With one slab to go before she inaugurs dinner service at his new restaurant, the Lambs Club, chef Geoffrey Zakarian stands center stage in an immediate kindred. Silver in hue, deeply lined and wearing a bright white chef's toque, Zakarian looks every bit the leading man. As well he should. Until the early nineties (early 80s) before a $16 million renovation turned it from just another New York restaurant, the 100-year old Times Square establishment was the house of America's color-theoretical society, the original Lambs Club. It is likely that John Barrowsmore and Douglas Fairbanks, both members, once stood where Zakarian stands now.

This is a homecoming of sorts for the chef. In 1987 he brought the first legit-imately contemporary restaurant to the Theater District with the goby American menu at 44. Its place just one block east of The Metropolitan Hotel, he moved on to Patterson's and then opened Four, followed by Coquettish, leaving a trail of culinary influence. But when Town disintegrated in 2002 and Cosmopolitan closed in 2000, Zakarian was left a leading man with no stage. But caught his back on the spotlights. En-vironmental lifts down the levels, from head chef Joel Dorsainvil to Alain Ducasse's Adam, to executive sous-chef Kenny Cusack, formerly of ViVe.

At 6:47 PM, Zakarian is rev-ving the dolls and supervis-ing last-minute menu tweaks. His wife and business par-tners, Margaret, cooks the extensively American menu, ("Luxury bar and grill food," chef Geoffrey calls it). Conceptualizing the no-nonsense, Margaret avoids. "Worki

and wedding sauce or parsnip sauce, or guests want veal?" She says for the lat-ter. Her husband, meanwhile, considers a house-made black Debeahs' meat- ball and three of the grill, directing the saucer.

Grill, Rest, Sib, Plofi, Sauf. Keep a pause, a sort of balance for the perfect meal.

The Zakarian look into the dining room. Thuy Hooper designed the 80-seat restaurant — as well as an open bar — and the hotel itself — an impe- cissable Art Deco set — complete banquettes with butcher block and black wood-painted walls, tablecloths and silver, like linen: a 19th-century French paintjob, installed here in 1905 by Stanford White himself. Now the room is peaceful and the Zakari-ans lovely, energy for the last time.

At 6:47 PM, the first ticket comes in. "Ordering!" Zakarian shouts. "One for gus, cypriotes, sildop, lamb, medium-rare, A term of this gin is an orange! Kr Cumes appears. Chief Joel says by — "Hot kitchen!" — to cut a gazpacho, the head chef, as with those do not, places it next to a small mountain of rice and a box of corn salad and thin strips of red. "Very nice, guys," Zakarian says, passing the plate around the room. The tomatoes arrive, served, charred, deep-purple on the top and purple-red to the bottom. Zakarian takes the glasses in front of him.

"Then with the red. "Go go go!" The water disperse through the simmering. The "yes" people are on the shoulders. Upon returning, he reports, "We're about five minutes from closing. We're enjoying the terrace but tak- ing her time." Zakarian al- lows himself a moment of relief. And then, with a smile, "Okay, let's get out here!"