

wheels." Fewer than 4,000 Concord coaches were built between 1830 and 1900; only a handful survive in decent, unrestored condition.

Greg Martin, head of Butterfield & Butterfield's Arms & Armor division, and its de facto wagon expert, knew of a Concord that sold last year for about \$100,000. Today he says it might bring as much as \$500,000.

Traina's prize wagon is his Wells Fargo Express "Mud Wagon" U.S. mail coach, which he bought in 1986 when

the contents of casino tycoon Bill Harrah's Pony Express Museum were auctioned off. "This is the kind of thing I probably should have bought more of," says Traina, who paid \$22,500 for the faded burgundy-and-gold coach. It might fetch more than \$75,000 today.

"I've learned that certain things are quite valuable now, but I don't expect to make money on collecting," says Traina. "Mostly because I just don't like selling things." ■

The art of charging \$8 for a plate of lettuce.

Hail, Caesar

By Clark Wolf

Caesar salad is an industry, a benchmark, a cultural phenomenon. It's also a meal. When I reinstated it on a chophouse menu in Manhattan in 1988, it went for \$7.50, cost 78 cents to make and sold thousands every month.

This is a true American success

mention a dose of desperation.

It was the 1920s. An Italian-American restaurateur named Caesar Cardini ran a Tijuana hot spot favored by Hollywood bigwigs and their glamorous gal pals. One fateful day the food truck failed to deliver. And the restaurant was booked solid.

Food pro that he was, Cardini went to work with whatever he could find around the kitchen: crunchy sweet romaine, the whole elegant inner leaves only; aged mellow Parmesan; a swipe of garlic; plenty of olive oil; and a raw egg to hold it all together and give it depth—and protein. Then a squeeze of lemon, a grind of pepper, a pinch of salt, a drop of Worcestershire with its hint of anchovy. (The whole anchovy came later; and don't let a

snooty, misinformed waiter make you feel stupid if you don't want some skanky little dead fish laid to rest atop your salad.) Cardini put all the ingredients together in a wooden bowl with his customary flourish, and—as they say in French—voilà!

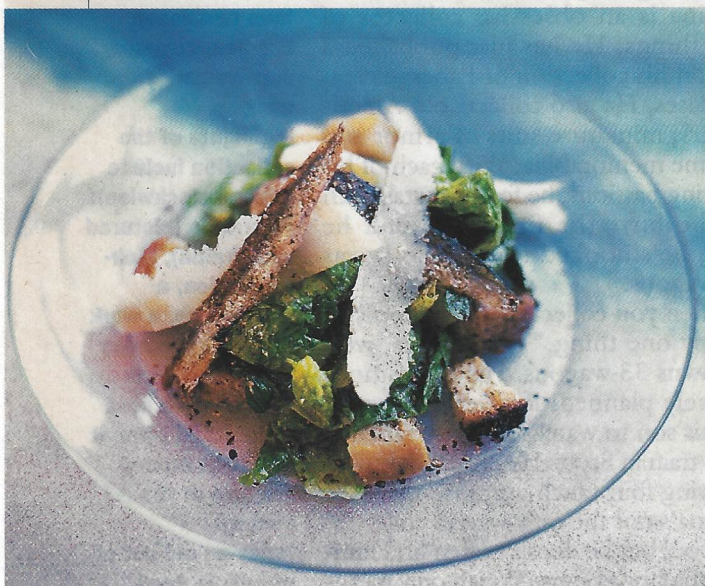
The classic Caesar salad has ranged pretty far afield since then. In north-

ern California it's covered with Dry Jack cheese. On the Gulf Coast they toss in a few shrimp or crabs. New England restaurants contribute everything from fried clams to aged cheddar. And everywhere you go, even on room service lists in the best hotels, the Caesar sports its ubiquitous grilled chicken topper. Last week I even discovered a Thai Caesar at a Manhattan restaurant called the Red Garlic: no uniquely Asian ingredients, just the classic base with a sautéed soft-shell crab. At \$12, not a bad deal at all.

The scariest version I've ever seen was in a very good little Mexican restaurant in San Diego, not far from Caesar's original shrine. The sweet family that ran it confused Worcestershire sauce with Marmite, a fairly nasty English yeast-based spread that made the whole thing look a little bloody. And it was *still* tasty.

How to explain the phenomenon that is Caesar? Well, for one thing, it is a complete and satisfying dish all on its own. But beyond that, people love it because they perceive it as fun, modern (especially with stuff on top) and yet still healthy (especially when a placard on the table notes that pasteurized eggs are used). Somehow, it is considered American and Italian at the same time, despite the fact that you can't have it both ways.

Is there nothing sacred when it comes to rendering unto Caesar? This flexible purist, whose only objective is to avoid confusing the dish with taco stuffing, propounds six simple guidelines: hold the tomatoes; tear, don't chop the romaine; use plenty of real garlic; find a free-range chicken egg you can consume without fear of salmonella; add a dash of mustard if you like; and eat other food from other plates. ■



story, embodying a bushelful of trends on a single plate. It's been around longer and shows up on more menus than any other classic dish I can think of. You can now find it in a variety of permutations, some of which can get pretty ghastly, but it originated with a simple dose of Yankee ingenuity, not to