

VEGAS

seven[®]

October 13-19, 2011

THIS WEEK IN YOUR CITY

BEST RESTAURANTS

Our annual awards celebrate everything from great dishes to game-changing fishes



Costas Spiliadis, owner of Milos, our Best Seafood Restaurant.

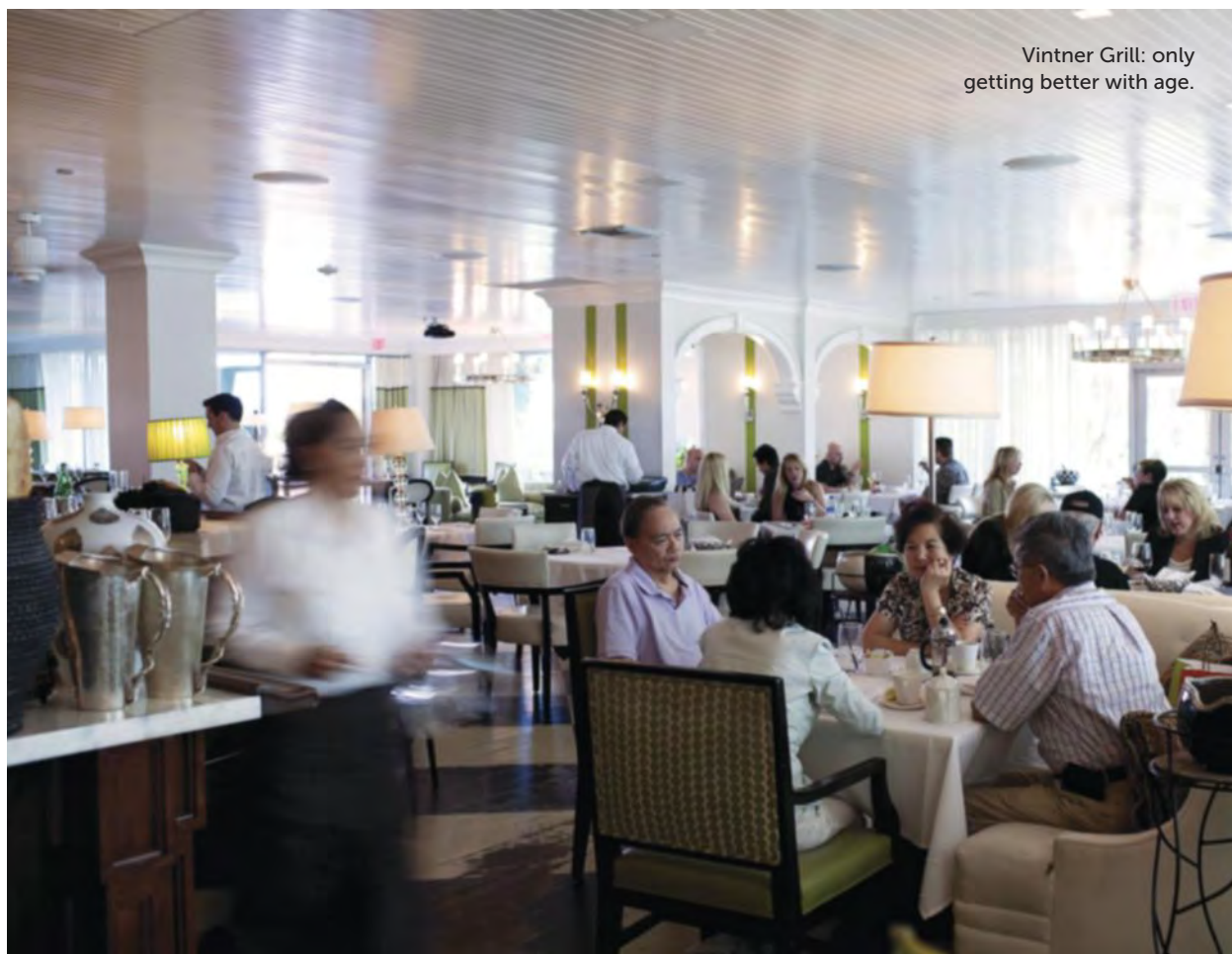
FREE

BEST RESTAURANT (ON STRIP)**Guy Savoy**

Chef Savoy has a son here, Franck, who is now director of food and beverage at Caesars Palace, home to this palace of gastronomy. As a result, the renowned chef comes to visit us often, which gives his restaurant better quality and consistency than those owned by his rivals. A dinner here starts with a parade of tiny amuse-bouches such as a foie gras club sandwich, a Parmesan waffle and a thumbnail-size burger inspired by a visit to In-N-Out. The restaurant hasn't slipped under new chef de cuisine Mathieu Chartron, a kid with talent, looks and great technique. Especially during autumn, core dishes—such as artichoke soup with black truffle, Peas All Around and the seasonal game—are still *vaut le voyage*, or worth a trip, as the French say. Combine that with faultless service, an amazing wine list and that certain *je ne sais quoi, et voilà*. Perfection! *In Caesars Palace, 5:30-9:30 p.m. Wed-Sun., 731-7110.*

BEST RESTAURANT (OFF STRIP)**Vintner Grill**

When Vintner opened five years ago, people complained that they couldn't find the place, hidden as it is in a generic office mall. These days, customers jockey for parking spaces, as the restaurant has become a de facto social club for upscale west-siders. Chef Matthew Silverman, a rock since Day 1, has added a few wrinkles to increase the appeal. First, he's actually making his own cheese—goat, Camembert, Stilton, creamy goat-milk feta—all of which he serves gratis during the restaurant's happy hour, 5-6 p.m. weekdays. Second, he's added elegant creations to what is already one of the city's most diverse and appealing menus. Most of us were already addicted to his innovative Moroccan spiced lamb ribs and wood-fired flatbreads. Now he's doing a full-on French-style bouillabaisse and Cornish game hen on mesquite on a busy grill in the back. There is a giant by-the-glass wine list, a joint effort of able sommelier Troy Kumalaa, and the restaurant's personable general manager, Peter Varela. And décor is sleek and comforting, with lots of sofas and chairs that you can sink down into. On balmy nights, request a cabana outside—yes, it's in an office parking lot, but it's still one of the nicest eating spots in the city. *10100 W. Charleston Blvd., Suite 150, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. lunch and 4-10 p.m. dinner Mon-Thu, 11 a.m.-*



Vintner Grill: only getting better with age.

4 p.m. lunch and 4-11 p.m. dinner Fri, 4-11 p.m. Sat., 4-10 Sun., 214-5590.

BEST CHEF (ON STRIP)**Steve Benjamin, L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon**

Despite having what appears to be an American name, this friendly Parisian is as French as a Camembert wrapped in a tricolor. When Benjamin first came to the MGM Grand six years ago, his accent was as thick as the crème Anglaise served on desserts in his restaurant. Today, he's lost much of the accent and speaks fluent English. He's made Las Vegas his permanent home. What makes him great? Simply that from day to day, year to year, the kitchen at L'Atelier is the most consistently excellent on the Strip. It's virtually impossible to get a bad dish here, and that includes faithful and difficult reproductions of the dishes that made his boss so famous, such as his celebrated mashed potatoes, stuffed quail and *papillote* of langoustine. *In MGM Grand, 5:30-10 p.m. Sun-Thu, 5:30-10:30 p.m. Fri-Sat, 891-7433.*

BEST CHEF (OFF STRIP)**Mitsuo Endo of Raku**

What makes a chef great? Imagination, technique and dedication

to craft. On that score, Endo-san, as he is known to his colleagues, has no peer as an off-Strip talent. Is there anyone else imaginative enough to do the Waterfall Tofu-tofu inside a wooden push-up contraption that is meant to be pushed out, in pasta-like strands, into a broth smoky with *ikura*, tiny salmon roe? (He makes the tofu in-house, too, and it's better than any in Tokyo.) Regarding technique, Endo-san has sprinkled his menu with endless delicacies grilled on *bincho-tan*, a kind of charcoal made from red oak. One evening he made sea bream crusted in salt and *kombu*, Japanese kelp, which rendered it ethereally moist. On another occasion, he did a simmered duck; two slices of fat-ribbed duck breast in a thick sauce with bamboo and *horenso*, Japanese spinach. As far as dedication, he works miracles in a tiny kitchen with only a pair of helpers, turning out fare such as *zensai*, Japanese tidbit appetizers that include tiny spears of asparagus in a sesame batter, cooked fish with buttery soy glaze, and eggplant smoked with radish. Is it any wonder that, on any given night, the counter in here is packed with local chefs? *5030 W. Spring Mountain Road, Suite 2, 6 p.m.-3 a.m. Mon-Sat, 367-3511.*

BEST NEW RESTAURANT**Jaleo**

Once, chef José Andrés insisted he would never open a restaurant here. Suddenly, he has three: China Poblano, E Bar and this one, his flagship. Jaleo, which means “rev-elry” in Spanish, is as versatile a restaurant as there is in this city. It's possible to eat quickly, snacking on small plates (tapas), but you can also spend hours here nibbling on course after course, crowned by a smoky paella from the olive-wood fire pit in the rear of the dining room. The décor is colorful, featuring multicolored banquettes that Andrés chose himself, avant-garde murals designed by Spanish artists and, just outside in the common area, foosball tables that double as dining tables. Most of the dozens of dishes are inspired by Spanish cuisines. The conserved tuna and potato salad is to die for. Another more exotic dish is *butifarra casera*, the famous Catalan pork sausage done in a stew with mushrooms and pearl onions. Try *patatas arrugadas*, tiny alabaster-color potatoes paired with a duo of exotic sauces from the Canary Islands, or *embutidas*, various types of ham and sausage imported from Spain. *Pata negra*, from black-footed Spanish pigs that subsist on



The city's new tastemaker: Jaleo's José Andrés.

acorns, is the world's best ham. At almost \$40 for a small serving, it had better be. *In the Cosmopolitan, 5-11 p.m. Sun-Thu, 5 p.m.-midnight Fri-Sat, 698-7950.*

BEST DISH

Pintade en Papillote, at Guy Savoy

Pintade, Guinea fowl, is delicate, plump and flavorful—yet few chefs use it, let alone give it the royal treatment. Closer to a partridge than a chicken, it is native to North America, but demand for it is low, and the price prohibits it from most menus. But chef Guy Savoy loves game, and serves game birds throughout fall. For this dish, a semipermeable plastic bag is used to seal in the bird's natural juices while in the oven. (In France, they still use parchment, the papillote in the dish's name.) The bag is pierced at the table, and root vegetables, another fall staple, spill out. It's all blanketed in sauce *Albufera*, sort of liquid foie gras, mixed with the essences of the *pintade* and the vegetables. It's as close to heaven—or France—as you can probably get in Southern Nevada. *\$130 a la carte, in Caesars Palace, 5:30-9:30 p.m. Wed-Sun., 731-7110.*

BEST SEAFOOD

Milos

You can get great seafood at many places in Las Vegas today, from



Carnevino beef: a cut above.

Bartolotta on the Strip to King's Fish House in the District at Green Valley Ranch. But Milos, the elegant Greek restaurant at the Cosmopolitan, is a game-changer on many levels. It's the first truly great Greek on the Strip, the only place you can eat *lavraki*, a kind of sea bass, done simply with the Greek trinity of lemon, oregano and olive oil. There is also red mullet, simply broiled but exquisite, and octopus so tender you can eat it with a spoon. Even better, this high-priced restaurant has a ridicu-

lously cheap (\$20.11) three-course lunch, where you can have a first course of Greek dips, a fish dish as a main, and *karithopita* (a walnut cake) as the dessert course, among myriad choices. It's the best deal in town. The bonus is Costas Spiliadis, the most charming of hosts. He'll escort you himself to the fish market, where you will choose your dinner from the gaudy display of live and fresh fish on ice. *In the Cosmopolitan, 5:30-11 p.m. Sun-Thu, 5:30 p.m.-midnight Fri-Sat, lunch noon-2:30 p.m. Sat-Sun, 698-7000.*

BEST STEAK HOUSE

Carnevino

It's a cliché to say that the Strip has more great steak houses than anywhere else on earth per square mile, but it's true. So it's quite a distinction to be called the best in this town. But while the A300 beef from Australia at Jean-Georges may have been the top cut we tasted this year, Mario Batali's place, with Zach Allen at the helm, wins for overall excellence. The beef program, created by legendary New York butcher Adam Perry Lang,

Dining Trends

What We're Into

Sharing. Think of it as a pooling of resources: Tomahawk chops for two, tableside salads, tapas, small plates ... Need we go on?

Adultifying foods. It's been another rough year, and more and more we're finding comfort in childhood favorites of all kinds, whether it be mini hot dogs or fried PB&J. Next thing you know, chefs will be cutting off our crusts.

Healthy alternative menus. The Wynn resort famously took the lead in this movement, with vegan menus now available property-wide. But further evidence is piling up all over town, down to the alternative dessert menu at Elements Kitchen & Martini Bar (4950 S. Rainbow Blvd.), whose desserts rely on natural sweeteners and juices.

Lowbrow brew. PBR is the water of life on hip and happenin' Fremont East, and Old Style has popped up on taps at more than one place around town. As much as nouveau-Belgians, home-brewing and craft beer are enjoying immense growth, low-brow brew is what the kids are drinking.

Wine beyond the bottles. Plenty of restaurants have put down the bottle and picked up high-end alternatives to glass. For a high-quality wine that just happens to come in a box, try the A Mo Pá insolia or nero d'Avola at Due Forni (3555 S. Town Center Drive) or at the secret pizza joint at the Cosmo. Or, go a step further and enjoy local winemaker William Sherer's Iberian Remix wines on tap at RM Seafood.

Molecular gastronomy. Spanish superstar chef José Andrés brought this style of cuisine to Vegas at E Bar in the Cosmo. The shape-shifting—form-changing cooking that relies on 21st-century appa-

ratues such as the PacoJet and reverse griddle—is growing in stature. Anyone for grapefruit risotto? Look for more bizarre combinations to surface soon.

Phone apps. What hath Zagat wrought? They've sold out to Google, and apps for your mobile devices are multiplying. Now you can just click on your home screen to find OpenTable, Trip Advisor or any of hundreds of regional and large city restaurant maps, reservation portals and reviews.

What We're Over

Cupcakes. We get it: They're cute. But they're difficult to eat and far too twee. Let us once again eat cake!

Mac and cheese. Everyone has done their own version of this American classic, plying it with everything from designer hams to Maine lobster, not to mention making it with obscure pastas and oddball cheeses. Whatever

happened to good old Kraft? Enough already!

Menus that list the provenance of every item. Do we really care about the name of some farmer in Idaho that we've never heard of, or the résumé of that micro-brewer? Some menus read like *War and Peace*. All we want, actually, is for our burgers not to be overcooked and our beers to be cold.

Food trucks. We still have great food trucks such as Sloppi Jo's and Top Notch Barbeque, but there are too many now. Plus, be honest: Do you really like to eat standing up?

Bacon. We love bacon. Boy, do we love bacon. And there's plenty of evidence of that on these pages. But now that it has invaded everything from vodka to doughnuts, it's high time we looked to a new meat to exploit. When was the last time you had a *porchetta* cupcake?



Jaleo's main room: a reflection of its chef.

menus are seasonal, but look for dishes such as lobster *en cocotte*, an amazing langoustine ravioli topped with black caviar, and potato salad laced with truffle and foie gras shavings that your mother never made. Well-known for labor-intensive and visually stunning dishes, and for his vast knowledge of food chemistry, Robuchon was voted Chef of the Century in a French poll. Are we even qualified to argue? *In MGM Grand, 5:30-10 p.m. Sun-Thu, 5:30-10:30 p.m. Fri-Sat, 891-7433.*

BEST DESIGN
Jaleo

If Spanish avant-garde cuisine is what's on the tables at Jaleo, then Spanish avant-garde design is what's everywhere else. Chef José Andrés collaborated with New York's Rockwell Group, as well as with artist Mikel Urmeneta and designer Juli Capella, to create a space that reflects Andrés' passion, personality and sense of humor. The bull in the

Mexican wrestling mask ("Mote-kutli"), for example, was heading to China Poblano (his other restaurant in the Cosmopolitan) when Andrés redirected the movers. A great deal of thought went into everything from the brass inlay that re-creates the shrimp shells and crumpled napkins typically littering the floor of a Spanish tapas bar to the seating height, which is high in the *tapeo* and tapas bar areas, low in the dining room, making the patrons as much a part

of the design as the room's custom paella ovens. Hardly an afterthought, the exterior "patio" area features wooden tables, tree-stump seats and, most importantly, a foosball table also known as "José's Table." *In the Cosmopolitan, 5-11 p.m. Sun-Thu, 5 p.m.-midnight Fri-Sat, 698-7950.*

BEST RESTAURANT BARTENDER

Max Solano of Delmonico Steakhouse

Rye, bourbon, scotch—Solano loves whiskey, and in all its multitude of formats. Indeed, the Delmonico mixologist/beverage manager is attempting to collect them all! The restaurant's list has grown to 346 labels, and Solano expects to reach 420 by spring, when the fourth edition of his Book of Whiskey menu—and it's a tome all right!—hits the bar. Later this year, Delmonico will even get some expanded storage just to accommodate his obsession. Last month, Solano also launched his whiskey menu, a lineup of nine cocktails spotlighting his favorite category. Try the BBS (Bitter Bourbon Sling) or the Scarlet Starlet, but do not miss his bacon Manhattan featuring house-infused bacon bourbon. Make no mistake, Solano will happily make you just about anything you ask for. He'll just personally get a kick out of it if you ask him what he's drinkin'. *In the Palazzo, happy hour 3-7 p.m., dinner 5-10 p.m. Sun-Thu, 5-11 p.m. Fri-Sat., 607-6363.*



Last call for the Bradley Ogden burger.

R.I.P.

Alex

Alex Stratta won two Michelin stars at the Wynn, but apparently the margins weren't sufficient to keep the star chef in business.

Bradley Ogden

After a great run, the seminal American chef will close his eponymous restaurant at Caesars early in the first quarter, to be replaced by Gordon Ramsay's gastropub.

Town Square fare

It was another dog-eat-dog year at this popular outdoor mall. So long to Lolita's, the Mexican restaurant and nightclub; The Grape, another Las Vegas wine bar that bit the dust; Cadillac Ranch, which was dead on arrival (though the décor will live on at the new tenant, Ranch House Kitchen).

Nora's Wine Bar

It seemed like a good idea during the boom days at the turn of the century, but Las Vegas just doesn't support this concept like big-city markets do.

Rosemary's

A victim of the recession, Michael and Wendy Jordan's place will be remembered as one of the city's best all-time neighborhood restaurants.

Ruth Reichl

America's foremost food critic on Las Vegas' culinary scene, the state of food journalism and her dream dinner party

BY MAX JACOBSON

Ruth Reichl would cringe if she heard herself referred to as the First Lady of American Food Journalism, but it wouldn't be an exaggeration. A native New Yorker, she started her career as a restaurant critic at *New West* magazine before assuming the position of *Los Angeles Times* restaurant critic and, later, food editor.

From there, Reichl went on to greater fame as the *New York Times* restaurant critic, where her incisive observations and infallible palate brought her a huge fan base. That led to her post as editor in chief for *Gourmet* magazine, which ceased publication two years ago. Reichl is the author of many successful books, among them *Tender at the Bone* (Random House, 1998) and *Garlic and Sapphires* (Penguin Press, 2005), the latter of which chronicles her travails as the *New York Times* critic and her attempts—often unsuccessful—at anonymity. (The book has been optioned for a script.)

These days, Reichl—who recently visited Las Vegas—can be found on the lecture circuit, online (she's the editorial adviser of GiltTaste.com), on television (she was a judge on Bravo's *Top Chef Masters*' Season 3 last spring) and in her kitchen in Columbia County, N.Y., cooking with passion.

What does the closing of *Gourmet* say about the state of American food journalism?

The odd thing is that it doesn't say much. Our renewal rates were great, and we had the highest circulation ever. *Gourmet* closed because our advertisers were luxury advertisers, and they were in trouble. Not a single day goes by where at least one person doesn't come up to me and tell me how much they miss the magazine. No one has replaced *Gourmet*; there is a hole where *Gourmet* used to be.

At Gilt Taste, the business model is based on commerce, not advertising. We make our money on the products that we sell. We introduce great artisans to Americans.

Do you feel that the multiplicity of food bloggers and sites such as Yelp dilute the message of real professionals like yourself?

Not at all. What's happened is that places like Yelp have become like *Consumer Reports*. Critics today have to be better and do what critics are supposed to do. I like it; it's pushed food writing to a better place.

What's your response to all the hype about Vegas being the "Dining Capital of the World"?

I haven't spent enough time here to say, but I can tell you that I had one of the best meals of my life at E Bar [José Andrés' restaurant at the Cosmopolitan], a great meal at Raku [5030 W. Spring Mountain Road], and loved Monta [5030 W. Spring Mountain Road] for ramen. The thing that amazes me about Vegas is that almost nothing is open at 1:30 a.m., which isn't the case in New York. The only place open at that hour was Blue Ribbon Sushi and that secret pizza place, which had something like a one-hour line. Why aren't they staying open later?

I'm also impressed by the service here. Vegas has lots of professional restaurant people—they're not actors doing this as a sideline. And the level of professionalism is really impressive.

What's on your current wish list in terms of what you'd like to see from the American food scene?

I'm pretty happy with what's been going on. I feel like Americans are becoming more knowledgeable din-



ers. My 22-year-old son's generation are ethical eaters; many of them are vegetarian, even vegan. My wish is for Americans to start tackling hunger, more social justice for food workers, making sure poor people in this country are well fed. [Michelle] Obama has been great on these issues. At a certain economic level, you eat spectacularly well in this country; there are farmers markets everywhere. We are hoping the new generation will avoid processed foods. The obesity crisis costs us \$150 billion a year.

How have American tastes changed during your tenure as a writer and editor?

American tastes have changed dramatically. There is an increased tolerance for spice; new cuisines such as Latin American food, Sriracha on every table in America, the idea that sushi is sold in supermarkets—when I started writing about food, no one even knew what sushi was. Raw fish

grossed people out. Immigration has brought whole new groups of Chinese, Indian; the whole ingredient base has expanded enormously.

Who are the five people you'd most like to have dinner with?

Mike Nichols, the director—he's the best company you'll ever have [because he] knows something about every subject. Jancis Robinson, the *Financial Times of London* wine writer, because she'd bring great wine. Robert Irwin, the conceptual artist who did the garden at the Getty Center (in California). Bill Clinton—he's the most charismatic person I have ever met. And Ferran Adrià of elBulli, because he's the most cutting-edge chef there is.

What's next for Ruth Reichl?

I don't know. I'm living day to day. I'm writing books, and hope my movie comes out. Today I'm cooking; I roasted a chicken and have spicy kale, fresh corn, new potatoes and blueberry pie on the menu. 🍷