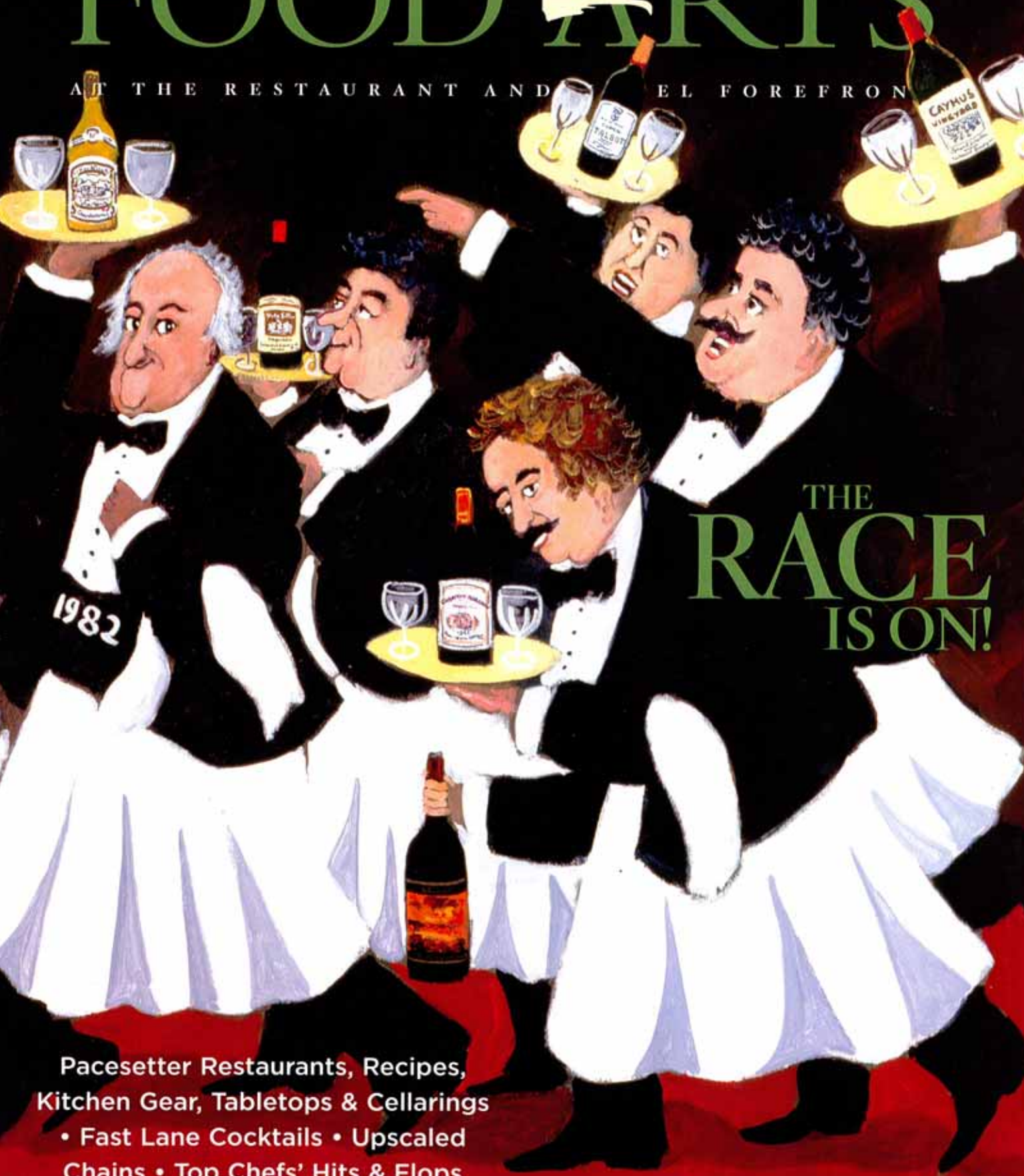


MAY 2006

FOOD ARTS

AT THE RESTAURANT AND IN THE FOREFRONT



THE
RACE
IS ON!

Pacesetter Restaurants, Recipes,
Kitchen Gear, Tabletops & Cellarings
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Terrance Brennan

Silver Spoon *Food Arts* presents the May 2006 SILVER SPOON AWARD for sterling performance to **Terrance Brennan**, the New York City chef/restaurateur/entrepreneur who invented American restaurant cheese service as we know it. For sure, Brennan wasn't the first and only to present cheese as a separate course, and cheese's cachet has waxed and waned between gourmet infatuation and dietary censure for decades. But in the mid-1990s, when Brennan turned an interest into an obsession at his New York City haute restaurant **Picholine**, his cheese cart blooming exponentially with *bleus*, *blancs*, and the occasional *rouge* from artisanal barnyards—all caressed and given a life story by the professorial gm turned *maitre fromager* **Max McCalman**—the rest of the restaurant world caught whiff of his success.

"We had just a few cheeses that I took care of when Picholine opened in 1993," Brennan recalls. "Then there were 12, then 18, and soon more as I got into it, and it was taking too much of my day to manage. So I turned it over to Max, and the rest is history."

That history must note the installation of the first temperature/humidity controlled cheese "cave" in an American restaurant, which Brennan wedged into a closet when he converted an office into a private dining room. The narrative should also take note of **Artisanal**, the cheese-centric buzzing bistro he opened in 2001, complete with five custom-built beech wood shelved caves for aging cheese by type—blue, goat, bloomy rinds, washed rinds, and *tommes*—a retail cheese counter, and a dipper's delight of fondues such as fontina with truffle essence, cheddar with pickled apples, and *tomme de montagne* with chestnut honey and caramelized chestnuts. Yet another chapter has to discuss the Artisanal Premium Cheese center, a 10,000-square-foot multiuse facility on Manhattan's West Side that selects, matures, and distributes cheese via mail order and online sales to restaurants and consumers and also hosts educational forums for professionals and consumers.

That's Brennan's cheese story, and no doubt it's a significant one. But he's also an acclaimed and accomplished chef, the son of Virginia restaurateurs ("a pizzeria/sandwich shop," he clarifies) who started prepping for his career in restaurants and hotels as a teenager and in the 1980s went to finishing school under such luminaries as **Alain Saille**, **Gualtiero Marchesi**, and **Roger Vergé**, whose Mediterranean infused cooking informs Picholine. And something about Picholine: Brennan opened it on a shoestring as a pan-Mediterranean bistro, and, without ever closing for a night-and-day makeover, oversaw its metamorphosis into one of the city's top fine dining spots for Lincoln Center curtain-catchers and *bees-fins* alike.

Brennan will take Picholine through another upgrade this summer. And he plans on spending more time as a chef than as a cheese businessman. "I do tend to go overboard once I find something I'm interested in," he says. "But you've really got to love this business or you won't succeed. I want to be the best I can be."

He loves it, all right.

—JIM PORIS

