

## georges with an upper case Great

By Susan I. Shiber

The moment I entered georges', a George Perrier signature restaurant, I was in France. Stepping on 19<sup>th</sup> century terracotta tile, I took trips to Paris, Provence and a cozy country chateau. Each stop, from artistic Lavendar Room to get-away-from-it-all lounge, tempted me to send postcards extolling my afternoon vacation.

I dined in the Garden Room, bathed in natural light and reminiscent of a Parisienne courtyard. How could they know when the table was set that freesia is one of my favorite flowers. The tale of my rather unorthodox lunch comes later.

Masterful management from a team hand-picked by Georges Perrier is behind the culinary cachet that is georges'. General manager Joe Evangelista's vision is responsible for the restaurant's comfortable setting and popular menu. "You can't copy Le Bec Fin," stresses Evangelista. "It's one of its kind in the country. At georges', you relax, have a good meal or quick bite at affordable prices. Wine aficionados like georges's. We have the finest global wine list on the Main Line including *big boys*, such as Batard-Montrachet Grand's 2001 Cru Louis Latour, or 2003 Super Tuscan Summus from Castello Banfi."

Evangelista, a native of Poland, has been in the restaurant business for 29 years. His astute sense of what works attracts nearly 2,000 patrons per week for lunch, midday meals, dinner, brunch or bar dining. "We cater to a wide range," he notes. "Some come just for Dover sole or prime rib. Others, oysters, burgers or pizza. An ever-changing brunch menu is a big draw."

Joe Frost, executive chef, shares Evangelista's appreciation for Georges Perrier. "When you work for the best, doors open," he reveals. "I can trust purveyors to supply peerless products and help me out at the last second."

Frost is a chef prodigy, who, at age 5, had his hands in everything he could reach in his mom's kitchen. "Some of my fondest memories are of making babka for Easter and escarole soup for Christmas with my mother and great grandmother. At certain times of the year, there are amazing aromas that take me back," he muses.

Today, Frost frequently cooks what he wants to eat. "If I'm on my way to work and crave steak tartare, I'll set some meat aside and make it. Actually, I'm hungry for that dish so often that it's a menu regular."

Tastes and aromas alone don't drive Frost. The excitement of 500 things happening at once and precise attention to detail spur him to action. "I need a pressure cooker environment or I get bored," he admits. "The hours in this business are long, the work arduous, but it's all I ever wanted to do. You have to love every second you're here, every potato you peel and every filet you grill. I do," says the youngest of Georges Perrier's executive chefs.

Frost's fine-tuned olfactory glands are stimulated daily by the heady redolence of Bakery Perrier, the restaurant group's in-house artisan boulangerie. While working for a large caterer in Lebanon, Lyon-born Stefan Wojtowicz, decided to send his resume to Perrier. Within two weeks he got a call to join the team and innovate authentic French breads and pastries for Perrier's restaurants.

After a few months, a wholesale business blossomed and Wojtowicz's creations are delivered to area restaurants three times a day. "Our breads and pastries are dependent on imagination," comments the young baker. "We don't want flat white bread, so we experiment with different ingredients, such as figs. One bread takes two days to prepare. The secrets we seek are the ones that give breads wonderfully crisp crusts with incredibly soft insides."

I happily experienced those secrets first hand for a week. My box of bread, brioche and croissant was a glorious surprise I received as I left georges'.

Monthly wine dinners are exceptional at georges' with top vintners in world represented. A celebration of Bastille Day, complete with French vintages and roasted suckling baby pig with truffles, is the theme for a July 14<sup>th</sup> wine dinner. "Wine events are so impressive," reports Frost. "When the man whose name is on the bottle attends and stays for the entire dinner, it sets us apart."

Now, my luncheon adventure. Because georges' is a Perrier signature restaurant, I selected dishes I love that don't always satisfy my discriminating palate. I began with French onion soup – absolutely the best I ever tasted. Crostini rounds topped with Gruyere were crunchy and easily eatable. Too often, onion soup is served with soggy bread and dropped-over-the-bowl cheese that requires cutting to manage with grace. Oysters on the half shell were next. Malpeque, beau soleil and carquette were plump, flavorful and zestfully accompanied by ginger mignonette for dipping.

Though Caesar salad with focaccia and parmesan vinaigrette was splendid, I asked for a take-home container to allow room for dessert. Made to order georges' signature chocolate cake was recommended, much to my pleasure. A molten liquid center presented chocolate as it is meant to be. Vanilla ice cream, blackberries, strawberries and sliced almonds enhanced the beautiful ambrosia.

Was I finished yet? No, the lust for Chef Frost's steak tartare could not be quelled, so it became my post-dessert piece de resistance. Just the right hint of tang perfected every bite, completing an unusual meal.

### **Georges'**

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