

Cadwalader Sent Me



BY BARBARA ROSENBERG

Downtown Philadelphia is dotted with a variety of private dining clubs to suit every taste and pocketbook. They all provide the security-blanket comfort of club membership (although some of them run strictly on a cash rather than charge basis), serve booze on Sundays and election day, but most don't necessarily require accident-of-birth as a qualification of joining—at least if you are white and male. Knowing someone who belongs and letting him know you'd like to become a member will generally do the trick, unless it's one of those that are oversubscribed.

The Vesper Club has been around for a long time and still only gets \$10 a year for membership—a bargain these days when hardly anything still costs only \$10. Only it's tough to get in. There's a long waiting list. At least they *tell* you there's a long waiting list, and there probably is, but if you've got the right connections, the list has been known to dwindle miraculously.

Vesper is one of the dining clubs that still clings to its male-members-only policy. Membership is issued in the man's name and he has to be there to lay out the cash (this is one of the ones that doesn't allow for charges). If a member's wife wants to go, she's welcome to tag along, but nix on her using the club for her own entertainment.

Vesper turns out a passable meal in reasonably comfortable, if not

plush, surroundings. Lunchtime is frantic—lots of elbow-bending, with scarcely a feminine face in the crowd. Dinner is more leisurely—business entertaining interspersed with couples, mostly middle-aged.

Food prices are moderate and compare favorably with downtown restaurants. The menu offers varied enough choices for every taste—not fancy but more than adequate. Drinks are hearty, and the members and their guests quaff them with great gusto. Wine is another matter. The list is nicely bound and presented but the selection is pretty pedestrian. You begin to get the message that maybe people here dig the sauce more than the grape. However, if you decide to sample the club's featured Irish coffee, be forewarned that they're much more generous with the coffee than the Irish.

So the Vesper ain't got what you'd call real class. But it's a convenience, it's in a good location, between Walnut and Locust on Sydenham, and what do you want for \$10 a year?

Then there's Le Coin d'Or—a dining club where *food* really is king. This is one whose membership is unified only by its respect and love for French cuisine and wine. It's situated in a charming little house at 251 S. Camac St., and the overall ambience is delightful, rather like an Early American-style French country inn, although if you look closely you'll see evidence that it's running down at the heels,

getting a bit frayed and worn.

The tariff here is \$50 a year, and the club rolls only include about 200 members. Based on the rate of use, they could accommodate 500, according to one of the club officers. He says the only criterion for admission is that prospective members must be the sort of people "one would invite to one's home"—whatever that means. In any event, you have to be proposed and seconded.

The food is marvelous, beautifully prepared and attractively if not elegantly presented. The basic raw ingredients are impeccable, whether imported (like the Belgian salsify) or purchased locally (like beef from Pierce and Schurr at the Terminal) and prepared with the finesse and devotion of a French chef.

It's an interesting operation. To insure consistency the club hires a couple on contract and provides them with living quarters on the place. While her husband does the cooking, the distaff side of the present pair runs the dining room, acting as greeter, waitress and sommelier.

Dinner is fixed price at \$7.50—although three of the five entrees carry an extra charge of about \$2, so unless you stick to basics, better figure on at least \$10 a head. And it's worth every penny.

The club used to be open routinely for lunch and allowed for a delightful two-hour interlude in the middle of a hurly-burly day, but evidently

