

Eating Late

BY BARBARA ROSENBERG

If people are looking for a place to eat a real honest-to-goodness meal (as opposed to a snack) at an hour when most Philadelphia restaurants have long since closed their doors, that would be about the only reason I can think of for going to **Spats**, a new self-styled "supper club" at 27 Bank Street—the same small alley between Second and Third, Chestnut and Walnut, which houses the Tony George and the Bank Street Five.

We found ourselves looking for a late dinner recently, with one of our foursome arriving at Philadelphia International at 10:15 p.m., famished after a series of short hops (whereon he got plenty to drink but no dinner.) So, intrigued by the announced policy of Spats' management to serve dinner until 2 a.m. in generally early-to-bed Philadelphia, we decided to give the place a try.

We must confess to some misgivings as we entered a cramped foyer cluttered with an assortment of oversized plants (both the genuine and plastic types, some still bearing the "good wishes" cards of the senders), where we were greeted by an overly friendly hat-check girl who, it turned out, also doubled in brass as the hostess. After checking our coats and the reservation, she said she'd "see if our table was ready" and opened the dining room door, only a few steps away, to reveal not only plenty of empty tables for four but a decibel level only slightly lower than a boiler factory. We chose a booth on the "balcony" rather than a table-in-the-middle-next-to-the-post, since the former offered a three-step-up vantage point from which to view the whole scene, which by this time we could see was pretty interesting. The room is decorated more or less in Art Nouveau—tulip lamps and stained glass.

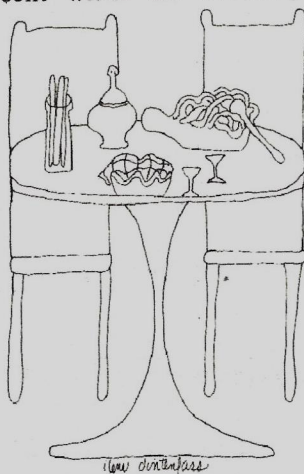
After we were seated in the cramped, dimly lit booth, we spent the next half-hour or so before the

waiter arrived to take our drink order.

We finally got our drinks and almost simultaneously a basket of Play-Dough-type rolls. I wolfed down a bite, because by this time it was getting *late* and that was the only hint of food we'd had, except for what we saw being carried to other tables.

Eventually we got a menu and the promise from the waiter, "Be right with ya." The over-sized card presented a number of high-priced choices, among them a variety of steaks (\$6-\$14), lobster (\$10.50), lamb chops (\$6.95), sweetbreads (\$4.75) and a selection of "French cuisine" including beef Stroganoff (\$6.95), beef Marcel (\$6.95), carbonade (\$7) and frogs' legs (\$5.25). There were also fairly routine appetizers at fairly routinely high prices and a few specialties, such as Caesar salad (at \$2.50 per) and an hors d'oeuvre of melon, ham, etc., a creation of the chef's, priced at \$2.75. Desserts, too, with cheesecake unquestionably the most popular, judging by the number of orders we saw go by as we waited interminably for our obviously green waiter to finish fussing with someone else's Caesar salad and take our order.

In the ample time before we were served, we consulted the wine list and the men agreed that there were only two decent wines on the menu, a



Blanc de Blancs champagne and a Bâtard Montrachet, at \$22 and \$11 respectively. The rest was undistinguished, so we did without.

No one in our party was poisoned, but no one was very enthusiastic either. The steak for two was aged as advertised—too long in the broiler, that is, and served medium instead of rare. The portion of Stroganoff was skimpy and huddled in the center of an enormous platter of rice. Sweetbreads were by far the best choice—tender, crisp, accompanied by plenty of mushrooms and, in contrast to the Stroganoff, an ample portion. The salad that was included with the entree turned out to be a wedge of lettuce, one slice each of cucumber and tomato. Our request for oil and vinegar threw the waiter into a dither. "We have Italian, French and Russian," he repeated as if computer-programmed—"Roquefort extra." In desperation, we settled for Italian all round; the flavor of the oil was fresh and good. They were out of all vegetables except potatoes and peas.

By the time we were actually eating, the crowd had thinned out a bit, but unfortunately the noise hadn't. The din was still deafening, and altogether out of proportion to the number of patrons, as the dining room only holds about 60, so we figured out that the painted tin roof must compound the problem created by the dames who didn't know how to turn their voice volume down.

After coffee we got the check and split. On our way out the same oversolicitous hostess inquired, "How was everything?" We didn't answer.

There's a room upstairs for dancing. We didn't go. Obviously a lot of people dig this place, but for us Spats is not the spot. At least not at the moment.

Lunch from 11:30 to 3, open for cocktails at 4:00. Dinner from 6:00 to midnight on weekdays, Saturday until 2:00 a.m. (WA 3-1034.)

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SPATS POSTSCRIPT

Knowing that new restaurants have shakedown problems, we dispatched one of our editors a month after the review was written. His report:

Went on a weekday night. The place was empty and the service was fine. The snails (\$2.50) were the best we've ever had in Philadelphia but the entrées were a disaster. The portions were tremendous but the Coq au Riesling (\$5.75) turned out to be pre-cooked chicken smothered in tomato paste. The Escalope Niçoise (\$7.25) was a huge slice of veal with prosciutto and tomatoes topped by a layer of cheese—tasteless. The string beans were excellent. The shoestring potatoes were ordinary French fries. Perfect espresso. There's a good-looking upstairs room filled with more art nouveau and a small dance floor that's open on Saturdays only.

Speaking of supper clubs, **Frankie Bradley's**, burnt out of its original location at Juniper and Chancellor, has rebuilt on the ashes and is now back in business. The decor has changed somewhat—a lateral move, it's really a little garish for our taste—but the menu is the same and the food as delicious as ever. Some of our friends insist Bradley's has the best steaks in town and maybe they're right. It certainly has the best pot roast and potato pancakes and the best boiled beef soup and the tastiest sour tomatoes and very nice scampi and lobster. The waitresses are great and the hospitality is warm without being oppressive.

Back in the days when Philadelphia had legitimate theatre, all the stars gravitated to Bradley's after the curtain went down. There's still a New York feeling to the place, reinforced by the extension phones they can plug in at your table and lots of well-dressed guys with good-looking dolls.

—A. H.

CITY DINING

Because of limited space, we are obligated to confine our dining listing to those restaurants that have indicated a desire to reach the Philadelphia Magazine audience by becoming advertisers. Prices and hours subject to change.

PHILADELPHIA (Center City)

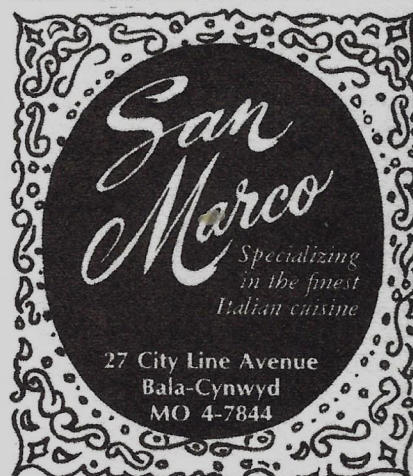
Arthur's Steak House, 1512 Walnut St. (PE-5-2590). This meaty eatery is one of the best restaurants in town and a tastefully decorated haven for beef gourmets. It also has one of the most enticing bars around; the martinis are Philly's wickedest. Some sea-

Philadelphia Magazine said there are no class restaurants in Wildwood.

They don't know their class from a hole in the ground.

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