



Chefs Patrick Terrail (left) and JJ Vigoureux



Patrick with Wolfgang Puck and Suzanne Somers (below)



Master Chef

A CULINARY ICON IS SHARPENING THE SKILLS OF CHEFS IN FIRST COAST RESTAURANT KITCHENS

BY JEFFREY SPEAR

If you happened to be living in Los Angeles in the late 1970s, you likely heard the name Patrick Terrail. As the owner of Ma Maison, he created an inviting atmosphere, provided remarkable hospitality and launched "California nouvelle" cuisine, an altogether new approach to cooking that integrated fresh regional produce with French culinary techniques.

Equally important was the notoriety attached to the restaurant and its patrons, including some of Hollywood's brightest stars. While the list is considerable, names including Jack Lemmon, Jacqueline Bisset, Joan Collins, Warren Beatty, Jack Nicholson and Orson Welles were all known to frequent the LA hot spot. Without a doubt, the bistro quickly became the most glamorous gathering spot in the city.

When asked about the notoriety and the celebrities, Terrail offers, "The celebrities paid to come to my restaurant. I was their servant, not their friend. That's a line that could not be crossed. I had to be very diplomatic and careful not to step on egos.

"It helped that I never watched television," he adds. "I didn't even know who some of these people were."

Of course, Terrail did not achieve success without a little help from the kitchen, led by a virtually unknown chef with the name of Wolfgang Puck. Over a period of seven years, the restaurateur and its exceptionally talented chef made dining history that continues to resonate with leading restaurateurs today.

When Puck left Ma Maison to open Spago in 1982, the restaurant's fortunes began to decline, eventually closing altogether in 1985. But Terrail didn't excuse himself from the table. Instead, he endured, enjoying a string of high-level consultative positions with companies including Hiram Walker & Sons and Allied Domecq Spirits & Wines, as well as a successful run as publisher of *85 South/Out & About*.

In the wake of the pandemic, delighting in visits with friends in Ponte Vedra Beach, and looking for a school district that would give his teenage son a well-rounded education, Terrail realized Northeast Florida was the

place he and his family could call home.

With decades of noteworthy accolades under his belt, he enjoys a slower paced existence today. Still keeping busy as a restaurant consultant, Terrail is currently making his mark assisting and training chefs at JJ's Liberty Bistro in Ponte Vedra. Opened in 1994, JJ's is a longstanding favorite at the Beaches.

Considering its reputation and longevity, Terrail is applying his experience, helping to preserve all the elements that made the bistro an enduring success and, at the same time, innovating and infusing a breath of fresh air into well-worn aspects of operation. When asked if JJ's would be the next Ma Maison, he says, "Things aren't the same as they were back in the '70s. Entertainment was an entirely different industry. Even the way we eat today is different than it was back then. While I'm a few years older, and nowhere near as fast on my feet, I'll give it a go."

To read more about Patrick Terrail and his storied career in Los Angeles, check out his book *Ma Maison-A Hollywood Phenomenon*. ★