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## Copeland makeover turns staid into spectacular

### FINE DINING

Sunday, March 27, 2005

BY CODY KENDALL

FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

### Copeland

Westin Governor Morris, 2 Whippany Road, Morristown.

Breakfast: 6:30-10:30 a.m. Mondays-Sundays. Lunch: 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Mondays-Saturdays.

Brunch: 11 a.m.-3 p.m.

Sundays. Dinner: 5:30-9:30 p.m. Mondays-Sundays. Full bar.

Major credit cards. Business casual dress. Smoking only in bar. Wheelchair accessible.

Reservations recommended: (973) 451-2619.

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Another bright new restaurant has made the New Jersey scene, offering food and drinks that are as exhilarating as the surroundings.

When Copeland opened in January at the formerly staid Westin Governor Morris, "it was quite a shock for a lot of the guests," laughed manager Evelyn Hsu, recalling the reaction of the hotel's regulars. After a "major facelift," the Governor Morris' dining room is indeed a whole different scene, softly lit with an air of elegance that also conveys a warm invitation to sit down and unwind.

Hsu said the intended message is "sophisticated yet relaxed," and it comes across clearly, from the cushy chairs and welcoming staff to the amazing menu and resourceful layout. Although the room is large, it is made more intimate by tables on two levels and a curving, low wall that defines the main section. The wide-open bar done in dark wood and the adjacent raw bar are practically their own entity.

This is a place that makes you want to kick back, and the lively list of \$10 cocktails will help you reach that goal quickly. There is a good range of martinis, such as the refreshing cucumber sake, and the fresh ginger with apple liqueur. There are also some jazzy novelty libations like the peche bourbon, which mixes white peach purée with bourbon and fresh mint for a mixture that happily lacks the stridency of a traditional mint julep.

Cocktails go well with something from the raw bar, perhaps the Little Neck clams (\$9) on the half shell in a pink pepper mignonette or a platter of oysters, clams, shrimp and mussels (\$29.) Wines by the glass range from \$8 to \$14, but those who want to economize may do better by the bottle. The 2003 Echelon pinot noir, for instance, is \$25 and works well with a range of dishes. There's a 2000 Raymond Reserve cabernet sauvignon for \$50, while the 1999 Clos de Bois tempranillo runs \$30. Those who don't mind spending more also enjoy a wide selection on a list that meshes beautifully with executive chef Thomas Ciszak's tempting menu.

Ciszak, who previously held the same position at The Manor in West Orange, is very clever but stops short of getting cute with his offerings. A variation on the traditional shrimp cocktail (\$14) presents not only whole shrimp but also a split shrimp decked out with shaved fresh horseradish and microgreens. The green salad with blue cheese and toasted walnuts (\$8) includes the unexpected, marinated squash for a slightly sweet touch. Squash also teams with the Hudson Valley foie gras (\$14), as delicate as tissue paper and partnered by a brioche for substance. A

horseradish-crusting crabcake (\$16) gets an additional kick from a mustard seed vinaigrette, softened by an array of pea sprouts.

Side orders show a great deal of thought. While they include the expected creamed spinach (\$6) and wonderful crisp fries (\$5), the lineup goes far beyond that with celery root purée (\$6), a mushroom and asparagus combo (\$9), Parmesan gnocchi (\$6) and artichokes delightfully blended with tomato confit (\$6). Some of these sides also appear with the entrees. My celery root favorite, far more stylish than potatoes, comes on the plate offering zinfandel-poached filet mignon (\$33) served with short ribs and a red shallot confit. Short ribs are difficult to do right and can be tough in the wrong hands, but these were as yielding as the steak.

The gnocchi is part of the equation featuring garlic-dusted roasted rack of lamb (\$36), which also includes an eggplant tarte. A pinot noir reduction adds a smooth finishing touch. Vegetarians, by the way, can content themselves with the eggplant tarte sans lamb, in a \$15 selection that replaces the meat with artichokes and marinated tofu.

Salmon (\$21) is paired with maki for a delightful look and taste, while soybeans, pea sprouts and an orange-lemon fumé tie the two main elements together, making them greater than the sum of their parts. For those who can't decide what to order when they have only three courses to play with, there's also a five-course chef's tasting menu for \$59. It hits several high points, including the lamb and short ribs, as well as the impertinent cinnamon/chili-glazed Chilean sea bass, which runs \$26 when ordered as an entree.

The dramatic desserts (\$8) are by Michael Zebrowski, whose credits include working with two of New York's most famous chefs, Daniel Boulud and David Bouley.

Both taste and structure are designed to dazzle, as in the lush espresso mousse bombe, a curved blend of cake and ice cream covered in dark chocolate and served with mascarpone cream. The frozen hazelnut parfait with kumquat confit gets a dash of expressive color and flavor from the intense blood orange sorbet, while passion fruit and pink guava sorbet does the same for the banana crème brûlée. Even Zebrowski's version of an old-fashioned coconut tapioca is dressed for success with golden pineapple and passion fruit sorbet.

An evening at Copeland goes by far too fast, which means one visit just won't be enough. If you haven't been to the Governor Morris since your high school prom, it's time to return and enjoy a firstclass restaurant that offers equal measures of comfort and excitement.