



Didier Jouvenet,  
proud owner  
of Westfield's  
Chez Catherine.

CHEFS By Teresa Politano

## Magnifique!

IN THE HEYDAY OF MANHATTAN'S La Grenouille, celebs were seated in the restaurant's front room, while the unwashed masses—those gastronomically challenged folks who thought sweetbreads were dessert—occupied the back room, scornfully dubbed the ketchup room. Didier Jouvenet was La Grenouille's maitre'd then, seating the likes of Henry Kissinger, Nancy Reagan, Oscar de la Renta, and Prince Rainier.

Today Jouvenet owns Chez Catherine in Westfield, which he bought three years ago from friend Catherine Bourdeaux, who opened the restaurant in 1979. Here there is no ketchup

room. Indeed, when you dine at Chez Catherine, you join *le beau monde*.

Jouvenet, who is from Lyon, France, is a purist and a perfectionist. "When you're from Lyon, you are supposed to know about good food and wine," he says. He talks passionately about his restaurant—the guests who sat at the front table last week, his rosemary-thyme-and-garlic rack of lamb. "This is my other family," he insists.

Chez Catherine is Jouvenet's *raison d'être*. That means every nuance, every detail, matters. The chocolate is Valrhona. The 375-label wine list is updated—and proof-read—every Wednesday. The stocks are cooked

from scratch. The plates must be placed one inch from the edge of the table. The roses are fresh; Jouvenet himself makes sure by pinching the base of the flowers.

Jouvenet lives by his rules, even when no one is looking. One rule is that a dining room should not smell of food. At the small New Jersey apartment Jouvenet recently bought, he had a door to the kitchen installed, which he closes before turning on the exhaust fan and cooking in peace.

"It takes a life—and sometimes two—to be perfect," he says. "I don't want any medals. I don't want any flowers. I just care about it."