

## FOOD & WINE RESTAURANT REVIEW

# Something old, something new

By Polly Hurst

It's not just your imagination—there really is a new restaurant opening in Philadelphia almost every other day. The city's Bureau of Licenses and Inspections issued licenses for 140 new restaurants between August 1980 and March of this year, and while not all of these have opened, quite a few new places are vying for our palates. This month we visit a new restaurant in an old location, an old restaurant in a new one, and a third newcomer that knows where it is but hasn't decided what it is.

Tripp's (★★½)

Food 6; Service 7; Atmosphere 9.

It seems to be one of the verities of the restaurant trade: there's nothing like a penthouse location. The higher up the better. Windows on the World, the stratospheric restaurant atop Manhattan's World Trade Center, reportedly did upwards of \$16 million worth of business its first year, and good food was only part of the draw. Diners pausing between bites of steak tartare have a panoramic view of the metropolis, the harbor, the Atlantic Ocean, and more of New Jersey than they probably care to see. They can even look down on small planes flying below them.

But then, New York does *everything* to excess. Philadelphia's rooftop dining rooms aren't in buildings so tall they sway in a strong wind, but we have our share of restaurants with a view. The newest of these is Tripp's, which has taken over the 33rd floor site of the old Penthouse restaurant in the Lewis Tower Building. The Penthouse wasn't easy to find unless you knew where to look, and with its uninspired food and dreary decor, it was hardly worth the trouble. But the view of the city and the Delaware River, and yes, even New Jersey, was spectacular. Tripp's has tossed out the old Continental Cuisine and the fusty

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

### About the ratings

The stars reflect our evaluation of the overall dining experience at each restaurant. In addition, we provide a numerical rating for each of the three components of the experience: food, service and atmosphere on a scale of 1 to 10, with a 10 a virtually unattainable perfection. A rating of 4-5 is okay, 6-7 is good, and 8-9 is exceptional.

The panoramic view from Tripp's is spectacular.



## Golden oldies and fresh starts in the restaurant trade.

furnishings and changed everything but the view. The result is fresh and modern and pleasant and expensive.

Finding the place now is no problem: a green marquee marks the Locust Street entrance to the Lewis Tower, and a fast elevator whisks you to the 33rd floor. The dining room is reached through a tiny lounge where the less well-heeled can enjoy the view for the price of a drink. Tripp's seems particularly popular with the chic youngish center city crowd, Beautiful People who look like they belong in this Beautiful Place. The modern starkness of plain white walls and dark glazed tile floors is softened by white linens, rattan chairs, armloads of fresh flowers and airy ficus trees. The unadorned windows provide a virtually unobstructed view of the city and the river from three sides of the dining room—and as wonderful as it is during daylight,

it's positively breathtaking at night. The lighting in the dining room, a discreet combination of track lights and tabletop candles, is comfortably dim so that the lights of the city sparkle like stars on an August night and the Ben Franklin Bridge looks as gossamer as spider webs. It's hard to imagine a lovelier setting.

And it isn't only the decor that's lovely. The food is presented with an eye to beauty. Garnishes are arranged with an artistic perfection. Lacy white doilies embellish every service plate. Even the waiters and waitresses, in their black trousers, white shirts and black bow ties, seem chosen as much for their perfect features as their serving skills. The *maitre d'* could be one of Fitzgerald's characters in his dinner jacket, wing collar and thin bow tie.

It's all so beautiful, only a purist would grouse that the food tends to look better than it tastes. The menu is chic and nouvelle French and trendy; few heavy sauces or ingredients that would play havoc with a diet. But "light" food is a tricky thing, and too often at Tripp's

Photographed by Bill Dobos

## FOOD & WINE RESTAURANT REVIEW

the food is delicate to the point of bland with an occasional lapse into flavorless.

The menu is beautifully hand-lettered, and in addition to the regular fare, there are daily specials recited by the waiter, who also tells you how much they cost, which is a nice touch. Pâté maison (\$4.50) tastes like meat loaf with pistachios, but it's beautifully presented: thin slices of pâté on crisp romaine leaves garnished with cornichons, tomato wedges and pumpernickel bread. Bouché de coquille aux épinards (\$4.95) is a puff-pastry shell filled with a very delicate mixture of bay scallops and spinach in a cream sauce. Huîtres avec champagne en salade (\$4.95) is four deliciously plump poached oysters served on a bed of warm lettuce and topped with a slightly sour-tasting champagne cream sauce—a pleasant appetizer. Oysters are also featured in bisque de huîtres et champignons au saffron (\$3), a few of them floating with some sliced mushrooms in a fairly bland cream soup colored lightly with saffron. None of the hot appetizers was served quite hot enough, an oversight that doubtless affected the flavor of those dishes. A cold salad, les haricots froids et langoustinos (\$4.50), fared somewhat better: an excellent, very garlicky vinaigrette dressed fresh green beans and langoustines, the French prawns. The shellfish, unfortunately, had a rather mushy texture that might have come from being frozen.

Entrées were, in general, rather bland. An exception is the mignon de boeuf, sauce béarnaise (\$16.50), an excellent, good-sized filet cooked to a perfect pink and topped with a good béarnaise sauce. Escalopes de veau au trois champignons varies (\$13.95), on the other hand, was all too delicate and almost too beautiful to eat: small, lightly browned veal scal-



*Frog's new quarters are sleekly sophisticated.*

lops in a very thin, winy cream sauce were presented with an arrangement of three different exotic sautéed mushrooms—Chinese lily flowers, French morels, and Japanese straw mushrooms—garnished with a cluster of fresh watercress. Cailles et cuisse de grenouilles, sauté meunière (\$13.95) was also artfully arranged, sautéed frogs' legs on either side of a small semi-boneless quail in a very lemony sauce, the paleness of the dish once again beauti-

fully accented with watercress. Pasta primavera avec fruits de mer (\$10.25) is a very light, creamy but not particularly flavorful combination of green noodles, broccoli, summer squash, bay scallops and more of the mushy langoustines. Served with the entrées is a side dish of vegetables: on one occasion it was fresh crisp asparagus, attractively cut on the diagonal, and a potato gratin that seemed overly Cuisinarted and undercooked.

Desserts (\$3) are served from a trolley filled with visual delights that, once again, fail to live up to their exceptional beauty. Black cherry tart with a sponge cake topping is heavily flavored with kirsch and almonds. Beautiful cream puffs in the shape of swans with chocolate beaks are filled with whipped cream. The best dessert of all is the "chocolate house," a delicious house-shaped confection of three kinds of chocolate cake with a chocolate pudding-y icing.

The wine list is small, and markup seems rather high. No vintages are noted, and on one occasion, of the four California whites listed, only one was available.

The overriding impression at Tripp's is that appearance is everything. If you're more likely to be rendered stary-eyed by a lump of fresh foie gras than a gorgeous view, you'd probably be happier spending your money (around \$95 for two with tip) somewhere else. But if you have romance in your soul and an appetite only for the person you're with, an evening surrounded by the beauty of

*French and northern Italian specialties are featured at La Grolla.*



## Restaurant review

Tripp's could be a many-splendored thing.

TRIPP'S, 1425 Locust St., 33rd floor, 735-1118. L—11:30-3 Mon-Fri; D—5:30-11 Mon-Sat. Closed Sun. AMV.

Frog (★★★★½)

Food 8; Service 7; Atmosphere 8.

It's hard to review objectively a restaurant that's become an institution. It's particularly hard if you like the place and like the folks who run it. In trying to be objective, there's a tendency to be negative just to prove how objective you are. So in the interest of objectivity, let me be perfectly subjective: I love Frog. I've loved it since it opened eight years ago in a storefront filled with a jungle of hanging plants, hippie help, a chalkboard menu, and church pews for banquettes—in fact, loved it in spite of those

At Frog you always felt there were real people in the kitchen, real people who liked to eat and cook. . . .

things. There were times at the old Frog—for instance, the evening the man at the next table put his elbow in my butter as he soulfully explained to his companion that his impotence stemmed from deep-seated aggression—when I wondered why I like this cramped little place. And then the food came and I remembered. The menu was strange (this was, after all, the early '70s) and wonderful and if one of the dishes didn't seem particularly good, chances are it would disappear from the unwieldy green chalkboard forever. At Frog you always felt there were real people in the kitchen, people who liked to eat and liked to cook and hoped you enjoyed their efforts. It was friendly and fun and the growing sophistication of the food and wine cellar more than compensated for the Age-of-Aquarius atmosphere.

Since the establishment of Frog in 1973, owner Steve Poses has become a legend in the restaurant community. Every project he has undertaken—the gourmet cafeteria Commissary, its fast-food little brother Eden, a catering service and the brand-new Market at the Commissary—turned to gold; the combination of hard work, good help and lively intelligence seemed unbeatable.

But Steve Poses, it is rumored, is only human. When word got out that Frog was moving to larger quarters, some of

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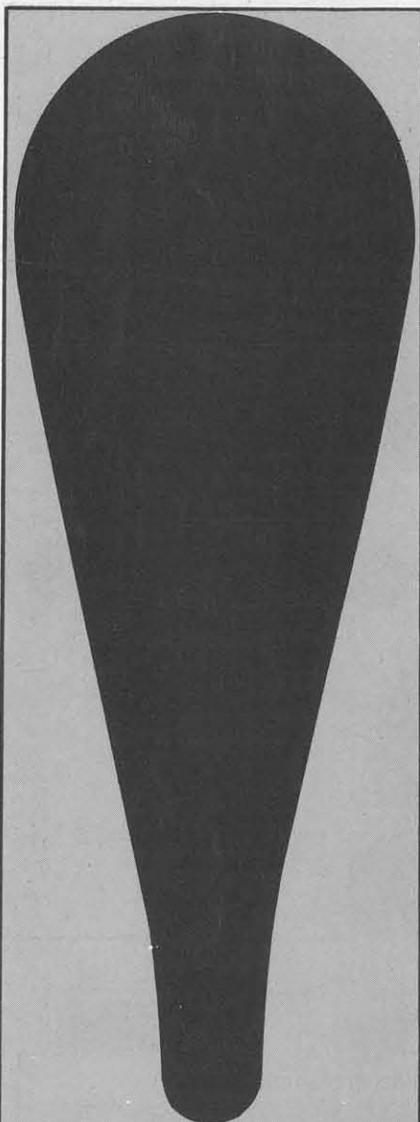
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## Restaurant review

us figured he just wasn't going to be able to carry this one off. This time he was overextending himself.

It's nice to be wrong sometimes. Not only has Poses carried it off, but he's done it with great style. The new Frog is the old Frog all grown up. The food's as good as ever, the service is the same, and the new look is sensational. Frog has become the Handsome Prince, complete with little eyes over the O—FRÖG—that look enough like an umlaut to make out-of-towners suspect it's a Scandinavian restaurant pronounced "freug."

The entrance wall is decorated with a huge hanging sculpture that looks like something Thor Heyerdahl might have used on the *Kon-Tiki*, very abstract and unusual but not out of place in this sleekly modern setting. Downstairs is a small lounge with piano music that wafts pleasantly up the stairway into the dining area. Cane chairs and an occasional wall covered with something reminiscent of bamboo add to the airy feeling of the dining rooms—two at street level and a

third upstairs—while alcoves and partitions and walls painted dusty rose and gray warm things up. It's a fresh, sophisticated look that's in perfect harmony with the food.

The menus are now printed and presented in gray Leatherette folders along with copies of the wine list; this is a particularly nice touch since these days almost everyone is interested in wines and it's a bother to have to pass one wine list around the table. The wine selection is excellent, a good mix of California and French, with quite a few German and Italian vintages as well, all at a reasonable markup. A 1979 Mondavi Pinot Chardonnay runs \$20; a 1974 Château Latour Figeac is \$24. There are daily wine specials—around a dozen of them—and house wines are available by the half or full carafe.

The menu is written, *mirabile dictu*, in English with enough description to give you a good idea of what's in each dish. In addition to a wide choice of hot and cold appetizers, salads, side dishes

## GUT REACTIONS

Gut reactions are *unrated* "mini-reviews" of recent restaurant experiences done the way you do it: one visit, pot luck.

*European Dairy Restaurant*, 20th and Sansom Sts., 568-1298.

This is where you go if you're Jewish and you've always felt somehow deprived that your Russian ancestors suffered the joys and horrors of shtetl life, pogroms and all, and you got none of it. Or maybe you just feel guilty. I, for instance, think a lot about my grandmother, whose family baked bread and who used to get her ears boxed for falling asleep late at night by the heat of the oven. She's dead now, but I can still picture her as a tired little girl slumping on her chair while the bread burned . . . anyway, the European Dairy Restaurant is run by a family of Russian immigrants, and I first stumbled across the place when my wife, child and I had been turned out into the cold by another restaurant which kept us waiting almost an hour for a seat. My humble little family struggled through the snow from Spruce to Sansom, and suddenly—miracle of miracles!—we heard the strains of a violin and an accordion playing an old Russian folk tune. And there, its uncurtained windows brightly beckoning through the dark night, the two musicians weaving and smiling like characters in *Fiddler*, was the European Dairy Restaurant.

It is a plain little place. There is no rug, no tablecloths, no candlelight. You sit at the kind of tables teenagers in the '50s used to share ice cream sodas. The owner, a pleasant-looking gentleman, bustles about a little more noisily and intrusively than necessary, some of the help don't use Secret, and you may be asked to move in slightly so that a refrigerator can be opened or so the door to the kitchen won't

hit your chair, but the price is right. You can get, for instance, a plate of filling matzo brie (rhymes with "fry," and that's what it means: fried matzo) for \$2.50, kasha with bow ties for \$2.45, boiled or fried potato pirogen with sour cream for \$3.25, and cold borscht with an egg and sour cream for \$1.45. You can get side orders like potato knishes (80¢ each) and salads like shredded carrots with raisins and mayonnaise (\$1.40). There are cakes (strudel is \$1.50), omelets (lox and onion, \$3.90), cold fish platters (white fish salad with raw vegetables, \$3.95), and several fresh fish platters including, God help us, Fishkibub at \$6.30.

Some of these dishes may remind you more than you want of your Jewish upbringing or, if you're not Jewish, let you live vicariously. Many of them need salt, lots of it, and this comes to you from a person who doesn't like salt. After all, who could afford seasonings? Who knew from basil and thyme? Or, God forbid, rosemary? Not my Jewish mother. Not *any* Jewish mother. These were foreign terms, symbols of assimilation and of the bacchanalia that went on in the house of the infidel. At the European Dairy Restaurant, you get the feeling that the little mother in the kitchen is making food for Philadelphia's center city Jewish food freaks with the same degree of blandness that she practices on her own family. But it's stick-to-the-ribs food (you never knew when you'd have to spend several days hiding from the cossacks) and you won't be hungry when you walk out.

It isn't Le Bec-Fin, but in some of the dishes and bowls you will find more than food. You will think you see, smell and taste Ellis Island. And that's worth something.

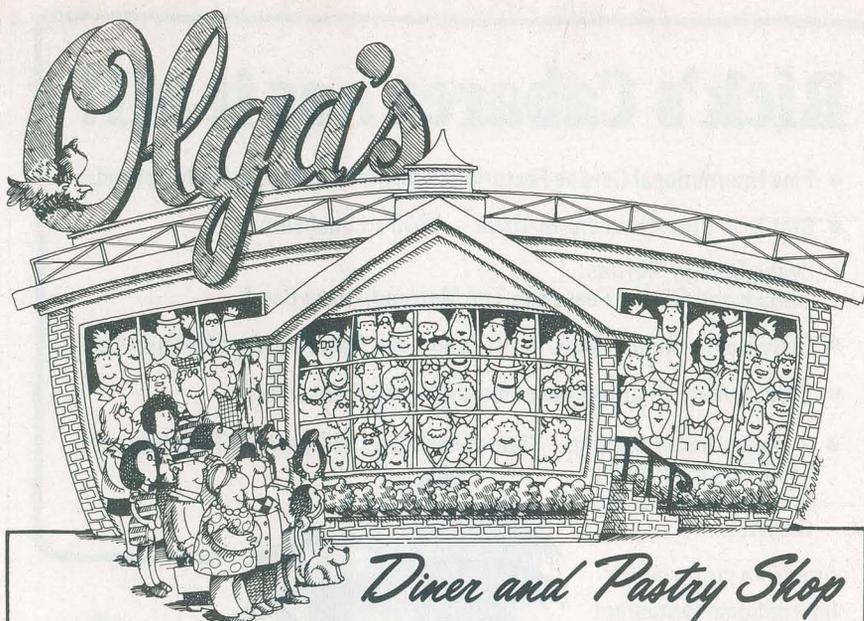
—ART SPIKOL

and entrées plain and charcoal broiled, there are an additional dozen or so daily specials. It's an extremely ambitious offering. I've long been a proponent of the First Law of Menus, which holds that the quality of a restaurant is usually inversely proportional to the number of dishes they attempt in the kitchen. But Frog is an exception. The selection is large and it's all well prepared.

Duck liver pâté with pistachio sauce (\$3.75) is a thick slice of superb creamy rich pâté garnished with aspic cubes and a sweetish port-flavored mayonnaise studded with pistachios, a crunchy counterpoint to the buttery texture of the pâté. Timbale of sole and smoked salmon with salmon caviar and dill beurre blanc (\$4.75) is a mixture of coarsely ground fish served warm with a dill-flavored butter sauce. It's beautiful to look at—a dollop of red caviar garnishing the pink and white timbale, white sauce flecked with green dill weed—and would have been even better if the wine and vinegar in the sauce had been reduced a bit longer. Fresh pasta with bay scallops and champagne cream sauce (\$4.50) was one of the specials, a delicious reduced cream sauce with tiny scallops accenting the excellent, chewy homemade pasta.

Although it seems a waste to order a steak in a restaurant of Frog's capabilities, it's a fairly good test of their ability to handle the basics. And they do it extraordinarily well. Filet mignon with béarnaise sauce (\$14) is a large filet of excellent quality beef grilled to order over charcoal and served with a very good béarnaise. Delicious sautéed green beans and perfectly roasted potatoes came with it. Roast rack of lamb with mustard and herbs (\$16.50) was also a fine rendition of a classic, the five ribs served pink and coated with deliciously spicy mustard-flavored crumbs. Poached salmon scallop with cucumber and leeks with sorrel beurre blanc (\$14), a special one evening, came with the salmon encasing a delicious and delicate mixture of cooked cucumbers and leeks, coated with a sorrel-flavored beurre blanc. At the other end of the taste spectrum is a hearty seafood stew with shrimp, scallops, mussels, cod and tomatoes (\$11.75), a huge bowl of fish and shellfish in their shells in an excellent fennel-flavored broth. Herbed croutons and a little pot of wonderfully garlicky aioli are served on the side. This is a superb stew.

Desserts include Frog's famous chocolate mousse cake with Grand Marnier sauce (\$3.25), chocolate mousse encased in a chocolate-glazed yellow cake topped with Grand Marnier flavored custard sauce. Pecan pie a la mode (\$2.75) is a better-than-average pecan filling in an excellent crust, but once again the plaintive cry is raised: why can't anybody make really good pecan pie in this



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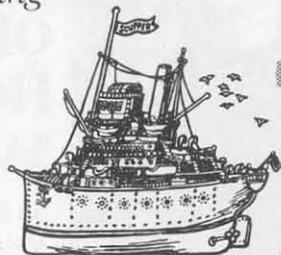
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## Restaurant review

part of the country? White-chocolate ice cream (\$3) is cold essence of white chocolate, almost too rich after a meal. Minted lime sherbet (\$2.50), on the other hand, is a light, deliciously cool combination of lime and mint flavors that seems the perfect ending for dinner. Coffee (75¢) is strong and excellent, with all the refills you could want.

One of the nicest aspects of the new Frog is that the prices aren't noticeably different from the old. Drinks, a bottle of wine, appetizer, entrée, dessert and coffee for two will cost about \$90 including tip, a relatively modest amount when you consider the quality of the food and wine.

Frog's warts are relatively minor. While it would be nice if the waiters and waitresses were dressed a little more in keeping with the sophisticated air of the

## GUT

Gut reactions are unrated "mini-reviews" of recent restaurant experiences done the way you do it: one visit, pot luck.

*Captain Cook's Seafood House*, 1613 Walnut St., 564-2282.

Just about everybody who's never been here assumes that it's a franchise operation, a fast food fish-'n'-chips. I mean, *Captain Cook's*? Well, matey, you are talking about a place where the average dinner entrée is around \$12.95, maybe more, and while the menu items all appear to have gone on sale recently—\$11.95, \$12.95, \$15.95—they're not bargains.

But first things first. The exterior is a stained-glass window with a nautical theme and a big gray awning with block lettering and a hand-carved sign that proclaims this restaurant to be "Phila's Most Prestigious [sic] 1st Class Family Owned Sea Food Restaurant," which it is not.

It looks, from the outside, something like a seashore gift shop. Inside is nicer: the bar, which is crowded this Monday night and illuminated by multicolored lights, will remind you a little of the old Pub Tiki, if you remember that, only the nautical stuff is much less forced, thank God. Farther back is the dining area, a lot of knotty pine and tall black vinyl banquettes that give Captain Cook's the appearance of a very fancy pizza parlor, but which are comfortable and even a little intimate. There's candlelight and fresh white tablecloths and captain's chairs.

Almost all the tables are filled. This is incredible—to us, anyway—because Captain Cook's is expensive and does not look very inviting from the outside. But here are all these people: a large group of Oriental gentlemen; a businessperson or two; a couple couples; an elderly woman dining alone; some shlubs in T-shirts, etc. What brings them? It must be the drinks, we figure. Or the food.

It is neither. The drinks are average; the wine list is poor—a few like Riunite and Mateus and some kind of Liebfraumilch,

place, they are still attractively, if casually, turned out in their khaki trousers and pastel Oxford cloth shirts. Service is still as ingenuous as it was at the old Frog, sometimes too much so: on one occasion, having ordered seafood bisque, we were told by our chatty waitress that we probably wouldn't like it since a lot of people didn't. We obediently changed our order. A red wine, which through an oversight hadn't been opened when we requested, was served so warm it might have been spending its days next to the oven. Because of the popularity of the place, it's difficult to get a table at, say, 7. The person taking reservations seems to feel quite put upon if you don't want to eat as late as 8 or as early as, God forbid, 5:30.

But these are fairly trivial complaints. The new Frog is an excellent restaurant:

## REACTIONS

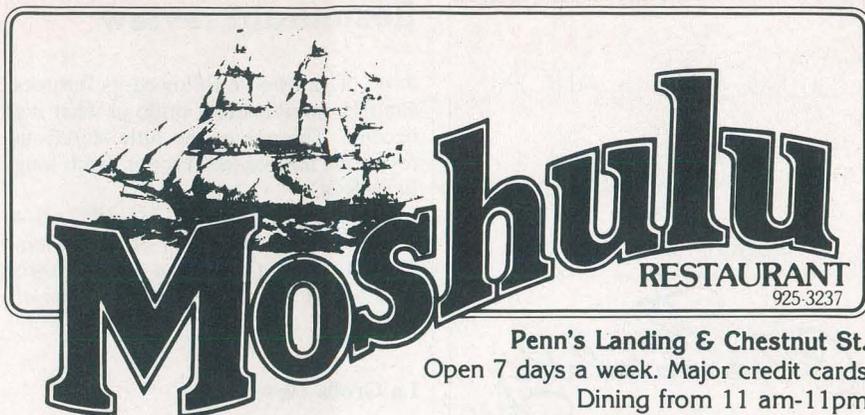
some rock-bottom Californias, an inexplicable \$35 Pouilly Fuissé, a few champagnes. Mostly the pits. It is what you'd expect of a wine list for people who order by color: red without bubbles, please; white with bubbles, please, etc. Really, with entrées priced as high as this, you expect better.

The same goes for the food. Captain Cook's charges more for some dishes than Bookbinder's on 15th Street, and doesn't handle them nearly as well, based on our sampling. "This food would be acceptable," says my dining companion, "if it were one-third the price." Even at that, our sautéed scallops (\$12.95) which are described as "the house's distinctive dish" and come in a tasty sauce and feature "our own secret seasonings," still would have been tough as chewing gum and cooked to a frazzle: have you ever had a scallop with hard edges? And flounder stuffed with crab meat (\$14.95), while not bad for the first few bites, doesn't wear well—it is substantially overcooked, soft as mush, drenched in butter, too rich, too salty. Mixed vegetables taste canned; zucchini is tasty but sopping and overcooked. Baked potato is baked potato, and the salad, with a creamy Italian dressing, is better than average.

On the plus side, the people who serve us are quite solicitous—our waiter is concerned because the flounder is unfinished; so is a gentleman whom we take to be the owner. Nobody asks about the scallops, though. The restaurant is very clean; the rest rooms spotless.

If Captain Cook's were inclined to improve its act a little, it might start by reducing the size of the menu. There are 27 entrées and it's pretty hard for a restaurant serving a small crowd to do that kind of selection justice. But at those prices, they *should* be done justice. It costs two of us \$33 plus tip, and that includes only one cocktail and a club soda—no wine, no appetizers, no dessert. I leave with the feeling that I was the catch of the day.

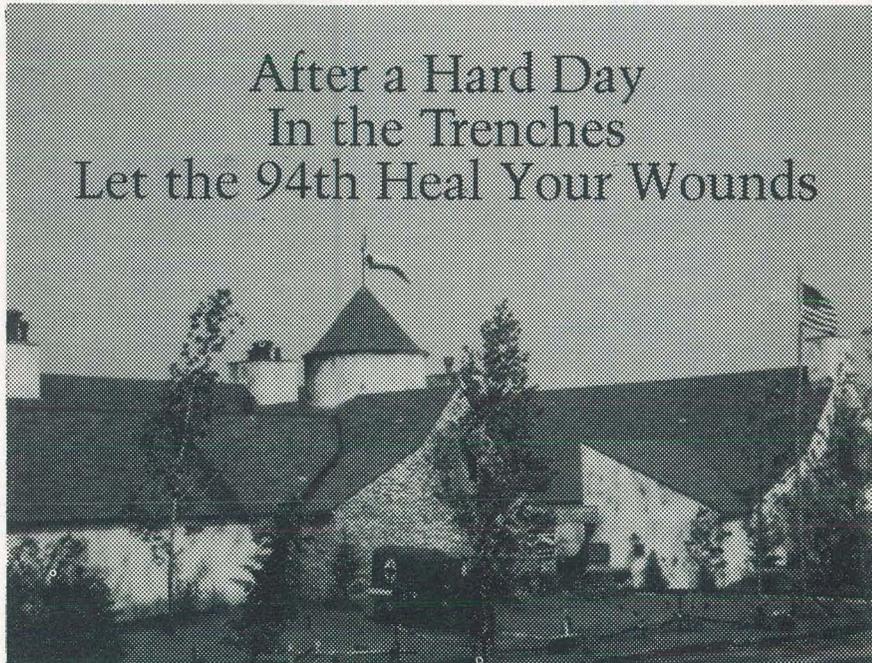
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## Restaurant review

those of us who've followed its fortunes can take an avuncular pride in what it's become. The age of the little storefront restaurant has passed. Frog is dead; long live FRÖG.

**FRÖG, 1524 Locust St., 735-8882. B—7:30-9:30 Mon-Fri; L—11:30-2:30 Mon-Fri; D—5:30-10:30 Sun-Thurs, until 11:30 Fri & Sat; SB—11:30-3. All major cards.**

### La Grolla (★★)

Food 5; Service 5; Atmosphere 5.

While Frog has a strong sense of its own identity, La Grolla, another newcomer, seems to be suffering from a split personality. This is a pleasant little restaurant tucked away in Queen Village, the buffer neighborhood between Society Hill and South Philly that isn't quite as upscale as the one nor as relaxed as the other. In many ways, La Grolla reflects that ambivalence. It's a northern Italian and French restaurant with a menu that is partly Italian and partly French, with English translations. There is a bar and rather informal dining area in the front of the restaurant and a small, more formal dining room in the back. Unfortunately, the small dining room is between the bar and the kitchen, and the constant traffic of busy, chattering waiters makes the diner feel he's in the middle of a large, cheerful family dinner.

Which would be fine if La Grolla were a red-gravy, checkered-tablecloth sort of restaurant. But the decor is much more sophisticated than that, with velvet upholstered chairs, deep, dark carpeting in the dining room and subdued lighting. The tables are beautifully set with white linens, silvery salt and pepper shakers, nice white china, good quality flatware and sprays of silk orchids in silvery vases. And each table is lighted by a candle in a tall silvery candlestick—not a wax-covered Chianti bottle in sight.

The menu reinforces the impression of a chic northern Italian restaurant with a good range of Italian and French items. Tortelli tricolore (\$7, with half orders available) is a plate of small ravioli, half spinach and half plain, filled with ground hazelnuts and ricotta, served with an aurora sauce, a rosy mixture of heavy cream and tomato. It's a lovely color combination, and the pasta is tender and delicious. Salmon quenelles (\$4.25) are less successful, salmon-flavored poached fish dumplings with an unfortunately mushy texture served with a rather bland sauce. Vitello tonnato (\$3.50) is paper-thin slices of roast veal served with a mild tuna sauce of mayonnaise consistency, a light, tasty appetizer.

Entrées were, in general, not as good as the appetizers. Vitello La Grolla (\$9.75) is veal scallops with prosciutto,

anchovies and capers, a delightful-sounding combination; but on one occasion, the veal was tasteless, the sauce had separated into an oily sludge, and the anchovies were nonexistent. Marmite de pêcheurs (\$11) was better, a huge bowl of assorted fresh-tasting seafood—fish, squid, mussels and clams in their shells—swimming in a creamy white sauce. Canard au citron et au whiskey (\$9.50) is half a roast duck, crispy skinned and fairly tender, in an uncountably bland lemon and whiskey sauce. Bistecca al Barolo (\$13.25) is a fillet of beef in a Barolo wine sauce. The meat tasted tenderized and flavorless, and the sauce was more brown gravy than wine.

Entrées come with vegetables on the side, on one occasion an underseasoned gratin of potatoes, and an excellent eggplant-zucchini mélange. A special salad available one evening was a delicious combination of curly endive, chopped red peppers, fresh asparagus spears and sliced avocado in a tasty vinaigrette.

There are several dessert specials each day. A frozen Grand Marnier soufflé (\$2.50) is a slice of frozen custard flavored with Grand Marnier and pieces of citron. It's tasty, like hard-frozen gelati, the wonderful Italian ice cream. (Although gelati is listed on La Grolla's menu, it was unavailable on either visit.) Cannoli (\$2.50) has a good, crisp, crunchy shell filled with a very heavy, too-cheesy filling that isn't quite sweet enough to be a good dessert. The excellent cappuccino (\$1.25) with its topping of whipped cream and shaved chocolate is good enough to be dessert.

The wine list has a fair selection of wines from all over—Argentina, Germany and America as well as Italy and France. Prices are fairly reasonable, with a 1970 Pio Cesare Barolo available for \$21. Unfortunately many of the bottles are displayed upright on shelves in the dining room with a bright light shining directly on them. Even the hearty Italian reds can't stand up to this treatment.

Service at La Grolla is friendly but erratic. On one visit all the waiters and waitresses seemed to be dressed in street clothes—it was difficult to distinguish them from the diners—and they spent the evening talking loudly among themselves. Another time, the service was quite professional.

It's this sort of inconsistency that makes it difficult to characterize La Grolla. The restaurant has been open only since New Year's Eve, and it may just be taking a while to get everything together. It's such a cheerful place, it would be nice to see them succeed.

**LA GROLLA, 782 S. 2nd, 627-7701. D—5-10:30 daily; LS—from 10:30 daily; ADMV.**