

**F**  
**WEDNESDAY**  
 SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS  
 MAY 11, 2005

# Food+Wine

mercurynews.com

mercurynews.com

You be the restaurant reviewer.

Details on Page 6F

TABLE MYSTERIES

Do you know what these forks are used for?  
 Answers on Page 7F



SO, YOU DON'T KNOW WHICH FORK TO USE OR WHAT THAT TINY SPOON IS FOR? YOU AREN'T THE ONLY ONE

By Carolyn Jung

*Mercury News*

It's happened even to the best of us.

At a posh restaurant or a fancy dinner party, suddenly it hits: a flatware faux pas. A cutlery conundrum.

Which fork to use? Why so many knives? And is that my water glass or that of the person next to me?

You're not alone.

At the tony Village Pub in Woodside, proprietor Tim Stannard estimates that 25 percent of his

guests use the wrong silverware.

For me, the sauce spoon has been an implement of befuddlement. The flat, paddle-like spoon sometimes accompanies both a knife and a fork with a sauced fish or meat course. Does one eat off the fork? Or off the spoon? It's enough to make my head spin.

Then there was the time I dined at a chic French bistro at a round table set for 10. A woman seated next to me began nibbling a dinner roll. Only it was *my* roll. She had reached for the bread plate to her right, instead of the one to her left. As

I feigned oblivion, she slyly switched the plates to right the wrong. And she was the restaurant publicist.

Why are we prone to such mishaps?

Blame it on the way we eat today. Our parents may have grown up eating Sunday dinner at Grandma's house, complete with proper silverware and a full tea set. We didn't. We eat using all of one fork, sitting in front of the TV, or even standing over the sink.

See **SILVER**, Page 7F

# THE SILVER STANDARD

PATRICK TEHAN — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

By Steven Wayne Yvaska

*Mercury News*

Imagine a meal with as many as 18 courses lasting three or more hours using 36 utensils. While it might be hard to swallow such extravagance, that's the way some people dined more than a century ago.

After the Civil War, trade boomed in the United States. It was a time of great expansion and industrialization. Immense fortunes were amassed by titans through banking, steel, oil, shipping, railroads,

timber and other business endeavors.

An opulent lifestyle emerged. Palatial residences, some referred to as "cottages," were outfitted with silver flatware, gold-trimmed porcelain and lustrous cut glass. A retinue of hired help was necessary to keep it all gleaming.

Arbiters of etiquette established strict rules governing the way the rich dined. Hundreds of books were published between 1870 and 1910 providing helpful hints concerning the order of courses, seating assignments, the length of tapers and so on.

Perennial quandaries such as what diners were to do with grape seeds, and whether it was permissible for a gentleman to share an oversize pear with a lady, were hotly debated.

Cartoons from the 1880s and 1890s frequently mocked the lavish, fashionable dinner parties thrown by the elite. The events became fodder for newspaper columnists, and gossip spread quickly about any faux pas that may have occurred at a

See **ANTIQUES**, Page 7F

AS FORTUNES MULTIPLIED IN THE INDUSTRIAL AGE, SO DID THE UTENSILS ON THE TABLE



THEN  
 circa 1880-1910