

EATING OUT/Frog

Everything's coming up Poses

By SUSAN GREATOREX
Of The Bulletin Staff

The visibly beautiful but so far unidentified new restaurant at 1524 Locust st. is Frog.

"We've made the leap," declares a sign in the window around the corner on 16th st. where the restaurant began in April 1973 as a storefront neighborhood eatery. Since Dec. 10, owner Steve Poses and company have been in residence at the Daroff Building that formerly was occupied by the American Jewish Congress.

Poses bought the Locust st. building last spring and spent summer and fall — and apparently a lot of money — to turn office space into a truly splendid, multilevel restaurant. The tasteful pink and gray decor and comfortably elegant ambience now equals the quality of the food. That is not to say that Frog's former quarters were shabby — just cramped and sometimes awkward when you had to juggle a blackboard menu.

There are proper menus now, proudly flaunting Frog's new logo. Look at it carefully — the two dots over the "O" are not an umlaut but the eyes of an open-mouthed frog. It's clever and will also be on the brass sign that will soon identify the restaurant to passers-by.

The best of Frog has been moved to the new location. Bob Maranville is still the chef, whipping up old favorites and adding new ones to the expanded basic menu and daily specials. Entrees are mostly in the \$7.50 to \$12.50 range, some lower, a few higher, and include the favored Thai curries and duck which the restaurant has always done exceptionally well.

The kitchen has gained a real charcoal grill for meats and fish and sometimes vegetables. The grilled eggplant steaks (\$6.50) ordered by my companion were amusing in that they had the grilled-steak look. My pork medallions stuffed with apples, raisins and nuts were deliciously tender at \$8.75. Both entrees came with rice and tender zucchini strips. We splurged and ordered an a la carte vegetable of snow peas. It was extravagant at \$2.75 but very good.

Frog

1524 Locust st., Philadelphia.

Phone: 735-8882.

Lunch, 11.30 A.M. to 2.30 P.M. Monday through Friday; dinner, is 5.30 to 11 P.M. Sunday through Thursday, 5.30 P.M. to midnight Friday and Saturday; Sunday brunch, 11.30 A.M. to 3 P.M.

Credit cards (AE, DC, MC, V).

For starters we had tried the special of a spinach-pasta manicotti (\$3.25) and the baked sesame clams (\$3.75). The latter might be called an Eastern version of clams casino, with soy sauce, sesame seeds and bits of sauteed onion. It was piping hot and delicious. The pasta was excellent — almost large enough for a meal — but had cooled off on its trip from the preparation kitchen on the third floor to the second floor serving kitchen and then to our table, also on the second floor. We split the caesar salad (\$2.75) which had an excellent balance of garlic and anchovy and enjoyed the fact that we had a real pepper mill as standard equipment on the table.

Frog hasn't overlooked anything that might make its patrons more comfortable. It has even set aside the back room on the first floor for nonsmokers. All dining rooms are decorated with objects and paintings by artists, many of them Philadelphians. On the way in, be sure to notice the ceramic frog in Indian dress that was done by David Gilhooly. Also in the entryway, you can't miss the brass and bamboo installation with oriental symbols and wind-chime-type objects done by Jeff Kippax. The art also extends to individual tables, each of which has a handmade pot with an orchid in it.

Reservations are recommended but general manager Don Falconio said persons who just show up at the door will be accommodated when possible. We overheard the hostess saying she could seat a drop-in couple at 6.15, provided they

were willing to be finished by 7.30. That seems fair enough.

You may be wondering if all this has raised Frog's prices. I would say not noticeably. Our bill for four drinks, two appetizers, one salad, two entrees, two desserts and a glass of wine came to \$42.37, plus tip. I think that's reasonable enough.

Of course, you can spend more and order the pheasant in port wine for \$16 but we didn't. We thought we were extravagant enough when we ordered the rich desserts concocted by head baker Vanita Tyler. I was pleased to see that the chocolate mousse cake with Grand Marnier custard sauce (\$2.75) is still a Frog specialty. However, I was even more delighted with the taste of the mocha buttercrunch pie (\$2.50) and its coffee-flavored whipped cream. The pecan pie a la mode (\$2.25) ordered by my companion was as delicious as ever.

Frog has gotten better by being bigger. The renovated building, designed by Edwin Bronstein, can seat about 150 to 160 diners, half again as much as the old Frog with a lot more room and much more comfortable bentwood armchairs with caned seats. There's also a lower-level bar for waiting or lingering after dinner with light-hearted piano music for lunch and dinner. And Frog plans to start serving breakfast around the end of this month.

It's quite elegant, yet with enough casual touches to be very comfortable. The waiters and waitresses, for example, wear pink or blue oxford shirts and beige slacks. And the menu still has Becky Roller's distinctive handwriting that appeared on the old blackboards. Incidentally, she's the wife of Poses' executive chef Paul Roller.

Now the punchline to the story: Poses, the Restaurant School graduate who has built a popular empire with Frog, the Commissary and Eden and a soon-to-open retail store where Plage Tahiti used to be on 17th st., is ready to return to his roots. He's talking now about opening a very casual neighborhood eatery where Frog started 7½ years ago.



Bulletin Photo by Don Camp

Chef Bob Maranville looks out of Frog's new home on Locust st.