

Mediocre to gourmet

The food service, meanwhile, doesn't seem to know what it wants to be. That lunchtime chili (which is nothing special) is served in paper bowls, accompanied by plastic spoons. The steaming cider is laddled up in paper cups, when an earthenware mug would seem so much more civilized.

At dinner, however, the shift of gears nearly induces whiplash. The tiny restaurant (10 tables, 42 seats) is the pride of Mammoth, with an



With all its eccentricities, Tamarack harkens to earlier era

eclectic menu, an impressive wine list and real plates.

Chef Fredric Pierrel, who hails from Vosges, France, said, "I use a lot of game and a lot of mushrooms. That is related a little bit to the environment."

It's not unusual to find rabbit, elk or frog legs on the menu, along with caviar from Russia, lamb from Australia and fresh seafood from various oceans.

In light of all those signs warning of elk crossings on the drive up Highway 395, the appropriate selection seemed to be peppered elk medallions in blueberry-juniper berry sauce. Relax; it's raised on ranches, like sheep, in New Zealand. Because of the leanness of the meat, Pierrel insists on serving it medium rare, and it can literally be cut with a fork.

Pierrel says he also takes pride in accenting each plate with six or seven vegetables — and not always the conventional ones. Shelve your aversion to turnips and beets until he can serve you his interpretations of fresh ones.

Families or travelers on a budget might want to pick up some groceries in town and plan on cooking once or twice in the well-appointed kitchens in the cabins. Dinner in the lodge might border on a splurge, at least for so backwoods a setting: For two people, a shared appetizer, salad, entree and one glass of wine each will range between \$66 and \$96 before tax and tip.

The Tamarack Lodge Resort definitely has its eccentricities, and its managers, in the face of Mammoth Mountain Ski Area's stewardship, hope to preserve its unique qualities.

Oh, there will probably be a hot



TAMARACK LODGE RESORT

Hideaway: Fresh fallen snow nearly covers the Tamarack Lodge and makes for great cross-country skiing.

tub of some sort going in soon to soothe all those tortured ski muscles. Construction is planned for 20 new cabins (some of them on the sites of current dilapidated ones), while other units are set for renovation.

But TV? No chance. Not as long as there are checkers and chess and puzzles and conversation to be had.

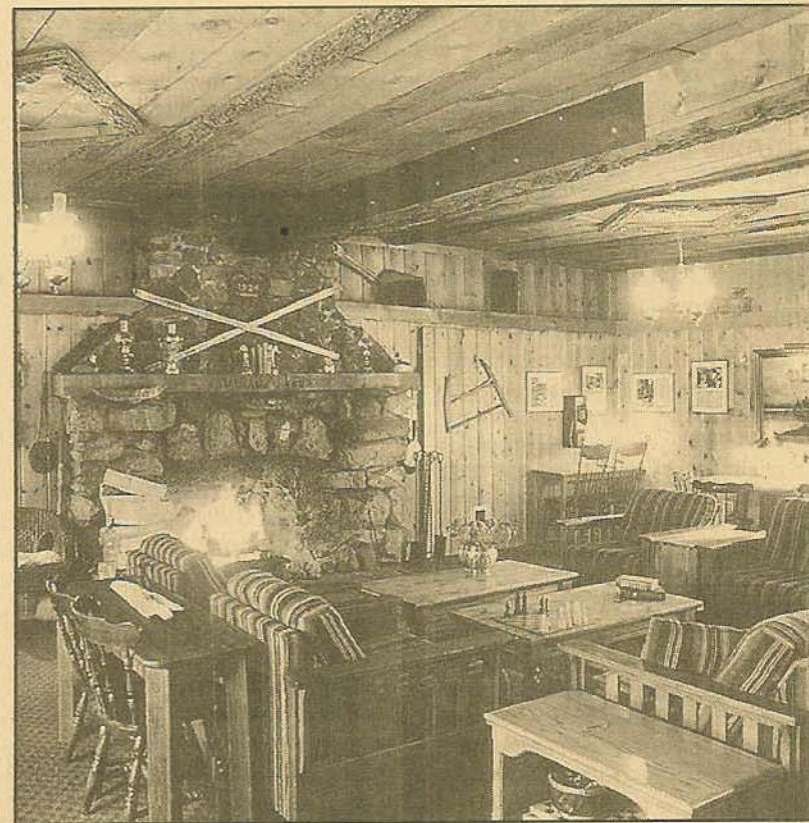
One desk clerk told of a visit a few weeks back of Jerry Dunphy, a

Los Angeles TV news anchor. Impeachment and war were in the air, not to mention the imminent prospect of a freeway chase or a bikini photo shoot, and Dunphy "couldn't believe we didn't have TV," the clerk said. "He was none too happy about it."

Clearly, this place is not for everybody.

It likes being that way.

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TAMARACK LODGE RESORT

Mountain retreat: A blazing fire, set in a huge stone hearth, welcomes visitors to the 75-year-old Tamarack Lodge.