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FOR PHYSICIANS AT LEISURE

DECEMBER 2003

Dining in America What's Cooking in 2004

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French Paradox

What, then, accounts for the recent resurgence of French restaurants? For one thing, they too are acceptable to the Atkins crowd, offering plenty of red meat, butter, cream, and cheese galore.

This is not nouvelle cuisine or the kind of French food composed of three scallops and two string beans on a big white plate with six dots of beet juice. This is far more generous fare, such as rabbit with tarragon cream sauce, or roasted guinea hen with bacon in an herbed cream sauce, both served at the wildly successful Jean-Robert at Pigall's (513/721-1345) in Cincinnati.

At Lacroix at The Rittenhouse (215/790-2533) in Philadelphia (my *Esquire* pick for restaurant of the year), Jean-Marie Lacroix's exquisite four-course lunch costs \$24. You'll spend considerably more at dinner, feasting on dishes such as beef tenderloin with a side of warm liver and onion gratin. Then you could hit the 20 cheeses on the trolley before dessert.

Thinking about all I have just written, I believe I am happier in these lean times—I use the phrase figuratively to be sure—than in the excessively piggy '90s. Food is better today, and not nearly as expensive. I can graze my way through a restaurant menu, weep over well-made gnocchi, and indulge my lust for red meat just about everywhere, with a reasonably priced bottle of good red wine to wash it all down. Let's just hope this is more than a passing fancy. ■