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By Catherine Bigelow, Chronicle Staff Writer

## Modernism's Martin Muller honored by French



Poet Alain Borer (left) with Martin Muller, Consul General Romain Serman and his wife, Laura.

As animated and eloquent as the tribute recitation delivered in honor of Modernism gallerist and publisher **Martin Muller** by renowned French poet and **Arthur Rimbaud** scholar **Alain Borer** was on Saturday at Bix Restaurant, we, most embarrassingly, understood only *un petit*.

But the mutual admiration shared between these two intellects, artists, prep school friends and cultural attaches at large was palpable as the occasion celebrated Muller's knighting in April by the French Ministry of Culture as a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres.

"Do you know that Martin owns some 25,000 books?" asked French Consulate cultural attache **Denis Bisson**. "Even more amazing? He's not only read them, he's read them all twice."

Also on hand to exclaim "Vive le Martin!" were such longtime friends and fans as author **Barnaby Conrad III**; French Consul General **Romain Serman** and his wife, **Laura Serman**; **Edith** and **Joe Tobin**; Bix owner **Douglas Biederbeck** and his wife, **Jennifer**; Borer's wife, Roman scholar **Claudia Moatti**; journalist and L'Express editor **Florence Servan-Schreiber**; Telluride Film Festival founder **Tom Luddy** and his wife, **Monique Montgomery**; graphic designer **Margaret Allen**; and venture capitalist **Meridee Moore** and her husband, interior designer **Kevin King**.

The consul general praised Muller's storied history in the arts, which includes a series of cultural premieres: the first major exhibitions of Russian avant-garde, German Expressionist, Dada and French Cubism in a West Coast gallery; the first **Le Corbusier** exhibition in a U.S. gallery; the first comprehensive, worldwide retrospective of **R. Crumb**; and the first West Coast **Jacques Villeglé** exhibition, which led to a major retrospective at the Pompidou in Paris.

"France is honored to thank you for the exemplary work you have done in the art world, in literature and in the realm of ideas," toasted Serman. "You are today one of the finest ambassadors of dialogue between the United States and Europe, among those who have accomplished the most to further mutual understanding of the cultures of both continents."

Slightly abashed, Muller proudly sported the impressive Chevalier medal, which was playfully accessorized with a red beauty queen-style sash "presented" by Muller's pal, **Lee Hudson**.

In accordance with Muller's well-honed palate, the dinner at Bix, which Muller fondly refers to as "my canteen," featured exquisite vino (Domaine Pinson Chablis Premier Cru la Foret, Jean-Michel Gaunoux Pommard Les Perrieres), which accompanied a masterful Bix meal of buckwheat blini with osetra caviar, Wagyu New York sirloin and assorted desserts of petits fours and creme brulee.

Before his original recitation based on Rimbaud's famous poem "Le Bateau Ivre," Borer, who recently won the prestigious Pierre Mac Orlan Prix, boldly exclaimed Muller's accomplishments as "*le grandeur*."

Inspired by Borer's maritime imagery, Serman said: "Martin not only presents and disseminates French culture, language and poetry, but all his friends are part of the crew on this ship, which defends and fosters culture."

However, one guest demurred from that description.

"Actually we're just down below, rowing," joked Doug Biederbeck. "Martin's got a pretty steady hand on this particular ship's wheel."

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