



RESTAURANTS

LACROIX AT THE RITTENHOUSE, 210 W. Rittenhouse Square, 215-790-2533

My personal holiday treat was a preview of the wonderful dishes that, by now, many other Philadelphians have found equally glorious. I was the first food writer to immerse my tastebuds in the remarkable dishes being served at Lacroix, the new dining room in the Rittenhouse Hotel. Jean-Marie Lacroix, the executive chef for whom the restaurant is named, recently retired after an 18-year stint as executive chef of the Fountain Restaurant in the Four Seasons Hotel, which under his guidance was deemed the best dining room in the city by many distinguished critics.

Chef Lacroix is one of Philadelphia's most beloved culinary resources; his influence extends far beyond the kitchen. As a premier Philadelphia chef for nearly 20 years, Lacroix has been instrumental in the development of regional sources for meat, produce, cheese, breads, coffee and teas. Thanks to his encouragement, many noteworthy upcoming chefs refer to him affectionately as "Papa," and credit him with teaching them culinary standards and discipline. Many prominent kitchens boast having a Lacroix "graduate."

Lacroix realized he'd retired too soon when David Benton, general manager of the Rittenhouse Hotel, made him an offer he couldn't refuse: to turn the main dining room of the Rittenhouse Hotel into the restaurant of his dreams. Meg Rodgers transformed the tired Treetops into a subdued, 1940-ish French and Japanese influenced environment with stone pathways, warm sunlight and abundant greenery, capturing the spirit of an elegant park. Near the dining room entrance, the food altar, an oversized replica of a stone fountain, displays wines, flowers and other delicacies. During the day, the 110-seat dining room and 14-seat private dining room's fresh green, warm yellow and comforting earth tones are bathed in natural light. After dark, candlelit tables create the romantic illusion of dining by moonlight.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE



HOLIDAY FEASTS

Lacroix's refined menu matches the comfortable elegance of the room. The food is simple, contemporary and ever changing. "I enjoy trying new things, both in life and in cooking," says Lacroix. Among the heavenly dishes was an outstanding onion soup. Also wonderful was the braise sliced sweetbreads enveloped in a sweet veal stock and glazed with a pale mustard flavored cream. The orange-colored French pumpkin soup seasoned with autumn spices, drizzled with crispy shallots and served with soft, warm leek flan was another cold weather winner. The most miraculous and inspired combination was the foie gras appetizer: a narrow triangle of toasted Challah bread topped with a slow-roasted wedge of foie gras and accompanied by a roasted, fresh and sweet black mission fig with chanterelle and enoki mushrooms in a Cabernet emulsion. The sweetness of the fig contrasted beautifully with the salt-sprinkled foie gras.

Lacroix's interest in game was evident in the roasted rabbit and lobster with brandied prunes in natural juices. Another intriguing entree included the Lamb Two Ways, a sautéed double lamb chop served with a slow braised leg of lamb casserole, accompanied by potato gnocchi and shaved goat cheese.

For dessert, I unfortunately had no room for the hot chocolate soufflé and crème brûlée, and instead nibbled on an amazing pear poached in Riesling and saffron. I also sampled a light-as-air vanilla custard. The specialty fruit, liquor, herb and spice-infused chocolate petit four (samples of the line of candy to be sold exclusively through The Rittenhouse Hotel) threw my restraint to the winds. They retail for \$8 per box of 36 chocolates, and are worth every cent.

An open three-course prix fixe meal at Lacroix, with any of the choices on the menu available, is \$55. Also ask about the five and seven-course tasting dinners at the chef's table in the kitchen or in the private dining room.



# HOLIDAY FEASTS

To me, the perfect gift should contain a balance of time and pleasure. I prefer sharing a sumptuous holiday feast with people I love over giving or getting over-priced baubles. So this year, follow my lead and give those precious to you a romp through the culinary imaginations of two of Philadelphia's most consistently impressive chefs: Terence Feury of Striped Bass and Jean-Marie Lacroix of the recently refurbished Rittenhouse Hotel kitchen.

BY MYRA CHANIN  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY BILL DEERING



Seared center-cut pork loin on the bone with a foie de porc galette and a red wine and pork jus from Lacroix at the Rittenhouse

