



France is Only a Phone Call Away

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*N*ow that the holiday rush is over and a new year is upon us – wouldn't you like to get away just for a little while, maybe just for an evening? You don't have to go too far, only to West Chester where you can get an authentic taste of France right on Gay Street. Set in a small yet luxurious 1890's townhouse is Gilmore's, the realized dream of Peter and Susan Gilmore.

As much buzz-about-town that this restaurant has generated, you must know that Chef extraordinaire Peter Gilmore spent twenty-two years as head chef at that "other" French restaurant in Philadelphia. Local foodies had a real stroke of luck when a friend brought it to the Gilmores' attention that Dinon's in West Chester was getting ready to go on the market. It never got that far. As soon as the Gilmores laid eyes on the building, they recognized it as destined for singular greatness. As Peter said, "I didn't want a big restaurant. I don't want to be mass producing thousands of plates of food a year. Small is what I like." Gilmore's is a prime example of how great things come in small packages.

Left: Peter sums it up perfectly, "We look at it as having a dinner party every night, and all our friends are here."

Below: Gilmore's is the realized dream of Peter and Susan Gilmore.

Top Right: Gilmore's is set in a small yet luxurious 1890's townhouse.

Bottom Right: Shrimp Corn Dogs appetizer: batter dipped shrimp with a trio of dipping sauces

You'll feel as if you're entering the home of a friend. The foyer is actually lined with paintings from the Gilmore's own home. The decor is luxuriously French with warm pinks and cool greens. Candles flicker on the tables, all of which are set beautifully with fine china. Susan does most of the decorating while Peter came up with the beguiling "under lighting" effects and the mesmerizing row of palm fans swaying gently to and fro from the ceiling of the main room. There are approximately eleven tables within two dining rooms, it's quite cozy. Peter sums it up perfectly, "We look at it as having a dinner party every night, and all our friends are here. It's an intimate place where people feel comfortable joining each other in conversation." That said, welcome to Gilmore's. You're now a member of the family.

As well-traveled as you may be, I'll bet you haven't seen anything like Shrimp Corn Dogs, Artichoke Tarte Tatin with Truffle Whipped Cream or Mushroom Cappuccino in an Irish coffee mug with porcini cream. It's not just the exotic that enthralls either. Gilmore's Lobster Bisque and the Jumbo Lump Crabcake in lemon beurre blanc sauce elicited commentary like "mmm" and "oh my" from a normally fluent dining companion. Entrees such as Truffle-Stuffed Roasted Poussin, Butter Poached Lobster Tail, Magret Duck Breast and the "Chef's creation" Fresh Market Catch will have you polishing your plate, and may I mention that these are not dainty servings.

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Top: Foie Gras Pizza appetizer

Above: The Pyramid: Under no circumstances, should you consider skipping dessert.

There's no such thing as "out of season" here either. November saw a delicate Squash Blossom Tempura stuffed with lobster and lightly doused with a delicious sweet and sour sauce. "Anything you want, the sky is the limit," Peter says. One of his specialties is the rich delicacy Foie Gras, and he has been having a grand time serving it up on puff pastry pizza and in pheasant consommé with truffles. And during the summer months, it's absolutely exquisite with a rhubarb sauce. Speaking of the coveted truffle – the white ones typically go for \$1,500 to \$2,000 a pound and no other place in West Chester has them.

Under no circumstances, should you consider skipping dessert. Try the Pyramid: a thin layer of homemade, chocolate chiffon cake; topped with homemade, Tahitian vanilla bean ice cream; topped with homemade, raspberry sorbet; surrounded by creamy caramel; and topped off by your server with a tableside drizzling of warm chocolate. Or, enjoy the Butterscotch Crème Brûlée with its lightly caramelized crust and lush, buttery interior.

Milk Chocolate Mousse in a Candy Apple is one remarkable dessert concoction I will never forget. Taking dessert to a whole new level, was a full-sized picture-perfect, shiny red apple with a little green leaf on top; entirely too pretty to eat. However, this particular apple is made of hand-blown spun sugar and filled with light-as-air milk chocolate mousse; a few well-placed taps of the spoon on the hard candy exterior, and you'll be well on your way. By the way, Chef Gilmore is perfectly willing to share his culinary secrets. For those of you whose hearts have just jumped, he can be found teaching class at Celebrity Kitchens in Wilmington and the Innkeepers Kitchen at the Dilworthtown Inn.

Adding to the mix, is Pastry Chef Lynn Lindquist and Sous Chef Carlos Vargas. Peter says there are a total of four kitchen staff and never less than three people in the kitchen cooking at a time. If the restaurant is open, he is cooking. Every night before opening, the entire staff sits down together for a well-prepared dinner, kind of like pre-creation bonding before the party starts. I was delighted to see that the Maitre' D is none other than Rich Rooney and the Head Server is Stephanie Hoster, both formerly of La Cocotte and Dinon's. Richard was voted "Best Waiter in West Chester" not so long ago. It's no wonder the service is impeccable.

The kitchen itself is remarkably uncomplicated, with stainless steel countertops and large glass jars of fresh herbs sitting atop painted white cabinetry. Behind the restaurant is a small fenced courtyard, which in the summer, holds a garden overflowing with tomatoes, onions, garlic, sorrel, basil and even lavender for the Crème Brûlée. Peter is a big fan of local produce. Saturday mornings you will most likely find Peter at the West Chester Farmer's Market. From the simple comes the extraordinary.

Thrilled with their stunning success, Peter and Susan admitted to being very much surprised by the reception they got when first starting out. Peter said, "I expected to have to work hard just to get the name out there, and before we even opened there were articles." On any given week, calls

come in from all over the country and even Europe. Peter thinks this is largely due to the article *Bon Appetit* wrote identifying them as “One of the Best Spots around the Country for a Romantic Dinner outside of City Limits.” Having been voted one of the Top 10 Restaurants in Zagat’s Philadelphia Guide 2005, probably doesn’t hurt either. The odd downside to such widespread recognition is that people occasionally get the mistaken impression that they won’t be able to get a table. Nonsense! If you do encounter any dif-

ficulty getting a weekend reservation, consider coming for dinner during the week. Everyone at Gilmore’s would love to meet you. Maybe you’ll even make some new friends. •

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Left: Butter Poached Lobster Tail entrée

Bottom Left: Milk Chocolate Mousse in a Candy Apple is one remarkable dessert.

Bottom Middle: Crispy Thai Tilapia

Bottom Right: It’s not the basic Veal Chop.

