



Philadelphia Inquirer / MICHAEL VIOLA

Don Falconio (left) and Poses examine pastry offered at the Market at The Commissary, a Poses enterprise

# Success a la carte

## *Managing the recipe for restaurant renaissance*

By Peter Binzen  
Inquirer Staff Writer

Steve Poses, the Center City restaurateur, moved last month from cramped quarters behind the kitchen of one of his restaurants into a suite of offices on the 21st floor of the Architects Building at 17th and Sansom Streets.

His move marked another step in his evolution as a corporate executive.

Less than a dozen years ago, he was polishing glass as a busboy at La Panetiere, the posh French restaurant.

Less than 10 years ago, in April 1973, he opened his own 55-seat place, Frog, with a \$35,000 stake borrowed mostly from his family. Poses himself was head cook for lunch and dinner.

Frog was an instant success. One thing led to another. Now, at the age of 36, Poses runs

five restaurants, a retail store and a catering business. His 500 workers serve about 4,000 meals a day and his gross sales this year will be "in excess of \$10 million," he says.

He gave up cooking in 1977 and now sees his job as "managing the managers." He's about to form a holding company for his varied outlets.

Yet he insists that succeeding in the restaurant business isn't as difficult as one might suspect.

"It was an easy business when I started, and it's not as hard as people think it is, even today," he said in a recent interview in his new office. "People assume the restaurant business is difficult to manage. But it's a business that traditionally has not attracted managers."

The son of a Yonkers, N.Y., real estate man, Poses was not trained to run a multimillion-

dollar company. He majored in sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, from which he was graduated in 1968. City planning and architecture interested him, but business didn't. He scoffed at an uncle's notion that businessmen were creative.

Before taking the busboy job at La Panetiere, Poses served briefly in the Peace Corps, worked for SANE (the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy), which is an antinuclear group, and for a Germantown school for emotionally disturbed children.

Hardly the background of a budding entrepreneur. Yet Poses thinks his inexperience was more of a help than a hindrance. Being ignorant of the business, he didn't know what would work and what wouldn't. He was more willing to experiment than a tradition-

(See POSES on 20-C)