



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Geoffrey Zakarian serves up culinary treasures with a designers touch at The Lambs Club

By: Gina Samarotto, Samarotto Design Group

When Geoffrey Zakarian sweeps through the bar at The Lambs Club, people take notice. Definitely more silver fox than gentle lamb, Zakarian sports an air of charisma that is nearly palpable. Impeccably groomed in jacket and tie, his signature horn rim glasses firmly in place; Zakarian makes his way to a reserved table, stopping along the way to greet staff with a handshake and toss a few smiling nods to guests delighted to catch a glimpse of the Iron Chef himself. Once seated and after hellos and introductions, drinks are ordered and the famous restaurateur settles down to the business of discussing what it takes to be Geoffrey Zakarian.

Despite a Times Square location, there is nothing that even remotely suggests 'tourist' at The Lambs Club. Centered within the Chatwal Hotel in a historic, Stanford White designed building; Zakarian's restaurant is decidedly chic, infinitely upscale. Swathed in delicious art deco, The Lambs Club is a celebration of glitz and glamour that pays homage to an old world, New York style. A comely entrance on 44th Street welcomes guests, leading them through an animated lobby lounge and into spaces sparkling with bespoke lighting, custom crystal and well-heeled patrons. An 18th century French fireplace anchors the downstairs dining room - a gift to the building by the

preeminent Mr. White - while crisp white tablecloths and glittering stemware play against gleaming woodwork and deep, inviting leather banquets. Artisanal cocktails and a succinct wine list complement a well-curated menu - all served by a discreet staff that moves stealthily throughout the two level restaurant. A go-to spot for power breakfasts, elegant lunches and intimate dinners; on any given day The Lambs Club plays host to everyone from stylish, immediately recognizable editors to captains of industry to diners drawn simply to the fabulous food and stunning surroundings. Collectively the effect is that of a posh, private club. In reality, such decadence is open to the public - no such membership required. It's a restaurant designed to see and be seen in, each detail of its orphic allure bearing the Zakarian imprint.

"When we were planning this restaurant" Zakarian says, "we started with a concept. That's where it all begins and from there we put a great deal of thought into everything else that will touch the space. I designed the stemware, we chose the art and dinnerware carefully, the lighting is custom. We created a cocktail menu that celebrates the flavors of the spirits in each, a menu that showcases well prepared, excellent ingredients... every element had to speak of quality and everything had to work dynamically".





Indeed, quality is spoken here. Fluently. Even the water served has a distinct elegance to it. Not one to settle for what comes from the tap and staunchly opposed to having plastic bottles to sully his painstakingly crafted aesthetic; at The Lambs Club, imported water arrives in beautifully labeled glass bottles, poured over impossibly clear, tinkling ice and served to guests with the kind of care and flair usually reserved for a flirtatious amuse-bouche.

Decadent though it may be, The Lambs Club represents just one of glistening jewels set within Zakarian's culinary crown. Equally notable are The National, Zakarian's uber-hip 'grand café' situated in midtown Manhattan's Benjamin Hotel and The Water Club that brings a wave of New York chic to Atlantic City via the Borgata Hotel. At sea, Zakarian created Ocean Blue, restaurants that provide guests aboard Norwegian Cruise Lines Breakaway and Getaway vessels with opulent, luxury-dining experiences.

Despite his myriad restaurants, roles as an Iron Chef, Chopped celebrity judge and most recently, co-host of Food Network's The Kitchen filling his schedule to nearly bursting; Zakarian's gourmet plate is about to become fuller yet. In keeping with his known penchant for hospitality-based endeavors, Zakarian was recently named Culinary Director for what is arguably the brightest and most beloved of all hotel stars, The Plaza. Here, he's been tasked with infusing the hotel's iconic Palm Court with his special brand of magic and will eventually move forward to resurrect The Oak Room, Oak Bar, Rose Club and Champagne Bar as well. Zakarian is also debuting his newest cookbook, My Perfect Pantry: 150 Easy Recipes from 50 Essential Ingredients this October.

How, one wonders, does this entrepreneur, husband and father of three manage to find the time to do it all... and do it so well.

"My wife, Margaret, is amazing," Zakarian says by way of explanation. "With her background in the industry, she understands the business and what it takes to become successful. I choose projects that I have passion for and I choose projects that keep me fairly close to home. One reason I'm looking forward to working with the Plaza is it's right in my neighborhood... I want to be able to walk a few blocks to the Oak Bar, sit down, relax and enjoy a well-mixed martini in a good looking space".

And when at home, how does the chef like to unwind? With family, friends, a great cigar and of course... a great meal. Zakarian's preferences are honed to appreciate what he calls the "purity" of food. "Eating is a sensory experience," he says. "I want to smell all the aromas coming out of the kitchen. I want to see the colors and enjoy the textures of a good meal."

Regardless of the attention 'Molecular Gastronomy' receives in today's culinary world, Zakarian remains firmly loyal to the basic pleasures of well-prepared, simple foods. "A great cook, no matter what cuisine they specialize in, should be able to roast a perfect chicken and make a perfect omelet. Ferran Adria and the masters of molecular gastronomy are genius. They bring food to new levels; their work is exciting and commendable. But for me, if I want to bite into a delicious olive I don't want a capsule created through reverse spherification infused with the essence of olive... just give me a really good olive." ➤