



Palme d'Or

Tuesday, December 16, 2003

Champagne Reception

*Duck Confit Croustillant
Salmon Caviar
Baby Crab Cake
Goat Cheese and Black Olive Paste
Taittinger, Brut Champagne, Reims*



*Pan Seared Duck Foie Gras
with Dry Fruit Chutney and Toasted Brioche
Chateau De Rayne-Vigneaux, Sauternes, 1996*



*Maine Halibut Filet with Leek Confit
Lobster Bisque Reduction and Petit Fleuron
Beaune, Clos des Mouches, J. Drouhin, 1996*



Minestrone "Digestive" with Verbena



*Braised Seven Hour Veal with Sweet Breads and Fava Bean Mousseline
Black Winter Truffle
Grands-Echezeaux, J. Drouhin, 1990*



*Roasted Venison with Rusti Potatoes
Wild Mushroom and Red Wine Reduction
Chateau Montrose, Saint-Estephe, 1982*



*Caramelized Pear and Apple with Toasted Walnut
Amarena Cherry Ice Cream
Domaine Des Forges, Grains Nobles, Coteaux du Layon, 1997*



Mignardises

Cigars in the Courtyard

Chef de Cuisine Philippe Ruiz



The International Wine & Food Society

Miami Branch

2003 Holiday Dinner

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Tuesday, December 16, 2003

Report by Christopher Zoller

For our black tie Holiday dinner sixty-three members and guests gathered on the covered patio of the courtyard at the beautiful Biltmore Hotel for a Champagne Reception featuring Taittinger Brut NV. We were offered a lovely selection of hors d'oeuvres including a crispy Duck Confit Croustillant, luscious twice-cooked duck meat in light pastry; Salmon Caviar on light toasts; Baby Crab Cakes on spoons; and Goat Cheese and Black Olive Paste, also on toast. All were a delightful departure and a great warm-up for the feast to come.

The newly redecorated restaurant features light hardwood floors, leather seating, vintage photographs, and more contemporary lighting, all within the lovely mirrored space overlooking both the huge tropical pool and the Mediterranean courtyard. We settled in to six tables of ten or eleven with plenty of room for place settings and glassware and were entertained by live music from the baby grand piano. The intent of Host Suhel Skaf was for a traditional dinner with some new and exciting flavors, and he consulted extensively with Chef de Cuisine Phillippe Ruiz, all to our benefit.

The first course was Pan Seared Duck Foie Gras with Dry Fruit Chutney and Toasted Brioche. The generous piece of liver was perfectly seared with a lovely crust and tender warm interior. The sauce was not overly reduced into heavy syrup, but rather it was light and sweet, with golden

raisins. A touch of sea salt added a little crunch and a sprig of watercress added some color. The wine for this course was a classic match: Sauternes, the Chateau De Rayne-Vigneaux 1996. It had great weight on the back palate, and was sweet without showing much fruit or acid.

Next was a fish course of Maine Halibut Filet with Leek Confit and Lobster Bisque Reduction and Petit Fleuron. The filet was thick and firm and the confit was exceptional, a medley of chopped leeks that gave texture and context to the delicious sauce of rich lobster flavors without too much salt or cream. Truly superb. The rich flavors of chardonnay always complement lobster and fish, so Suhel chose a white Burgundy from Beaune, a Clos des Mouches 1996 by J. Drouhin. This was a great vintage, and it did the job. With sharp acids on the attack and good fruit showing as it warmed and developed in the glass, the wine gave the course a great balance and did not overwhelm the fantastic flavors.

Chef Phillippe gave us a truly inspired “intermezzo”, far superior to the usual sorbet: Minestrone “Digestive” with Verbena. This was a unique and delightful almost clear broth with finely diced carrots and bits of pasta and the refreshing flavor of this unusual South American herb. Verbena has long, pointed leaves and a pleasant, sharp lemon scent and flavor and is only used sparingly in foods and teas. It is also popular in perfumes, soaps and lotions. Here it was a wonderful palate cleanser.

Next came an outstanding dish of Braised Seven Hour Veal and Sweetbreads, with Fava Bean Mousseline and Black Winter Truffle. Phillippe has made this preparation one of his signature dishes. He roasts the shredded veal with the sweetbreads for seven hours. During this time he extracts lots of juices, which are then reduced to make a sublime brown sauce. The tender meat is then shaped in round, tall patties and broiled to achieve a lovely crisp crust on the moist veal inside. It is presented on the green fava bean mousseline and surrounded by the veal reduction and topped with truffle shavings. It was delicious. Suhel found another Burgundian gem in our cellar, this time a red: Grand-Echezeaux, 1990, again from the house of J. Drouhin. This is another great vintage for Burgundy and this wine was showing very well. It had great structure with soft tannins and sharp acids and displayed mild fruit flavors of black berries and cherries. This wine, like the previous one, opened up as time went by and was excellent with this course and even the next one. The wine and food acted like a mutual admiration society, constantly complimenting each other.

Classic Holiday menus call for game, and we were treated to Roasted Venison with Rusti Potatoes and a Wild Mushroom and Red Wine Reduction. This was an exquisite filet of venison tenderloin cooked perfectly rare. The meat was tender and tasty, and made all the better by another fantastic sauce. The wild mushroom flavors of the forest added a nice touch to the obviously farm-raised venison. The wine pairing for this course was Chateau Montrose 1982, a Saint-Estephe. With a dark ruby color and heady nose of sweet black fruits with oak and floral scents, this wine had good weight on the palate, strong cleansing acids and rich concentrated flavors. It was great with the dish and even better as it developed in the glass. After some time it showed a lovely sweetness.

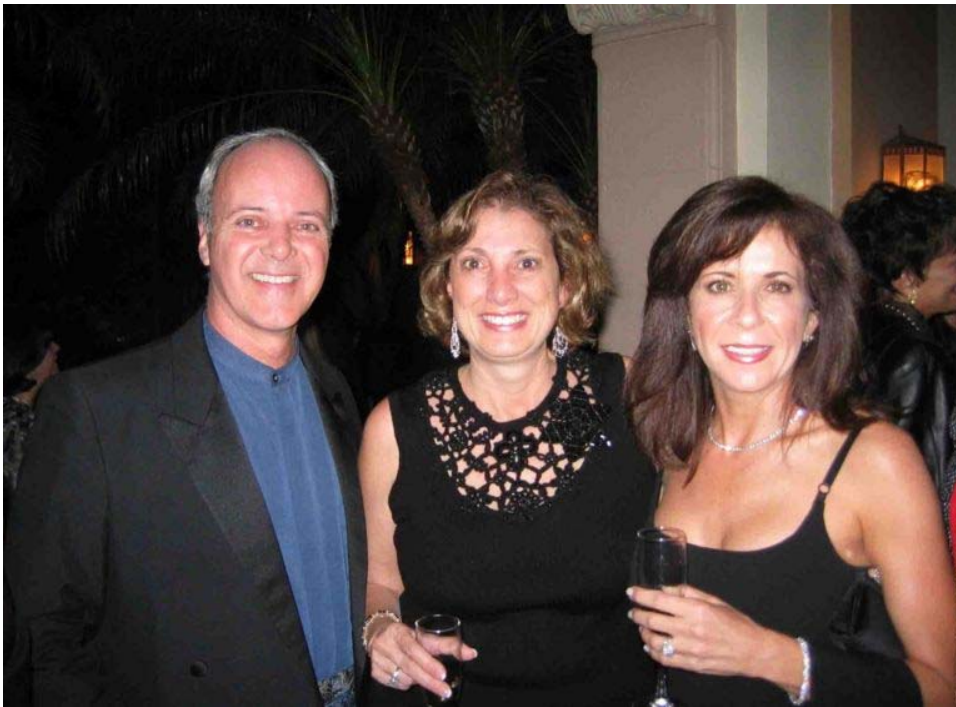
All these dishes were showcases for Chef Phillippe’s skills as a *saucier*. The sauces featured classic ingredients with new and lighter interpretations and truly enhanced the dishes. As in life, patience was a great virtue for these wines, as they all continued to evolve and improve in the glass.

For our dessert we had a simple but glorious Caramelized Pear and Apple with Toasted Walnut and Amarena Cherry Ice Cream. It proved to be a perfect sweet finish without overpowering our sensibilities. We had a unique and rare sweet wine to accompany the dish: the 1997 Domaine Des Forges, Grain Nobles from Coteaux du Layon. Superb flavors of sweet peach and apricot were found here because the grape was Chenin Blanc from the Loire Valley. It a delightful departure in dessert wine.

Questions, comments and guesses flew back and forth among the tables, so finally Suhel asked the Chef to join us and hear our accolades for this, and many great meals. Among our guests was Biltmore General Manager Dennis Doucette and Cellar Club Director Yvonne Roberts to witness the awarding of our first ever Certificate of Excellence to Chef Phillippe in recognition of his talent and creativity, and the Palme d’Or’s commitment to excellence in providing the ultimate dining experience. The award is our expression of gratitude to Chef Phillippe and the staff of the Palme d’Or for consistently delighting our group with most delicious (and wine friendly) food, and good service in a most elegant and friendly atmosphere. Suhel presented Phillippe with the framed certificate and we offered him several toasts. It was a great recognition of one of Florida’s finest chefs and a fitting tribute to end our fabulous Holiday Dinner. Another great gathering of Wine, Food and Friends.







The International Wine & Food Society

CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE

awarded to

Executive Chef Philippe Ruiz
La Palme D'Or

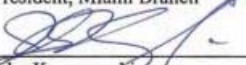
for his devotion to culinary excellence and exceptional service
provided to
The Miami Branch of *The International Wine & Food Society*
on the occasion of the 2003 Holidays Dinner
this 16th day of December in the year Two Thousand and Three.



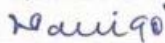
In Testimony whereof, we have
subscribed our signatures, as officers of
the Miami Branch of The International
Wine & Food Society, this Sixteenth
day of December in the year Two
Thousand and Three.



Suhel Skaf
President, Miami Branch



John Kuczanski
Secretary, Miami Branch



José R. Garrigó
Treasurer, Miami Branch