

C the Menu

Koi, with its throngs of star-gazing night owls, set the standard for L.A.'s latest breed of club-inspired restaurants when it first opened in 2003.



Making A Scene

A flood of hybrid nightclub-restaurants is sweeping L.A.'s culinary terrain. Is celebrity cuisine the wave of the future? BY NORA ZELEVANSKY

Imagine the typical Hollywood scene. Paparazzi lie in wait outside the newest hot spot's velvet rope. Inside, under vaulted ceilings and amidst design elements like 20-foot fireplaces and tree stump coffee tables, would-be starlets in skinny Tsubi jeans and four-inch platform wedges order pomegranate martinis and, wait...truffled mac and cheese?

The once rigid barrier between high-octane nightclubs and serious restaurants has grown increasingly porous as of late. The opening of each massive and expertly hyped venue strengthens the possibility that Los Angeles' culinary landscape will be swallowed whole by this new breed of club-restaurant hybrid, where scene often trumps cuisine. In order to stay alive in this competitive market, the new wave of gastro-clubs, such as Social Hollywood, Republic and Citizen Smith, lure the *US Weekly* set (semi-celebrities and their adoring crowds) with nightlife, spectacle, and the all-too-familiar unfulfilled promise of exalted food.

Old fashioned glamour is name of the game at the sprawling epicurean complex called **Social Hollywood**. While the theme may sound prom-perfect, owners Jeffrey Chodorow (of Asia de Cuba fame) and Melissa Richardson passed up streamers and paper mâché for an extravagant decor meticulously designed by Mark Zeff. Housed in the former Hollywood Athletic Club (which, one is repeatedly reminded, was once an elite sports club founded by Cecil B.



Republic's dining room

DeMille, Charlie Chaplin, Lon Chaney and Rudolph Valentino), Moroccan accents like colorful hand-woven sequined rugs, bamboo screens and mile-high vaulted and original frescoed ceilings recall 1920s grandeur. As with many of the new mega-restaurants, bold interiors worthy of a movie set seem designed to seduce patrons into a stupor of awe and contentment long before the first dish hits the table.

Chefs Joe Ojeda and Michelle Bernstein collaborate on Social Hollywood's menu with nods to Moroccan flavors mixed with *au courant* American standards. Many of the hybrid dishes, while well-prepared, end up in a kind of cross-cultural limbo. Still, delectable highlights include a conch appetizer, pomegranate-glazed lamb rack, and olive oil mashed potatoes dotted with crispy olives.

With a total capacity of 1,014, the converted fitness space—complete with a bar, the Barrymore Ballroom, and a soon-to-open club-within-a-club, Peter Famulari's Boulevard 3—is reminiscent of a very decadent mall or 1980s-era megaclub. Membership has its privileges in the second floor's Green, Game and Velvet rooms, closed to average patrons from Thursday through Saturday. Cocktail waitresses in French maid-like uniforms are called Socialites (in case one didn't yet intuit the target audience).

Still, Social's most unique, successful element is its eclectic bar area, where antique detailing works harmoniously with high-tech "glass wallpaper," on which stars and a full moon are projected in a surrealistic film called "The Magic Forest." Here, celebrities and civilians alike feel transported, sipping delicious Lycheewood martinis to the tune of evocative music like cancan or blues with a sense of appropriated class from Tinseltown's glory days.

Republic, another new contemporary American restau-club, this time with "Southern flair," is also trying to cross-breed. Although its name and crimson color scheme suggest Asian or Russian cuisine, Republic's menu again offers slight variations on standard steakhouse fare—iceberg lettuce with blue

cheese dressing; Caesar salad with hush puppies; garlic whipped potatoes; the inevitable seared ahi tuna; and multiple cuts of steak.

A feast for the eyes is the order of the day at this club-like establishment, where oversized design elements scream a return to '80s excess. In the main dining room (auxiliary spaces include a bar, a separate daytime cafe and oddly unadorned restrooms), massive white-tasseled lampshades surround a kitschy antler chandelier. A 20-foot Tower of Wine features "wine angels." These women, dressed in white wings, are hoisted up through a narrow glass sphere in order to retrieve vino for diners, proving that there is in fact a worse job for aspiring actors than sitting in a plastic display case behind the Standard Hotel's front desk. Not only are there enough white lounges for all, but the bleached-out tones and relaxed atmosphere inspires a beachy feel, even smack in the middle of West Hollywood.

Relaxed is also the vibe at entrepreneur Andrew Belchic's **Citizen Smith**. The menu options naturally reflect the restaurant's mission to be a "bistro for the everyman." Standards like French onion soup, onion ring towers, classic burgers, sautéed spinach, and five types of steak dominate, although chopped steak sliders and frozen hot chocolate (a dessert swiped from New York's staple Serendipity) are special treats.

Citizen Smith's decor, created by Thomas Schoos, mastermind behind Koi and the new Huntley Hotel, brings more edge than its menu. Exposed piping and brick combined with dark, almost gothic elements like glass lamp shades bearing haunting photographs of Hollywood residents and silhouetted tree limbs achieve a kind of supervillain lair-chic.

Even at their most culinarily inspired, most of these restaurants rely on deluxe basics. These items are like a slight of hand in which the inclusion of one indulgent ingredient—truffle oil, for example—can trick people into feeling sophisticated while eating mac and cheese. Although the new Southern spot **Memphis** is also guilty of this method, chef Francisco Chaidez's innovations are more original, and delicious, than most. Cajun popcorn shrimp and crazy fries with parmesan and garlic are bursting with flavor, while the Louisiana lump crab avocado salad and New Orleans BBQ prawns are more subtle.

With a bordello red interior, the spirit of Louisiana is palpable here. Originally built

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Piece of Cake

The craze for cupcakes, as trends go, may have had its day. The new way to have your cake and eat it too? Sweet and pretty petit fours. Sausalito-based **Dragonfly Bakery** has just launched a website selling its delectable morsels of cake, layered with marzipan, jam and buttercream, then covered in chocolate. In flavors like hazelnut, vanilla-orange, and raspberry and adorned with hearts and flowers in dreamy pastels, these treats are just as pretty as they are delicious. dragonflycakes.com. **ASHLEY MCADAMS**



NICE ICE

Chez Panisse pastry chef of nine years Mary Canales recently opened **Ici**, an organic ice cream parlor just down the street from her old Berkeley stomping grounds. Flavors range from organic rose geranium to coffee cardamom.

With tart-sweet Meyer lemons and almonds from local farms, this is a California classic in the making. *2948 College Ave., Berkeley; ici-icecream.com*. **ALISON CLARE STEINGOLD**

Choco-file

Nothing says Parisian cocoa-decadence like the dark brown packaging of **La Maison du Chocolat**. In California, fans are clamoring for Les Sevillanes (\$65), five airy and summery confections blending fruits and light spices with heavenly ganache. The offerings, like melon-port-milk chocolate or tangy lemon-grapefruit praline, make an ideal dessert when paired with a sampling of seasonal goodies from the farmers' market. laisonduchocolat.com. **A.C.S.**



The lobby at Social Hollywood

THE WAVE WATCHER

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controlled room. Instead, plastic binders full of negatives, prints and proof sheets are crammed into a closet space in his home that once served as a bar. Famous surfers like Dewey Weber and Mickey Munoz get their own binders. There are in-

dividual binders dedicated just to surf contests, board builders, and particular surf spots. It's well-organized but not at all showy.

While Grannis, disillusioned by the unseemly side of the pro surfing circuit, had stopped taking pictures by the 1980s, interest in surfing swelled throughout the 1990s and the lensman's phone began to ring. Even

though he had never made much money back in the day, the forgotten binders stuffed into the converted bar turned out to be Grannis' nest egg. "I've seen this pro surfing business ruin lives, and I don't like it at all," he says. "Money wasn't my primary concern in the beginning, and in fact, it still isn't today. It's just staying alive and being healthy. That's what counts." ●

PREMIER PALACE

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reworking of a building, how it should flow."

In what was a former rabbit-warren of four rooms, the expanded kitchen offers the only apparent concession to the 21st century—a plasma television. Even so, the new cabinetry is crafted to exactly match the original, hardware and all. But the real clue to the Corrigan's peccadilloes lies inside the drawers: one devoted entirely to banana taffy, another for nuts and a third for anything Entenmann's. For all his exquisite taste in design and gracious living, Corrigan's taste in edibles runs to the, well, plebian. "I

am embarrassed to say I probably work 10 to 12 hours a day, six or seven days a week. I don't have much of a personal life!" Or, apparently, time to cook.

But how could he possibly, with only nine employees between offices in West Hollywood and Paris wrangling projects worldwide? "I currently have three in Chicago, eight in L.A., one in Santa Barbara, one in London and two in France." Then there is his new resale venture. Adhering to his mantra of "authentic and beautifully crafted," Corrigan did not want to create reproduction furniture and slap his name on it. And why should he when he has a 12,000-square-foot warehouse filled by years of col-

lecting antique decorative arts from all over the world? In September, via the internet, the pieces will be available to the trade and "civilians" alike. And as a fitting accompaniment, Corrigan has developed cleaning products specially formulated for antiques.

Regardless of all the opulence, Corrigan insists a home is to be lived in as he curls up on the Duke sofa with Winston in his lap. Winston is happily oblivious to his surroundings, although Corrigan notes he occasionally barks at the empty chair that hosts Dorothy Chandler's ghost. "Dorothy tends to show up around her birthday," he says—no doubt to keep an eye on her beloved estate and its current gatekeeper. ●

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in 1903, the house later became a school for children of celebrities like Charlie Chaplin and Cecil B. DeMille (presumably, they dropped their kids off and headed to the Hollywood Athletic Club). Storefronts lining the narrow walkway to the front

deck resemble New Orleans' French Quarter. And if it weren't for the red velvet rope out front (or the couple making out), an outsider wouldn't guess that Memphis was in fact a Los Angeles nightlife destination. Passing old movies projected onto a wall, one half expects women in period garb to hand out pralines. Inside, house music, extremely low lights, and

wall-to-wall plantation decor are incongruous, although the private upstairs dining room is exquisite.

No matter what the respective strengths and weaknesses of these hot new hybrids, one concept reigns supreme for those hoping to attract the ever fickle young Hollywood jet set: You gotta have a gimmick if you want to make a scene. ●