu of the

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most recent banquet. Groups of eight or more may choose any Nobel menu from 1901 onward provided they reserve in advance, which is what my colleagues had done. Since one of them is a big fan of Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish writer, he booked the 2006 menu to enjoy the same meal Pamuk had the year he won the prize for literature.

"Except for the hours I spend writing, life seems to me to be flawed, deficient, and senseless," Pamuk has said. Funny, it's the opposite for me. But then, I am in the basement and Pamuk dined upstairs.

The starter appeared before me on impressive china edged in blue and gold gilt: Mosaic of salted salmon and scallops with Kalix bleak roe served with cucumber and apple salad. I sought a translation for that part in the middle and was told the orange stuff was eggs of bleak, a freshwater fish found in a northern region of Sweden called Kalix. The menu strives to present varied dishes with a typical Scandinavian flavour.

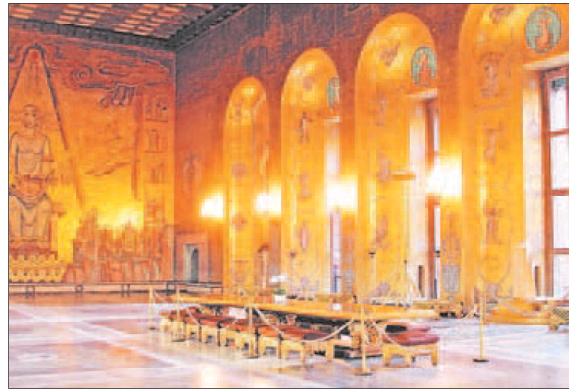
And bread? No, no — a Nobel roll. This was followed by a main of herb-baked rack of lamb with olive-glazed vegetables, potato-and-Jerusalem artichoke purée, served with Port wine sauce. It was all topped off with a dessert of pineapple parfait on almond-and-cinnamon biscuit, served with sugar-glazed, mint-flavoured pineapple salad. The pineapples, I assumed, must grow in the extreme south of Sweden.

The accompanying wines include a celebratory glass of Montaudon Brut Reserve Champagne to kick things off, followed by a very ser-



RICHARD RYAN, STOCKHOLM VISITORS BOARD

The Nobel banquet is held in the Blue Hall inside Stockholm's stadshuset, or city hall. Tours are offered daily.



GLEN PETRIE FOR THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

The city hall's Gold Hall is paved in gold-leaf tiles. After the annual awards banquet, Nobel laureates and guests dance in Gold Hall.



OLOF HOLDAR, STOCKHOLM VISITORS BOARD

At *Stadhuskällaren*, the cellar restaurant in Stockholm's city hall, anyone can enjoy the Nobel banquet menu, which is served on the actual gold-plated Nobel tableware.

viceable 2004 Backsberg Pump-house Shiraz from South Africa. A 2003 Sauternes from Château Haut-Bergeron washed down the pineapple parfait.

The meal has become my most enduring memory of Stockholm, a city which I discovered is synonymous with the Nobel prize. Reminders of it are everywhere.

For example, just a block from my small hotel in picturesque Gamla Stan (Old Town), I dined on classic Swedish meatballs "grandma style" at the city's oldest restaurant, Den Gyldene Freden, dating back to 1722, older even than the Swedish Academy, whose 18 members gather here every Thursday night. It is their job

to select the winner of the prize for literature, and I had to resist the urge to hover outside the closed door of the *Bellmanvåningen* private dining room with ears cocked.

The next morning, in preparation for my Nobel feast, I walked the cobblestone pedestrian ways to the Nobel Museum. It occupies one of the Stockholm's most handsome 18th-century buildings, facing Gamla Stan's central square. I took pictures with a new digital camera and had Mr. Boyle to thank for it: he won his Nobel as co-inventor of the charge-coupled device, or CCD, the light-capturing gizmo that makes digital photography possible.

Inside, the museum is thoroughly

modern and high tech. Shimmering walls of light, suggesting creativity and enlightenment, lead visitors into the main exhibit area. I walked a "timeline" of displays spanning 10 decades of prizes that recount history through notable achievements.

The Museum's *Kafé Satir* was a good choice for lunch — a light meal in a casual space modelled after the *Café Museum* in Vienna. Look under the chairs and you'll find the signatures of laureates who've also sat there.

Then, to bridge the gap to my Nobel dinner, I took a guided tour of the facility that hosts the official banquet: the *stadshuset* (City Hall). The Blue Hall, a voluminous enclosed marble courtyard that is not blue at all, stood empty, echoing my footfalls, but I could imagine it filled with tables elaborately set for more than 1,300 guests.

The 228 servers at the banquet on Dec. 10 will each clock more than five kilometres and pour no fewer than 360 bottles of Champagne, 760 bottles of wine and about 450 litres of coffee.

Barack Obama, it should be noted, will not be dining in Stockholm at all, but in Oslo, since Alfred Nobel stipulated that the Peace Prize be awarded by a Norwegian

If you go

The Nobel meal: *Stadhuskällaren*, Stockholm: It's about \$215 per person for the Nobel banquet menu. See www.profilrestauranger.se

Nobel Museum: *Storgorget 2*, Gamla Stan, Stockholm. See www.nobelprize.org/nobelmuseum

Den Gyldene Freden restaurant: *Österlånggatan 51*, Gamla Stan, Stockholm. See www.gyldenfreden.se

Stockholm Visitors Board: www.stockholmtown.com

Stadshuset: www.stockholm.se/cityhall

committee.

A grand flight of marble steps led me to the Golden Hall. Covered in 18,000,000 tiles of glass and 24-karat gold leaf (nine kilograms of it), it's a breathtaking venue for the dancing held after the dinner.

Feeling a bit overwhelmed and instilled with a sense of — pardon the pun — nobility, I then joined my colleagues in the cellar restaurant for a meal of suitable grandeur.

Glen Petrie is a Toronto-based writer and photographer.

Nobel prize facts

- The Nobel Prize was created by the last and will and testament of Alfred Nobel, inventor of dynamite and holder of 355 other patents, to reward achievements in peace, chemistry, medicine, physics and literature.
- The Nobel Prize for economics is not a true Nobel prize, since it wasn't specified in Alfred Nobel's will. Added in 1968, it is officially known as The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel.

- With the exception of some interruptions during the Second World War, prizes have been awarded every year since 1901, on Dec. 10, the anniversary of Nobel's death.
- The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded by in Oslo, also on Dec. 10.
- Alfred Nobel's interest in dynamite was for construction purposes. The invention made him fabulously wealthy.
- An early Nobel experiment with explosives killed his brother and four others and gave his father a stroke.

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