



CHRISTMAS WITH Georges Perrier

*“At Christmas play and make good cheer,
For Christmas comes but once a year.”*

—Thomas Tusser (c. 1524-1580)

Formal, elegant and—*mais oui*—very French as expected, the dining room table in Georges Perrier's house is set for Christmas dinner. At each guest's seat is a place setting of fine china and silver; five different-sized glasses of crystal stemware correspond to the selected wines to be served with each course; and a lavish floral arrangement of Christmas greens and fresh flowers commands the center of the table, with silver candlesticks adding atmosphere and small hand-carved crystal salt shakers and pepper grinders provided for personal seasoning. A printed menu rests underneath the place setting—a memento of the evening's dinner—and *de rigueur* at any Perrier House dinner.

However, in Georges' state-of-the-art kitchen, which he helped design, the atmosphere is anything but formal. Before he enters, already at work are Chef Jeffrey Power from his *Le Bec-Fin* restaurant and Tamar DeVine, his assistant in his home kitchen for the last 15 years. But nothing of importance happens until Georges barrels in, shouting orders and calling for his apron and a selection of copper pots, which are quickly brought down from the top of a cabinet. Then the magic begins, as Georges transforms raw ingredients into *hauté* cuisine.

At six o'clock his guests arrive—not through the front door leading to the formal living room—but through a side door, which deposits them into the kitchen. Another side of Georges. This entrance suggests close friendship and sets the tone. Amid “hellos,” “Merry Christmases” and kisses—

on both cheeks, of course—the dinner party begins. The ever-cosmopolitan Hans Eggstgein, in black dinner jacket and Georges' dinner server for many years, suggests, “A round of champagne would put all in a holiday spirit.” Georges wholeheartedly concurs, and a bottle of NV Paul Goerg Blanc de Blanc Champagne is popped, and, indeed, adds to everyone's merriment.

The dinner is everything that is expected of someone of Georges' reputation: nothing less than five-star. But what isn't is his candid advice on having guests to dinner.

His first suggestion? “Calm down,” he says, “Even for Georges Perrier. Getting nervous isn't going to make the party better. Relax and be ready in time. Make sure that the table is ready. The wine and alcohol ready. The flowers are ready. You do not have to have something fancy. Can be a simple flower in a simple vase—something to tell your guests you care.”

Let your purse be your first consideration, he says, and then, use your imagination. “If you can't afford a capon, then stuff turkey legs with an interesting, simple dressing. You don't have to spend a lot of money on food or make something complicated. If it's good, done well and presented well, then you have a successful party. It's the way you present it that makes the difference.

“You have to put your feelings and heart into it and then the dinner party is always a success. When you make yourself happy, you make your guests happy.” ❖