

HOTELS

THE
MAGAZINE
OF THE
WORLDWIDE
HOTEL
INDUSTRY

⊗ AUGUST 2004

Luxury
Collection

LACROIX AT THE RITTENHOUSE

The Rittenhouse Hotel, Philadelphia

As the new millennium dawned, David Benton, vice president and general manager, saw that the Rittenhouse's fine dining was not fine enough to differentiate this luxury hotel. He challenged renowned Chef Jean-Marie Lacroix to develop and execute a concept that would put the Rittenhouse on the culinary map, and he gave him the tools to do it: Operational freedom; an investment in design by Philadelphia's Marguerite Rodgers Inc. and US\$135,000 for the sommelier to build a respected wine list. That savvy investment paid off with a mantle full of awards, a doubling in revenues and a six-fold increase in wine sales.

Though Lacroix is a stickler about basics (some locals come in just for his exquisite omelets), he makes sure he says something new. "The challenge is to make every dish interesting. So I use cuts of meat people are not used to," Lacroix says. "I use food as the basis for sauces. I might put crisp veal sweetbreads with artichokes and a ragout of baby apples or a lamb sausage with stewed bing cherries. I want to surprise because I believe people like being surprised."

His use of fish rarely offered in the United States, unusual ingredients and an array of sauces make the menu a marketing tool. Guests need to ask questions. They sample. And, yes, even in this informally elegant dining room, they share. Like a true French *patron*, Lacroix enjoys mingling with his customers. "I did not want intimidating. I wanted fun," he says.



"I love sauces. Young chefs don't. They want to be on television. Television stars don't have the two to three days you need to make a sauce." Chef Jean-Marie Lacroix, Lacroix at the Rittenhouse