

# jammie

magazine

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GREEK STEWS AND A BISTRO CLASSIC**

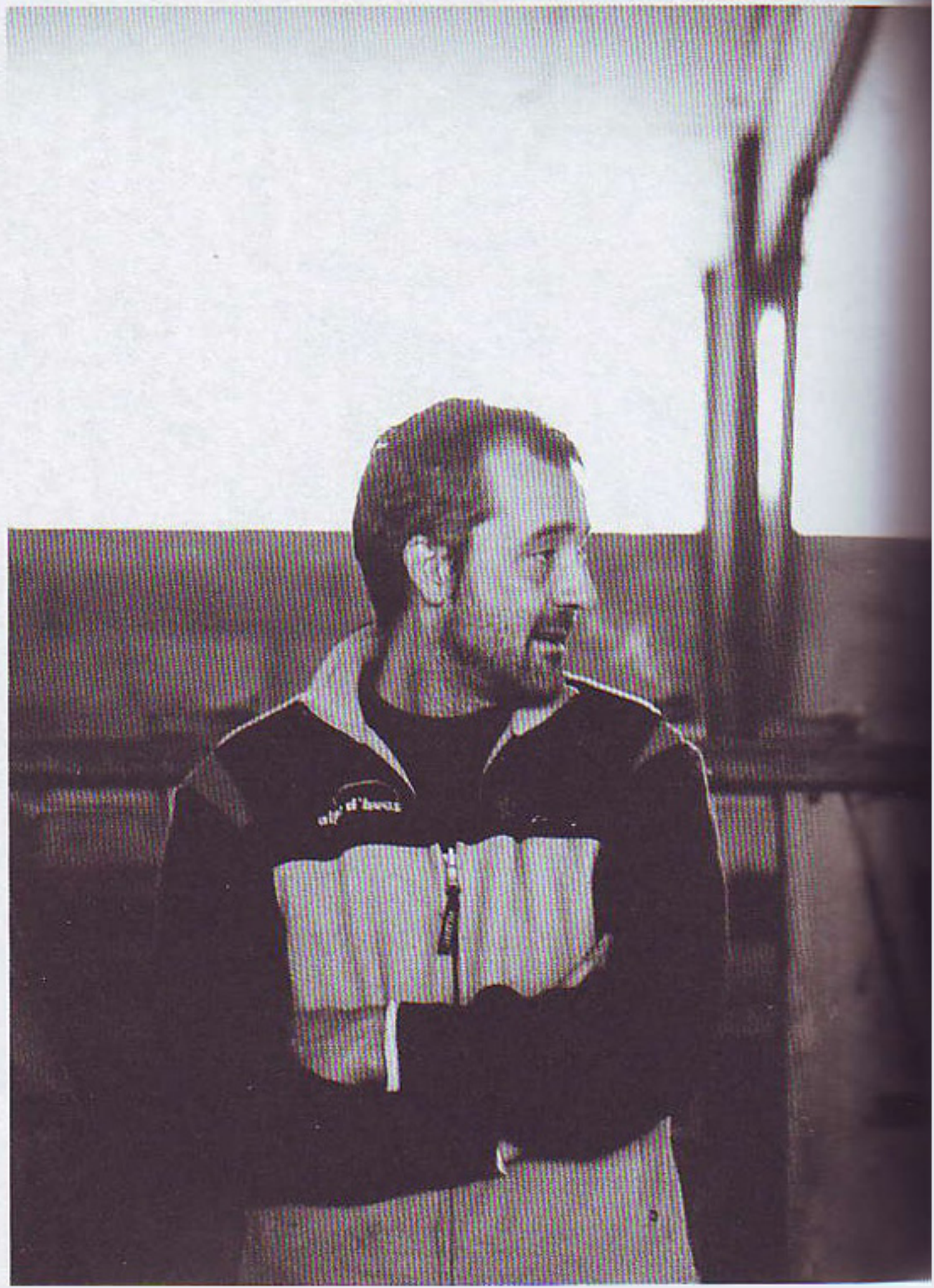
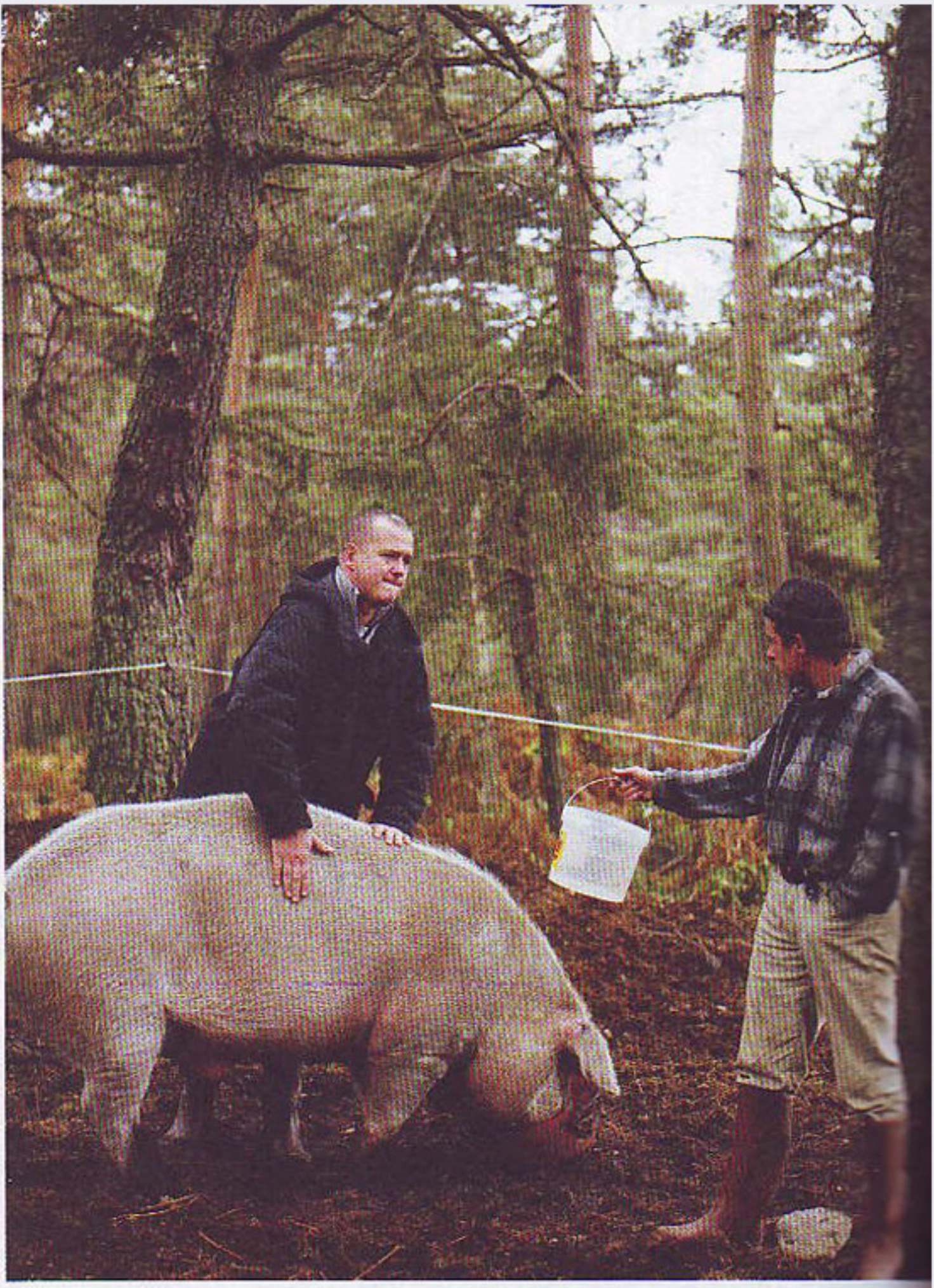
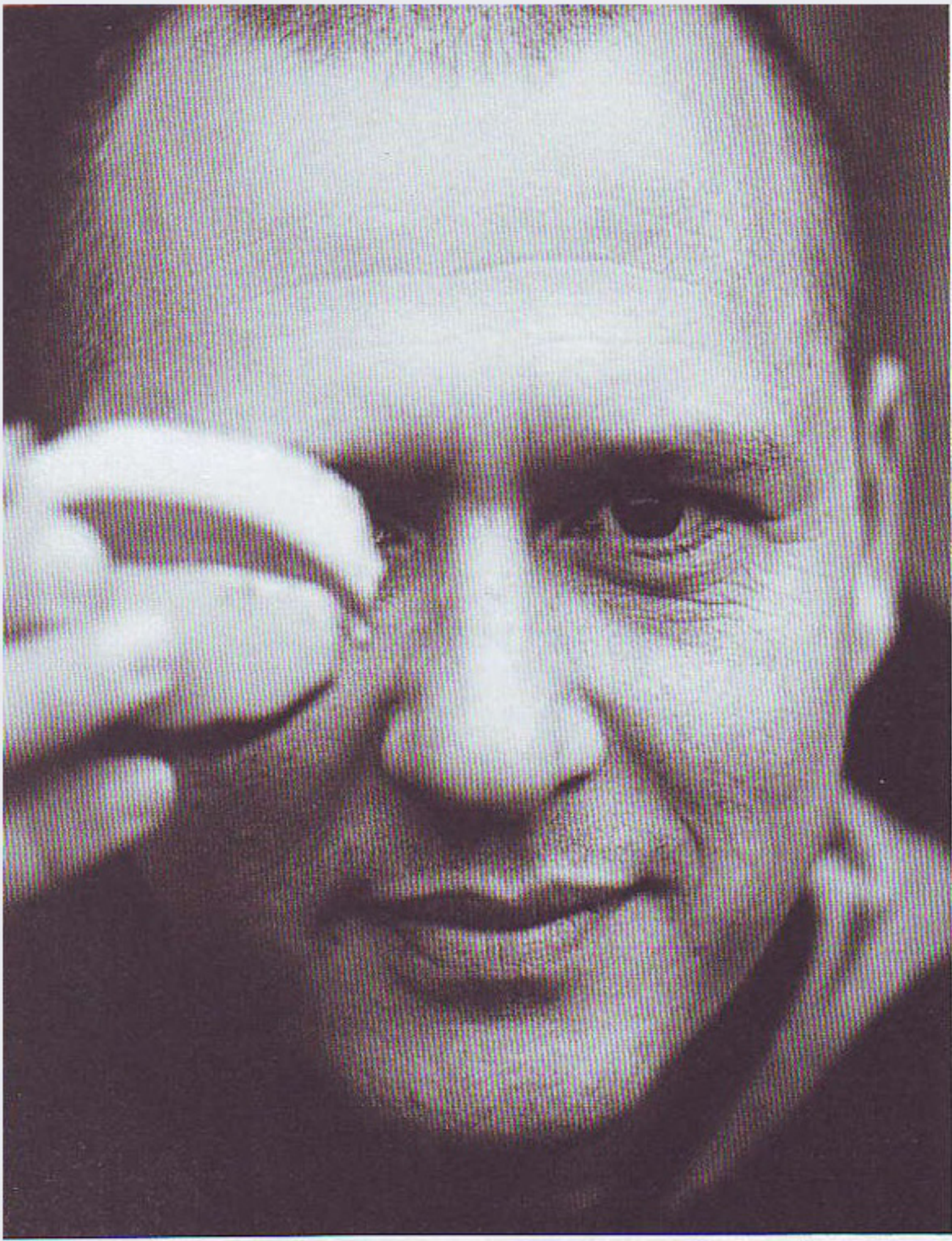
*Cape Town's hotspots\**

ELIZABETH DAVID'S FAVOURITE RESTAURANT REVISITED



Mar/Apr 09







# There I was, stopping a battered Citroën 2CV in the middle of a quiet lane in the French countryside for a 300-kilo pig called Howard to cross the road.

It's not often that a city boy like me gets to squire an inquisitive animal on his daily trot to the forest to forage for wild mushrooms with Marcel (an ex-gangster from Marseilles turned milk producer) in a scene that could have been straight out of a new *Babe* movie.

Life in this remote part of the Ardèche is filled with such unexpected moments, especially when you're hanging out with local chef and author Stéphane Reynaud. His life, like his impressive cookery books, is populated by a cast of colourful childhood friends (mostly all now local producers) and villagers, and noisy extras such as goats, chickens, horses and cows.

Welcome to Stéphane's world, and the village of Saint-Agrève, 1,200 metres up on the Ardèche plateau, where life carries on with all the hardships traditionally associated with surviving off the land. In winter, huge snowdrifts scour the harsh landscape, leaving roads impassible and the hardy villagers to fend for themselves with potent walnut liqueurs and warming chestnut soups. Even the summer months can be chilly as the winds rattle through the valleys.

Saint-Agrève hosts a bizarre summer rodeo, which attracts cowboys from all over France. It's also famed for its curative air and fine food, and

every weekend faithful foodies drive up the tortuous roads from Valence to queue at Teyssier, the best local butcher's, for caillettes and charcuterie such as saucisson and dry-cured hams. They also visit isolated fromageries, including La Biquetterie in nearby Chanteloube, where Jérôme and his 40 goats make some superbly piquant cheeses.

"Home is where the heart is. I love this place and I couldn't exist without this magical part of France. It's very wild but tender at the same time," Stéphane says of his beloved Ardèche. "Because we're so isolated we're obliged to uphold traditions because there's nothing else around. We don't have fresh fish from the ocean, for example; that's why we still have the pigs and kill them every year for food."

Stéphane's first book, *Pork & Sons*, introduced the world to Saint-Agrève. It begins by detailing the ritual of the pig slaughter in February, when the snow was on the ground, it was -15C and many locals helped out. Eric raised the happy free-range pig on a gourmet diet of potatoes and cabbage; Blachou appeared with a roll-up in his mouth and sharp knives to bone and cut up the carcass; blue-beret brothers Pierre and Charlou drank copious glasses of red wine

Opposite: Restaurateur and author Stéphane Reynaud (top left), who, along with milk producer Marcel, accompanies the late, great Howard the pig on a mushroom hunt (top right). Fromagière Jérôme (bottom right), aka Monsieur Chèvre.



as they mixed fresh blood and thick cream for the boudin noir (black pudding), before a hearty breakfast of fricassée at 10am.

An equally rich and authentic tapestry of rustic recipes follows, many gleaned from Stéphane's grandparents who owned a local butcher's shop, which celebrates the sheer diversity of cooking a pig every which way. There's pork shoulder poached in milk or beer, rack of pork baked in hay or a salt crust, sausage cassoulet, head-to-foot terrine, rillettes, confit, stuffed pig's ears, breaded trotters, pork knuckle with red cabbage, spare ribs with

experiment with the new flavours of France from Asia and North Africa that we find in the cities."

These days, Stéphane divides his time between Montreuil, a suburb of Paris where he runs his restaurant Villagtrois with partner Nicolas Bessière, and Saint-Agrève where he lives with his wife, Isabel, and their three children.

For today's long and lazy Sunday lunch, Stéphane is joined by friends and family who all bring local delicacies, charcuterie, goat's cheeses and wine. There's a mushroom tart and a thick cabbage and belly pork soup to start proceedings as he prepares a sumptuous pork pot au feu.

## 'I don't consider myself a chef, rather a cook who loves to uphold rustic French recipes'

barbecue sauce, even an aromatic curry and a club sandwich to list just a delicious few.

His latest book, *Ripailles* (aka 'feasts'), is an encyclopaedic collection of traditional dishes, such as blanquette and pot au feu, but also so much more. With its quirky mix of song sheets and vignettes of Gallic life from the irrepressible illustrator José Reis de Matos (who also did the mad cacophony of pigs that inhabit the pages of *Pork & Sons* and our specially commissioned illustration), it's destined to become a bestseller and an invaluable source for anyone searching for simple French recipes to cook.

"I don't consider myself to be a chef, rather a cook who loves to uphold and reveal rustic French recipes," Stéphane says, "and sometimes

"My grandmother used to put this on in the morning before she went to work in the butcher's shop and then it would be ready for lunch," he explains. "I love the spirit of a big table where you share a platter of pot au feu with friends. Of course, when I'm in Saint-Agrève I always make my pot au feu with pork and it's a big success in the restaurant whenever it's on the menu."

Later in the afternoon, the cheeses come out and there's even room for a hot caramel cake with chestnut cream. Sadly, with snow beginning to fall, we have to escape this idyllic scene before all the roads to the modern world are blocked.

"I'll call you when it's really cold and time to slaughter a pig," promises Stéphane, a country boy right down to his trotters.

Opposite: Stéphane assembles the raw material for his pork pot au feu (middle left). His daughter Zoé (top centre) helps to prepare lunch, while son Basile (bottom left) and wife Isabel (centre right) assist in polishing it off.