

## **Culinary Virtuosity Invades Fairfax County**

By William Nicoson

In April, 1976, the famous chef, François Haeringer, having abandoned his downtown location on 15<sup>th</sup> Street near the Ellipse, opened L'Auberge Chez François in the wilds of Great Falls. He was the first great chef to establish himself in an ever-urbanizing Fairfax County. His Auberge, now guided by his son, Jacques, made the best of Alsatian cuisine popular among those who respected careful and novel cooking as an art form.

Until recently L'Auberge Chez François stood alone as the progenitor of haute cuisine in Fairfax County. Last year, however, three resourceful chefs arrived in the County to compete for the title of first artist among its restaurants.

Just west of Reston on Georgetown Pike in a corner of the Seneca Square Shopping Center stands Le Relais which late last year brought on board Yannick Cam as full-time chef. I remember Cam's extraordinary artistry at his downtown restaurants, beginning with Le Pavillon in a K Street basement. He moved on to Connecticut Avenue, then Arlington and a series of restaurants with focused culinary styles (Brazilian, Provençal, Spanish).

His mastery remains invincible at Le Relais. During my last visit, I experienced a wild mushroom soup to die for, a sublime lobster crêpe and a humble beef stew over polenta, which was bursting with flavor.

Meanwhile at Maestro, the deluxe open-kitchen restaurant of Tyson Corner's Ritz-Carleton, a talented young chef, Fabio Trabocchi, is demonstrating his astounding and wide-ranging talent by sponsoring three varieties of tasting menus: traditional Italian, contemporary Italian and imaginative Italian. Whatever your choice (you can mix and match), the dishes, fashioned in the open kitchen as you watch, are extraordinary.

In November last year, yet another precocious chef, Jonathan Krinn, allied with his former teacher, Pascal Dionot of L'Académie de Cuisine in Maryland, opened the 2941 Restaurant in the glass-encased ground floor of an office building facing Fairview Lake southwest of Falls Church. Krinn had worked under inventive chefs at Union Pacific and Gramercy Tavern in New York City and, briefly, under the legendary Alain Ducasse.

At 2941, Krinn has devised appetizers such as diver sea scallops in caviar sauce with roasted salsify and main courses such as tenderloin of venison with baby beets, turnips and braised cabbage in a sauce flavored with juniper and black currants. Among his innovative desserts is a layered cider-glazed slow baked apple terrine with quince cream.

The most recent talented chef to come our way is Andrea Pace, lured this year to Ristorante Il Cigno in Reston's Lake Anne Village Center by owner Tony Arbid with an offer of co-

ownership. Pace studied at The Excelsior Culinary Institute in Merano, Italy, later serving there at Villa Mozart and later at Il Palio in New York City under Master Chef Andrea Helriegel.

Pace has carefully constructed his own menus for both lunch and dinner with emphasis on the freshest produce, matching impeccable salads with grilled meat and fish and offering inventive sauces. Examples: salmon carpaccio with thinly sliced fennel, black olives and orange; and boneless muscovi duck breast with bittersweet chocolate glaze, white polenta and green asparagus.

Il Cigno has embarked on a series of wine-tasting dinners and “opera nights” with elaborate multi-course menus and wines.

Our culinary landscape has been suddenly and vastly enriched over the last 12 months. And the competition to please our palates may just be beginning.

*William Nicoson enjoys both cooking and dining.*