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Los Angeles

where

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where

DINING DOWNSTAIRS

THE BEST RESTAURANT
IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD
MAY BE RIGHT INSIDE
YOUR HOTEL

CIRQUE
BERZERK

CULINARY
SCIENCE AT VU
RESTAURANT

LOS ANGELES
ART SHOW

DINING DOWNSTAIRS

No need for a cab—the
best restaurant in the
neighborhood may be right
inside your hotel

BY ROGER GRO



Opposite: The Bazaar by José Andrés in the SLS Hotel at Beverly Hills is one of the intriguing restaurants that has redefined hotel dining in L.A.

Not too many years ago, the last place a visitor to Los Angeles would choose to eat—someone passionate about food, that is—was the dining room of the hotel in which he was staying, regardless of how exclusive the property. The freestanding restaurants in the neighborhood were generally far superior to anything provided downstairs. But times have changed. In L.A. and cities around the world, some of the best restaurants are now found just off the lobby of your hotel.

Many hotels are using restaurants to enhance their reputations, signing celebrity chefs to contracts and bringing in cutting-edge designers. In a difficult economy, some of the most gifted chefs are attracted to the nurturing environment of a hotel kitchen, where profitability is not essential and where a big corporation is paying for their butter from Normandy and white truffles from Alba. At a hotel, chefs can concentrate on cooking while somebody else deals with bookkeeping, fending off lawsuits and hiring public relations firms.

Pasadena's stately Langham Huntington Hotel & Spa, formerly a Ritz-Carlton, used to be the classic case of a luxury property whose restaurant, simply called the Dining Room, was less than enticing. An awakening occurred when charismatic chef Craig Strong arrived and began attracting diners from outside the Rose City. Strong was succeeded by *Top Chef* champion Michael Voltaggio, who showed off some molecular gastronomy magic but quickly moved on to open his own restaurant on the Westside. Now called the Royce, the restyled space has a more contemporary look, with tufted white banquettes and glass-ensconced wine racks, a design that complements the century-old hotel's architecture. The new chef is Patina Group alum and Guy Savoy-trained David Féau, who cooks with finesse, a keen sense of aesthetics and a few molecular gastronomy tricks of his own. Starters include a salad of slow-poached lobster with pomegranate

"hot and snow," which translates into a warm pomegranate reduction and icy pomegranate powder created with liquid nitrogen. Among entrees are roasted venison loin with a ginger-lychee compote and Spanish-inspired piquillo pepper-accented John Dory, with bacalao sauce and jamón ibérico. While Féau may not be the mad scientist Voltaggio is, his inventive, globally influenced cuisine makes for a rewarding dinner without ever leaving the Langham's manicured grounds.

In New York, one of the toughest reservations in the trendy Meatpacking District—a neighborhood saturated with hot spots—is **Scarpetta**, where chef/owner Scott Conant adds intriguing modern touches to a relatively straightforward Italian menu. After its original dining concepts failed to create a buzz, the Montage Beverly Hills struck a deal with Conant to bring his Scarpetta to the hotel's prime address. It provides a nice counterpoint to Thomas Keller's Bouchon bistro, located next door to the hotel. Conant has an uncanny ability to fuse rusticity with contemporary elegance, in dishes like a silky pumpkin soup poured over the contrasting textures of black truffles, almonds and farro, indulgent duck-and-foie-gras ravioli with marsala reduction, and his signature spaghetti with tomato and basil that is as flawless as it is simple. Scarpetta's formula translates perfectly to L.A., where its casual refinement and innovative interpretations of familiar dishes strike a chord with local diners.

MORE HAUTE HOTELS

For a taste of the Côte d'Azur in a laid-back setting, head to **Delphine**, just off the soaring lobby of the W Hollywood Hotel. Towering plateaux of shellfish and Provençal staples like pissaladière are featured on a menu that also hints of Spain and North Africa.

There's probably no better steakhouse in L.A. than **Cut**, a Wolfgang Puck restaurant with a modern minimalist interior by Getty Center architect Richard Meier, tucked behind the Beverly Wilshire's ornate façade. Come for the finest Kobe beef and lobster with truffled sabayon.

At the Sofitel's **Simon L.A.**, chef Kerry Simon—he's called the "Rock 'n' Roll Chef"—offers his spin on American comfort cuisine that ranges from lobster pot pie and signature meatloaf to a junk food dessert platter that includes Twinkies for grown-ups.

The foul-mouthed but gifted star of *Hell's Kitchen* has designed a refined menu at his eponymous restaurant, **Gordon Ramsay at the London West Hollywood**. Also check out brunch at the hotel's newer, more casual Boxwood Café, adjacent to Gordon Ramsay.

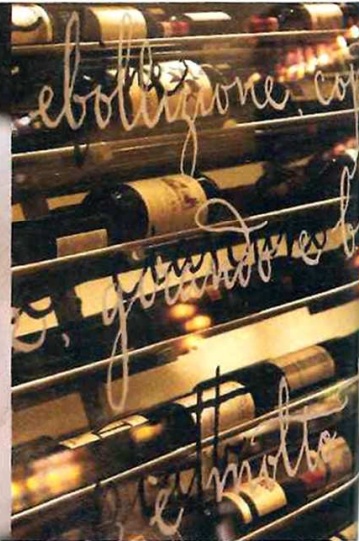
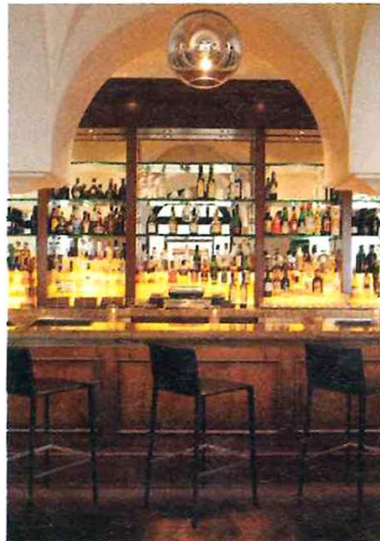
The Restaurant, the sunny dining room at downtown's trendy but affordable Standard, features American fare 24/7. Drop in for Belgian waffles or eggs Benedict in the morning, and tuck into a steak with olive salsa at dinner before partying at the Rooftop Bar.

At the W Los Angeles, a fashionable hotel nestled on a quiet Westwood street, is **NineThirty**, whose cuisine reflects an upscale farmhouse concept. Translation: dishes like a luxurious version of mac and cheese or steak with pasilla-barbecue sauce and truffle fries.

The Penthouse, the rooftop dining room at Santa Monica's Huntley Hotel, shows off stunning ocean views, a prominent bar and flamboyant Hollywood Regency décor. The menu offers yellowfin tuna with wasabi sauce and the best steaks available at this altitude.

Celebrating the food from France's Périgord region, where foie gras and truffles reign supreme, is RH. The name refers to the hotel's notorious nicknames ("Riot House" and "Riot Hyatt") earned when the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin trashed the place—long before it became the Andaz, Hyatt's new brand.

Fuego, at the Hotel Maya, highlights Mexican coastal cuisines, expressed in refreshing ceviches, achiote-tinted Yucatán-style tamales and pepita-crusting salmon, all served up with a postcard view of Long Beach Harbor.



From left: The bar and spaghetti with tomato and basil at Scarpetta at the Montage Beverly Hills; wine from Culina at the Four Seasons Hotel

Conant and Keller are major-league celebrity chefs, but there is no bigger celebrity chef than Wolfgang Puck, whose momentum hasn't slowed a bit now that he's entered his 60s. On the 24th floor of downtown's sparkling Ritz-Carlton, **WP24 by Wolfgang Puck** takes on traditional Chinese cuisine, but without imposing a fusion treatment like at his Chinois on Main. Here he displays respect for ancient recipes while using the finest artisanal ingredients and applying classic technique. The result is relatively authentic Chinese cooking, beautifully presented and tweaked ever so slightly, enjoyed with a stunning view of downtown. Many of the kitchen's small plates can be enjoyed in the lounge, including a soft bao-like bun folded over honey-glazed pork belly and accompanied by a snappy hoisin barbecue sauce. The Peking-style duck, with its lacquered, mahogany-colored skin, is dutifully presented tableside. Look for Puck to make another splash at the exclusive Hotel Bel-Air when the venerable property emerges from a protracted renovation later this year.

A steady stream of celebs—on Oscar weekend, you can't walk through the lobby without literally bumping into one—keeps the Four Seasons as relevant to the movie industry as Paramount Studios. But its former dining room, the critically acclaimed Gardens, was beginning to feel dated. Its replacement, **Culina**, offers a modern take on regional Italian cuisine in a space that has received a dramatic makeover. The restaurant includes

a sleek crudo bar and an impressive 25-foot contemporary chandelier from which delicate hand-blown crystal bubbles dangle from the ceiling. In the kitchen is chef Victor Casanova, whose down-to-earth Bronx roots ensure that Culina is more than just a pretty face. His crudo selections, exquisitely presented like precious jewels, are particularly enticing: lobster accented with pink peppercorns, grapefruit and chive oil, or tuna teased with ginger oil, coriander seeds, lemon and salt. Bistecca alla fiorentina and roasted branzino, flown in from the Mediterranean and simply treated with tomatoes, capers, lemon and olive oil, adds gravitas to the showy scene.

The boutique hotel, where stars can come and go relatively unnoticed, is an L.A. essential, and travelers appreciate the European-style charm and attentive service offered at these intimate properties. Among the latest is the Rebury, which consists of 57 boho-chic flats at the storied intersection of Hollywood and Vine. Its Mediterranean restaurant, **Cleo**, offers small plates that update Middle Eastern, Greek, North African and Spanish culinary traditions. Falafel, pork belly kebabs, moussaka, sliders with harissa aioli and a Moroccan-inspired mussel tagine are ideal for sharing with friends. Or just sip a crisp Domaine Sigalas Assyrtiko from Santorini while snacking on marguez sausage flatbread in an Old Hollywood-meets-Marrakesh scene whose lively bar draws industry insiders and C-listers between reality shows.

Cleo and the Redbury are ventures of SBE, the trend-conscious hospitality firm that also created the SLS Hotel, with its Philippe Starck-designed interior and collection of restaurants by acclaimed Spanish chef José Andrés that have redefined hotel dining. Its main restaurant, **The Bazaar by José Andrés**, is split between a dark room reminiscent of an authentic Spanish tapas bar and a hip, modern space. In either environment, you can play it safe with a traditional tortilla española and buñuelos (codfish fritters), or discover Andrés' mind-blowing experiments with molecular gastronomy that he picked up from his celebrated mentor, chef Ferran Adrià. These include liquefied olive (almost always precipitating a "wow!") created through a process called spherification or a modern take on the tortilla española which a soft, 63-degree egg is suspended in ethereal potato foam. Adjoining the Bazaar is Saam, an elegant room accommodating diners with a 20-course prix fixe feast of Andrés' creations, while Tres is ideal for brunch or high tea.

If all of this seems a bit too precious, you can grab an all-American burger at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel's 25 Degrees. Probably the most elegant burger joint in town—you be tempted to pair yours with a Bordeaux instead of a Budweiser—this burger bar is retro-chic as the landmark it calls home.

For **bold** items, see listings in the **where** section, pp. 66-77.

LOBBY-LEVEL EATS FUEGO/HOTEL MAYA 700 Queensway Drive, Long Beach, 562.481.3910 THE RESTAURANT/ THE STANDARD 550 S. Flower St., downtown, 213.892.8080 RH/ANDAZ HOTEL 8401 Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood, 323.785.6090 THE ROYAL LANGHAM HUNTINGTON HOTEL & SPA 1401 S. Oak Knoll Ave., Pasadena, 626.585.6410 25 DEGREES/HOLLYWOOD ROOSEVELT HOTEL 7000 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, 323.785.7244