

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



(U.F-10K)11A

Thursday, January 1, 1987 O&E

Reflections of food critic: job's fulfilling

D. Gustibus, the Observer & Eccentric's food critic, celebrates his first anniversary as a food writer. His reflections follow.

TELL AN acquaintance you are an anonymous restaurant critic whose column is published "in the 12 Observer & Eccentric newspapers" and you gain instant respect and envy. At least that was what I found when the initial excitement of this "job" was shared with anyone and everyone I knew. "What a perfect situation — to eat all you want and get paid for it!"

Well, it has been fun, fulfilling (pardon the pun) and interesting. But there are still times when I'd rather not be "forced" to eat out because another deadline is approaching.

This is my first (and, I expect, only) journalistic endeavor. I am, by actual vocation, the owner of a manufacturing firm that produces consumer goods you might see in department and food stores.

My primary qualifications for this assignment include an extensive amount of domestic and foreign travel and, hence, a lot of eating in restaurants.

Perhaps I am especially interested in the subject and process because my daughter is a reporter for a California daily and my son has spent a year in Paris, learning to become a chef. But, basically, I like to eat.

WHEN I FIRST became a restaurant critic, I thought that a "scientific" objective system would enable me, and my readers, to evaluate each restaurant more fairly than subjective techniques I had seen elsewhere. That is the reason I created a weighted point system based on my own experiences about what matters when you go out and pay your hard-earned money for a meal.

Admittedly, my approach is like a mapshot, a single picture of one dining experience. I do not

tell the restaurant that I am coming in to review it and I do not, except in a very few instances, make any comment when I leave.

I have time for only one visit, so there may be occasions when a good restaurant will be visited on a bad night, or vice versa. But when you go out for a special evening, you don't care how good the food was last night, it's tonight that counts.

Sometimes I've been disappointed by meals at restaurants that could, I know, do better — but that's the breaks. A top spot should be tops for every paying customer on every single night.

I once read a comment by a restaurant owner, complaining that reviewers were often not properly qualified to judge a restaurant's "special" offerings. I don't agree.

By its nature, a restaurant should strive to satisfy everyone whom it encourages to come there to eat. If the palate must be so educated that only a professional can enjoy or judge the food, then the restaurant should not be taking the public's money.

I HAVE TRIED to evaluate each restaurant on its own terms and by its own implied objectives as expressed in its setting, menu, prices and so on. But good service is good service, whether the server wears a tuxedo or jeans, and good food is good food, whether it costs a fortune or not.

I have reviewed 30 restaurants during the last year and a half, and I've found some interesting highs and lows. Since I use a numerical system, I'd like to share the following figures with you. These are the average number of points scored by the 30 restaurants, in each category:

Atmosphere — 11.5 of 15 possible (76.7 percent). Service — 11 of 15 possible (73.3 percent). Before the Entree — 11.3 of 15 possible (75.3 percent). Entree — 23.7 of 30 possible (79 percent). Dessert — 7 of 10



possible (70 percent) and Price-Value — 11.9 of 15 possible (79.3 percent). The average total score of all restaurants reviewed is 78.4 out of 100 possible — just average! That's a bit disappointing.

I have chosen restaurants that are in the Observer & Eccentric communities. Many of them have

been suggested by residents in the various locations. I've tried to pick "good" places. After all, I have to eat there to review them.

I BELIEVE when you or I go out to eat, we have the right to expect something worthwhile, inviting, better than we can do on our own. Yet, time after time,

even something like service that a restaurant should be able to control detracts from the dining experience in many places.

During the last 30 reviewed meals, I've had some real treats and eaten in many "unknown" places that offered tremendous food, value and service. That's reassuring and satisfying. I'd like to share my "best rated and enjoyed" in each of the categories.

The list that follows is drawn entirely from these restaurants I have reviewed, and many of them are not "big names," but I'd suggest they are all worth a try.

Atmosphere — Rizzo's Copper Door in Westland, a smoky and unassuming restaurant, provided the most relaxed and fun-filled experience.

Service — Cafe Bon Homme in Plymouth was the most gracious and attentive, an altogether pleasing experience.

Before the entree — New Peking in Garden City served outstanding appetizers that were inviting and delicious.

Entrees — Roman Forum in Canton was spectacularly superb in the preparation of every dish we tried.

Dessert (my favorite category) — Appetizer in Birmingham makes a Creme Brulee that is absolutely beyond compare.

MY GREATEST problem is locating those special places that are known locally but not more widely. That's where I really need your help. If you have a favorite restaurant, won't you drop me a note. D. Gustibus, in care of the Observer & Eccentric Entertainment Department, Box 3503, Birmingham 48012. I'm sure the restaurant you have enjoyed so much will appreciate it, and so will I.

One final comment. I have been asked about my choice of name, D. Gustibus. It comes

'Best rated and enjoyed'

Of the 30 restaurants D. Gustibus reviewed over the past year, these are his favorites:

ATMOSPHERE: Rizzo's Copper Door in Westland. It provided the most relaxed and fun-filled experience.

SERVICE: Cafe Bon Homme (formerly Emma's) in Plymouth. Coupled with an excellent menu, the service was the most gracious and attentive. Altogether, it was a pleasing experience.

BEFORE THE ENTREE: New Peking in "beautiful downtown Garden City."

ENTREES: Roman Forum in Canton was spectacularly superb in the preparation of every dish tried.

DESSERT: Appetizer in Birmingham makes a Creme Brulee that is absolutely beyond compare.

from Latin, "De gustibus non est disputandum," which means, "Concerning tastes there is no disputing."

I interpret that to mean that each of us has the opportunity to judge, according to his or her own taste. I think that's an appropriate description of what I am trying to do.

News that's closer to home • News that's closer to home • News that's closer to home •

Bernardi's RESTAURANT
APPLAGATE SQUARE, NORTHWESTERN AT INKSTER, SOUTHFIELD
Dining & Cocktails
EARLY DINNER SPECIALS
Served 4:30-6:00 p.m. Monday-Saturday

Your Choice \$7.95

PETITE FROG LEGS • Roadhouse Style

BROILED WHITEFISH • with Raspberry Bourne Blanc

GRILLED PROVING CALVES LIVER • APPLAGATE

• with Sautéed Apples and onions

SAUTÉED BREADED CHICKEN PECAN
with Supreme Sauce

Dinners include: soup, salad, potato, fresh vegetables, bread basket and your choice of coffee, tea or milk.

FOR DINNER RESERVATIONS CALL: 353-2757
HOURS: Mon.-Thurs. 11:30 A.M.-9 P.M., Fri. & Sat. 11:30 A.M.-11 P.M.

Tennessee William's
Passionate Drama

The Rose Tattoo

Now through January 25
Tonight at 8 p.m.

For ticket information
Call 377-3300

Meadow Brook Theatre
A cultural program of Oakland University

Presented in cooperation with

TREATS RESTAURANT

for your New Year's Celebration
NEW YEAR'S EVE

Dinner 5:00-12:00
Early Supper 5:00-6:30
featuring \$8.95 specials

NEW YEAR'S DAY BRUNCH
11:30-5:30 \$10.95

MAKE RESERVATIONS NOW
851-0060

4105 Orchard Lake Rd. • Betw. 17 & 18 Mile at Pontiac Trail

Distinctive Dining

Indulge yourself with an exceptional dining experience at the Benchmark.

The elegant decor serves as a dramatic backdrop for superb continental cuisine, fine wines, soft music, tempting desserts and impeccable service.

Cocktail and dinner service available Monday through Saturday, beginning at 6 p.m.

Call 559-6500 for reservations.

the Benchmark
16400 J.L. Hudson Drive, Southfield, Michigan 313/559-6500

ARMANDO'S
MEXICAN FOOD FOR REAL!

NEW YEAR'S EVE
NEW YEAR'S DAY
ENJOY ALL DAY BUFFET

FIESTA MEXICAN BUFFET
MON. - SAT. 11:00-3:00
ALL CAN EAT \$4.95
(Over 16 yrs. old, not incl. beverage)

NEW YEAR'S DAY
BRUNCH 10:00 A.M.
FRI. & SAT. 11:00 A.M.-1:00 A.M. MON.-THURS. 11:00 A.M.-11:00 P.M.
SUN. 10:00 A.M.-11:00 P.M.

29200 Orchard Lk. Rd. • Farm. Hills
(Between 12 & 13 Mile)
626-2982

SUNDAY
BRUNCH
A LA HILTON

NORTHFIELD HILTON

Our gourmet Brunch in an intimate setting — complete with a harpist. A mouth-watering menu of more than 50 items. So complete it can be your main meal of the day. Tender Roast Baron of Beef, creative omelets to order, exquisite eggs benedict and chef's hot dishes which change weekly. Tempting hams, Nova Scotia salmon and bagels, salads and cheeses. For a finale — chocolate mousse and fresh-baked miniature pastries.

10:30 AM to 2:30 PM
\$12.95 • Adults/\$7.95 • Children

Join us for our
Special New Year's Day Brunch Buffet

NORTHFIELD HILTON
5500 Crooks Road, Troy, MI 48068
879-2100