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## Lemaire - elegant and regional dining at the Jefferson Hotel, Richmond

By: Frank D. Quattrone , Ticket Editor

**One of the nation's grand hotels, the Jefferson Hotel is again playing a leading role in the ongoing history of Richmond, Virginia. A "Preferred Partner" in the city's ambitious 400th Anniversary Celebration, the Jefferson has become a destination in its own right.**

Built in 1895, this spectacular hotel retains the gracious hospitality and sweeping elegance of the Beaux Arts period in which it was shaped, while continually updating its now 264 beautifully appointed guest rooms with all the amenities any 21st-century guest could desire - from Frette bathrobes and linens to wireless high-speed Internet access.

Even if they don't stay overnight, travelers love to stop in to check out the spectacular Palm Court Lobby and stand beneath its impressive 35-foot dome of Tiffany stained glass or sit on one of the plush sofas to admire the statue of Thomas Jefferson and the room's stately comfort. Perhaps they even wonder what it must have been like during the first half of the last century, when pet alligators left behind by guests returning from vacationing in Florida were breeding in the Palm Court's fountains and reclining in those very chairs!

Then they walk into the stunning Rotunda, encircled by faux marble columns beneath its elaborate 70-foot ceiling and dominated by the Grand Staircase - a setting just perfect for an epic film. Rumor has it that this staircase was the model for its famed counterpart in "Gone with the Wind." Easy to imagine Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara ascending those very stairs!

It is an exceptional setting for weddings, meetings and other special events.

And then there is Lemaire. Named after Etienne Lemaire, Thomas Jefferson's White House maitre d'hotel, the man who introduced the art of cooking with wine to the American palate, Lemaire is the city's only AAA Five-Diamond restaurant. It is a magnet not only for special occasions but also for anyone desiring what General Manager Ben Eubanks calls an exceptional "relaxed formal dining experience."

The restaurant seats up to 118 guests in eight intimate dining rooms, including The Library, which houses the famous oil painting "The Soap Bubbles" by Elizabeth Gardner Bouguereau, and the relatively new, Victorian-styled glass-enclosed Conservatory, a bright and airy room overlooking bustling Hamilton Street.

Although it happened in an earlier incarnation of the hotel's dining area, it was in the dining room that the celebrated dancer and Richmond native Bill "Bojangles" Robinson was discovered back in 1907 - by a producer on whose spotless white suit Bojangles "accidentally" spilled soup while working as a server. It was an obvious ploy to gain his attention, as he danced all the way into the kitchen to bring out a towel.

But today Lemaire is graced by the stewardship of Executive Chef Walter Bundy. Another native Richmonder, Chef Bundy, a graduate of the New England Culinary Institute, has studied with and worked at the best, including Thomas Keller at Napa Valley's renowned restaurant, the French Laundry. He was also named the prestigious James Beard House's national chef of the year in 1998.

At Lemaire, the chef who unceremoniously dubs himself "the wild child" has introduced an impressive menu of Southern regional seasonal cuisine. Chef Bundy calls himself "the wild child" because of his fondness for the great outdoors. When he manned the kitchen at the Coyote Café in Santa Fe, New Mexico, he loved kayaking and skiing in the mountains nearby, not to mention hunting and fishing. It was the same while he studied the culinary arts in Vermont. So he fully appreciates freshness in all the local products he incorporates into the menu.

Examples from his three-course Winter Dinner Menu abound. From the First Course, there's Roasted Butternut Squash Bisque (\$9) with brown butter crab, quince and toasted chestnuts; and Chesapeake Bay Oyster Gratin (\$15) with local greens, smoked veal sweetbreads and Billy bread crumbs, with grated gruyere cheese and Pernod cream. From the Second Course: Humboldt Fog Goat Cheese and Roasted Beets (\$12) with Manakintowne Farms micro greens, Belgian endive and pine nuts, drizzled with Reggio Emilia balsamic vinegar and topped with a navel orange glaze, and the exquisite Roasted d'Anjou Pears and Maytag Blue Cheese (\$10), with house-cured duck confit, candied pecans, fall lettuces and Highland County maple vinaigrette.

From the Main Course, you will find Crispy Skinned Wild Virginia "Rockfish" (\$35) with Chesapeake Bay littleneck clams, artichokes and fennel over house-made fettuccine, topped by Meyer lemon-caper butter; Garlic Glazed Breast of Pheasant (\$32) with golden chanterelles mushrooms, spiced pheasant leg and rapini, served with herbed gnocchi in a natural broth; and Lemaire Jumbo Lump Crab Cakes (\$35) with Upland cress, baby carrots and tempura sweet onions, celeriac mousse and whole grain mustard beurre blanc.

On the chef's Spring Tasting Menu (\$70 per person for six courses, \$100 with paired wines), you would also taste Rappahannock River Soft Shell Crab with local radish sprouts, grilled d'Anjou pears, and Kite's country ham, served with herbed orzo in a bourbon-aged maple emulsion.

Other enticing offerings on the menu include Slow Braised Veal Cheeks (\$13) with melted leeks, baby corn and farmhouse cheddar "mac and cheese" in a fortified red wine sauce; a "Surf and Turf" First Course, of Seared Hudson Valley Duck Foie Gras and Lobster Ravioli, served with toasted brioche and field arugula in a creamy shellfish broth, and Main Course offerings such as Herb Roasted Free Range Venison (\$39), with cider-braised cabbage, green asparagus and prosciutto di Parma, served with Anson Mills slow-roasted corn polenta in a pomegranate jus, and Brandy Peppercorn Crusted Ahi Tuna (\$34), served with winter root vegetable risotto, Tuscan kale, Parmesan tuile and sun choke puree in a truffles veal reduction.

Vegetarian entrees will be created upon request.

You'll also enjoy Lemaire's specialty drinks, such as Pomegranate Martini (\$12), a delectable mix of Grey Goose L'Orange, pomegranate liqueur, sour mix and orange juice, spiced by pomegranate seeds.

Lemaire - especially now with its "relaxed formal dining" code, which travelers as well as Richmonders are finding an increasingly appealing option - has taken fine dining to a new level and is one more reason Richmond is rapidly becoming one of the culinary centers

of the New South.

Lemaire  
at the Jefferson Hotel,  
101 W. Franklin St.,  
Richmond, VA 23220  
888-483-4940 or  
804-788-8000 or  
www.jeffersonhotel.com

**HOURS:**

Breakfast:

Mon. - Fri., 6:30 - 10 a.m.;

Saturday, 6:30 - 11 a.m.;

Sunday, 6:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Sunday Brunch:

Reservations required

(804-649-4677) -

seatings at 10:30 & 11 a.m.

and 1 & 1:30 p.m.

Adults, \$38; children 6 - 12,

\$19.95; 5 & under, free.

Lunch:

Mon. - Fri., noon - 2 p.m.

Dinner:

Mon. - Thurs., 5:30 - 9 p.m.,

Fri. & Sat., 5:30 - 10 p.m.

Reservations strongly  
recommended.

All major credit cards.

Dinner entrees: \$29-\$39.

Meals at the hotel  
are also available  
at TJs Restaurant  
(fine dining in a  
relaxed atmosphere).  
Info: 804-649-4672.



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