



### Attention to Detail

At Kovaceski's Crystal Cafe, service is as important as food. "I'm old-school European," he says. "Service is the most important part of fine dining." At top, Kovaceski, always near his kitchen, puts the finishing touches on a dish of Maine Lobster Fricassé.

On a good night, Crystal Cafe will turn its 72 seats over two-and-a-half times, better than most larger fine-dining restaurants. Ultimately, however, most restaurants make little, if any, profit from main dishes, generating most of their profits from mixed drinks, wine and after-dinner liqueurs and coffees. Even with some items priced at \$25.95, such as a plate of veal medallions wrapped with applewood bacon, Kovaceski's restaurant, like other fine-dining restaurants, has small profit margins — typically running anywhere from 5% to 12%. Crystal Cafe's annual sales approach \$1 million.

### Entertainment

Recent dining trends bode well for his business, Kovaceski says. Throughout most of the 1990s, fine-dining patrons spent about an hour at a restaurant before hurrying off to a movie or some other form of entertainment. In the past few years, however, a trip to an expensive restaurant has itself become the entertainment, Kovaceski says. Now his patrons spend up to two hours at Crystal Cafe — meaning they're more likely to consume more drinks, desserts and other high-margin goodies.

Crystal Cafe draws about half of its customers from Miami-Dade County. About 20% of the diners come from New York, while only 12% are from neighboring Broward County. Kovaceski is convinced it's extremely difficult for a restaurant to change a neighborhood. Instead, a restaurateur must first understand

the local community. Please the locals, says Kovaceski. You'll get good reviews in the local media, and word will spread. The walls of Crystal Cafe display the reviews and awards. Like a proud father, Kovaceski gingerly takes a framed review down from the wall to show a visitor.

Indeed, to interview Kovaceski is to play audience to unabashed, gushing testimony to the American dream. Kovaceski's eyes widen as he tells of getting to serve a meal to boyhood idol Iggy Pop, who has recently been spending time in Miami Beach. As a favor to Kovaceski, Pop even called one of Kovaceski's old band members back in Macedonia one recent night from the restaurant. "It's incredible, really," Kovaceski says. "That I could come to this country in 1984 and now own a restaurant and have all these wonderful friends."

On a recent Tuesday afternoon, Crystal Cafe's wait staff moves quietly from table to table, cleaning silverware and making sure each place setting is perfectly arranged. The kitchen staff is just as busy. With the last of the day's deliveries of fresh vegetables, meat and seafood finally in, Kovaceski disappears behind an office door. He re-emerges minutes later dressed in dark pants and a white starched chef's tunic. It may not be rock 'n' roll, but for Kovaceski, it's still performance. "Every night, it's unpredictable; it's like walking onto a stage. You don't know what will happen," he says, flashing one of his infectious smiles. "It's entertainment." □