

Dining Out

With Sheldon Landwehr

Photos by Rob Rich

Siro Maccioni, a captivating gentleman, supports my contention that a restaurant is only as good as the person heading it up. When first visiting Le Cirque (originally on East 65th Street), it was Siro who greeted me. A tall, impeccably dressed man with an effulgent smile, he summed up in his well-disposed personality the numerous reasons why this restaurant has lured a good segment of New York's "best people," most of them highly articulate in their fidelity.

After a quarter-century, and with much fanfare, Siro transported his restaurant formula with its high-caliber cooking and top-notch service, to larger, more opulent, hipper-than-hip quarters in the New York Palace Hotel on fashionable Madison Avenue, relabeling the place Le Cirque 2000. Since then, offshoots were developed, one in Las Vegas, the other Mexico City.

At Le Cirque 2000 they not only satisfy hunger in various subtle and refined ways, but soothe and stroke your ego. And these ministrations are accomplished without obsequiousness or condescension. And happily, the boss doesn't possess the peculiar urge of some restaurateurs to enter intimately into the lives of their patrons. Mr. Maccioni is cordial and far from stuffy, but rarely departs from the realities which govern relationships between customer and host.

As for the fare, executive chef Pierre Schaedelin, former protege of Alain Ducasse, and newly appointed co-executive chef Alain Allegretti, more than fill the demands of the most fastidious tastes, generally attaining culinary greatness—a word, incidentally, that I reserve for no more than two or three restaurants in the entire city.

Both Le Cirque chefs are noted here for their mastery of the restaurants classics. They also provides most of the elaborate and costly classical preparations of la haute cuisine. But if dining more simply is your bag, you will find their touch just as sure.

If memory serves, there are a couple of dishes associated with meals I had here. For one, frutti di mare salad, a skillful mingling of octopus, arugula and linguine, tossed with shellfish vinaigrette that is as good as you might experience in a prosper-



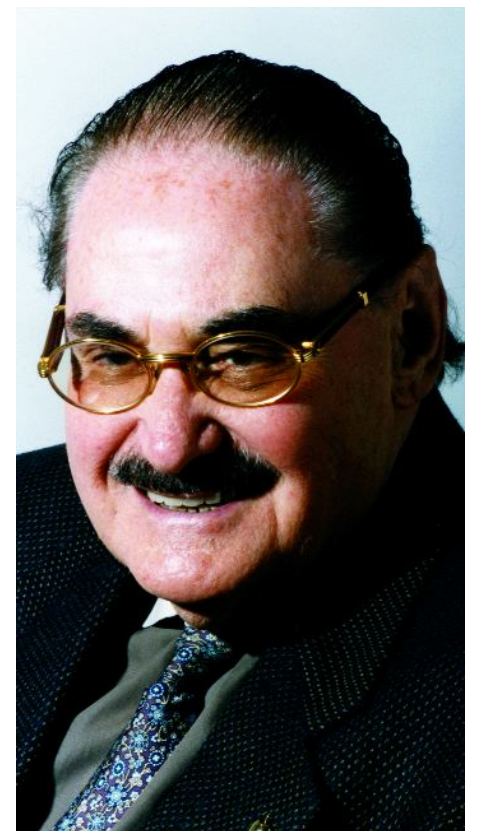
Roasted chicken with lemon and ginger, sweet red and yellow peppers, roasted potatoes and bok choy



Roasted veal chop, lasagna of vegetables and sweet bread



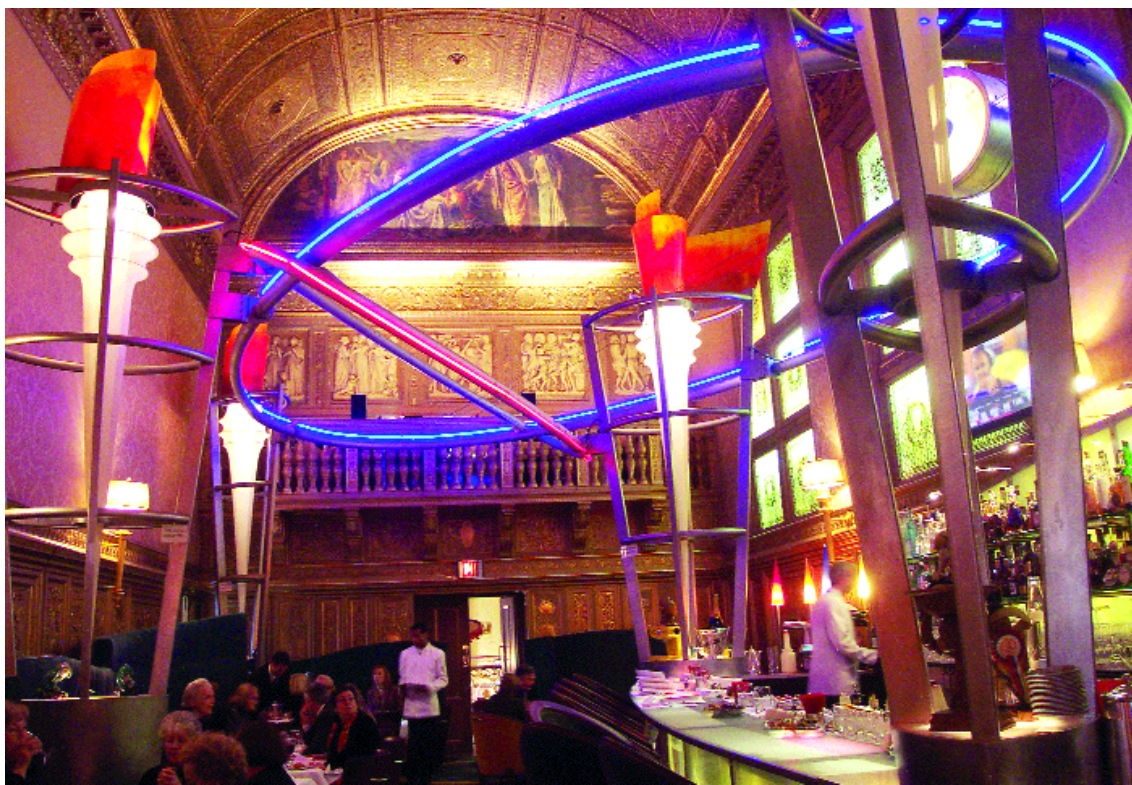
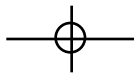
Risotto milanese and Due pasta & Casserole of winter vegetables



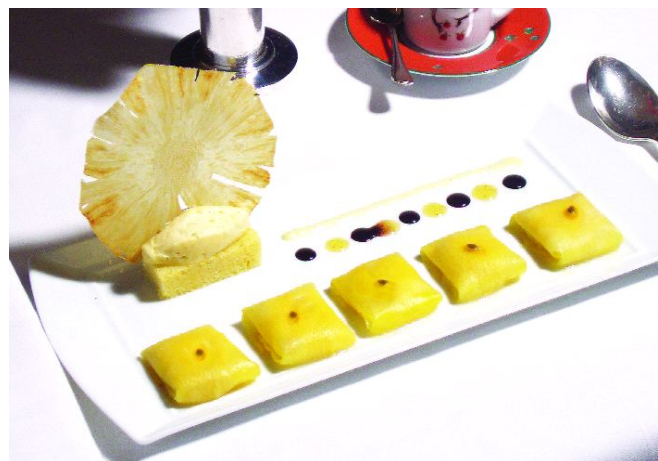
Petit fours



Siro Maccioni (far left), the fabulous Le Cirque staff and Marco Maccioni (far right)



Chocolate Bombe with a blackberry and crunchy nougatine center over an almond dacquoise and spiced blackberry sauce



Ravioli of mango and pineapple with a lemon-scented pound cake and frommage blanc ice cream



Casserole of winter vegetables, wild mushrooms and seasonal fruits

ous provincial European household. The other, fresh tuna tartare. It likewise is clear and pure, infused with fresh herbs and honey mustard vinaigrette, sending a agreeable perfume to my nose. There is also arugula sauce, daikon radish and micro greens rounding out the dish.

Casserole of winter vegetables is a classic rich dish, tasting of what it contains, enhanced by morsels of mushrooms, fruits, and generous shavings of pungently fragrant seasonal white truffles, demonstrating the kitchens quality as well as anything else might. Also enjoyed was the grilled Dover sole, adroitly and swiftly deboned at a side table so the juices would not lose their savor. This fish had a distinct flavor, strangely difficult to match in most restaurants. Notes on a recent lunch celebrate a delicate appetizer course of compresse of leeks, crispy pig's feet and braised pig's cheeks in a mustard vinaigrette.

An outstanding classic is perfectly cooked and subtly seasoned quenelles of the freshest pike, enriched in an airy, aromatic lobster sauce. Chef's also have a fine hand with sautéed tenderloin of Black Angus steak Rossini, the meat meltingly tender, cooked to order, and accompanied by Jerusalem artichoke puree, foie gras and sauce madere. The kitchen likewise seduces with a veal chop scintillating with sweetbreads and mushroom lasagne, black truffles with a crispy baked potato, and lemon/ginger roasted chicken. Artistically composed side dishes include baby vegetables, pommes soufflés and fluffy mashed potatoes.

There are the usual extravagances of a dessert menu relating to a restaurant of this class--deftly handled by a legion of experts--executive pastry chef Luis Robledo-Richards, Cynthia Sweeney and Daniel Belanger. Their offerings include classic Le Cirque examples like creme brulee or the weightless Napoleon, swathed in freshly whipped cream neltled in flaky pastry, and new signature desserts such as sumptuous tarte tatin, ravioli of pineapple and mango braced by white ice cream and pineapple sorbet, and chocolate caramelized banana bombe with a caramel center.

There are good wines in the cellar, but the management does not make a fetish of cobweb rarities. Instead it prefers to offer the robust, lively wines of fairly recent vintage. However, Ralph Herson, the knowledge wine director is justifiably proud of the great years.

**** Le Cirque 2000, 455 Madison Avenue (near 50th & 51st Street), New York. (212) 303-7788. Open for lunch and dinner. A la carte dinner entrees \$24 to \$42. Reservations advised. Accepts major credit cards.

