

MAY 1, 1980

Institutions

● NRA Show Special! 10th Ivy Awards

**Chicago's little restaurants.
Report from COEX.**

**Cover: Ivy winner Lester Gruber
and Chef Jimmy Schmidt
of The London Chop House**

The London Chop House

*Lester Gruber, The London Chop House
and the city of Detroit have been
carrying on a love affair for 42 years*

At the age of 72, Lester Gruber has earned all that qualifies one as a statesman laureate of the restaurant industry. His national and international awards, associations and friendships more than validate claims of his taste and talent as a restaurateur. They also express something of the great qualities of the man: experience, sagacity, courage and a sense of humor.

In the half-century that Gruber has been in the restaurant business, including a five-year lapse during which he became an insatiable polo player, he has just about seen and done it all. His own first restaurant, a bohemian coffee house named The Den of the 40 Thieves, included a gypsy fortune reading in the price of a tuna sandwich. The slated opening for an exclusive Detroit businessmen's club he once created on the roof of that city's Penopscott Building was December 9th, 1941—two days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Since 1938, however, Gruber, The London Chop House and the city of Detroit have been carrying on a pretty successful love affair. "The Chop," as it is known locally, is the sort of place where people can inquire into the whereabouts of a 1929 Chateau Lafite or drink the local beer. At any given meal, you'll likely find either several Detroit judges, three pro ballplayers, a hit Motown group or James Beard.

Gruber sincerely laments what

he perceives to be the decline of standards in the restaurant industry. He does not exclude his own place when he decries the diminishing quality of raw food ingredients or the less-than-enthusiastic attitude of modern-day service employees. Most of all, he does not attribute to the modern world the taste it attributes to itself.

"There are a lot of people interested in health foods," reflects Gruber, "which is nice. But the great tastes aren't there."

Still, even Gruber admits that The Chop House is very much on top of its game in the kitchen these days. The reason is a young, baseball cap-wearing American kitchen brigade led by 25-year-old Jimmy Schmidt, a graduate of Madeleine Kamman's professional cooking program in Boston. Schmidt's abundant creativity and his adaptability to the strengths and weaknesses of the grocery market more than compensate for the now-colossal expense that The Chop House incurs in printing its extensive menus daily.

"I just received a letter from a friend in Palm Beach," says Gruber, temporarily forgiving the world its lapses in taste, "which had a newspaper ad for a restaurant in it. The ad read: 'In Detroit you go to the Chop House, but you're not in Detroit . . .'"

"We're not elegant," Gruber suddenly decides. "We're Detroit." □

Sitting in "his" spot, Lester Gruber hoists a toast at the grand old bar in The London Chop House. □

1980 Ivy Winners

The London Chop House
Lester Gruber

Anthony's
Anthony Bommarito
Vincent Bommarito

The University of Illinois
S. Kent Dohrman

Hotel Utah
Stuart Cross

The Broadmoor
Karl Eitel

Shands Teaching Hospital
Ruby Puckett

Nick's Fishmarket
Nick Nickolas

The Sardine Factory
Ted Balestreri
Burt Cutino