BARRON'S

In Celebrity-Favored Beverly Hills, Foodies Are Now the Star of the Show

By **Hannah Seligson** March 6, 2024 3:51 pm ET

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Giada Paolon

Beverly Hills conjures many images, among them Rodeo Drive, world-class retail, and movie stars. Now, the city can add another bullet point to its resume: bone fide culinary destination.

The restaurant explosion and food renaissance taking place in the 90210-ZIP code is happening everywhere, from the perch of new hotels to subterranean sushi spots to decades-old dining institutions such as Spago and La Dolce Vita.

Within the 5.71 square-mile vicinity of Beverly Hills, over half a dozen new upscale restaurants have recently opened, or are in the pipeline. They include Sushi Note Omakase, Dante, Funke, Su La Vert, Espelette, Plant Food + Wine, the Hideaway, and La Dolce Vita. Marea, the upscale Italian eatery from the Alta Marea Group, will open on Camden Drive in early 2024. Café Boulud will soon have an outpost at the Mandarin Oriental Residences on Wilshire Boulevard.

“We are seeing more and more chefs coming to Beverly Hills,” says Julie Wagner, CEO of Beverly Hills Conference & Visitors Bureau. Among other reasons, Wagner attributes the recent restaurant surge to the city’s “walkable enclave,” something that sets it apart from many other Los Angeles neighborhoods that are not pedestrian friendly.

Beverly Hills is putting its own mark on the dining scene—the upscale and relaxed Southern California vibes converge into a melting pot of patrons. What that looks like are restaurants where some people are seemingly dressed for the Oscars, while others show up in athleisure-wear. Range is a defining feature of eating out in Beverly Hills, with menus that cater to everyone from the plant-based crowd to those who want to eat—and live—large.

Steakhouse the Hideaway is putting a refined twist on Baja cuisine. US Weekly called it "L.A.'s top destination for celebrity sightings."
The Hideaway

New Coolness Factor

While Beverly Hills is still far a far cry from more hipster areas such as Silver Lake, the influx of new eateries has brought a hit of coolness to an area that many Los Angelenos write off as a tourist trap.

To be sure, there is no shortage of selfie sticks along Rodeo Drive. But Beverly Hills is now home to some of the most coveted reservations in greater Los Angeles. One of those includes Sushi Note Omakase, which opened its second outpost in the basement of a Beverly Hills parking garage in September. Patrons enter the 16-seat restaurant through a hidden wooden door near the valet stand. Instead of sake, the 12-course omakase menu comes with a wine pairing.

"Some nights we have a 15 to 20 person waiting list," said Ian Lokey, Sushi Note's beverage director.

Tucked inside the Rodeo Collection, a 7,000 square foot outdoor shopping mall, is the Hideaway, a steakhouse putting a refined twist on Baja cuisine. US Weekly called it "L.A.'s top destination for celebrity sightings."

Dante, located on the rooftop of the Maybourne Riviera hotel, is an import from New York City. (Dante's West Village location was voted the No. 1 bar in America multiple times.)

Since opening in July, Dante has become the new center of gravity of nightlife in Beverly Hills—the combination of its live music, panoramic views of the Los Angeles skyline, and craft-cocktails is drawing crowds.

Fashion and Food

And some parts of the changing food scene are riffing off what Beverly Hills is best known for: movie stars, fashion, and glamour. Take, for example, the 24-karat gold leaf topped croissant, which costs $26 and is a recent creation of Beverly Wilshire's executive pastry chef, Riccardo Menicucci, as an homage to the Oscar statuettes.

Michelin-starred Gucci Osteria on Rodeo Drive, which opened in 2020, is the first restaurant from Massimo Bottura in the U.S. and the only fashion brand-led eatery in Beverly Hills. It was clear Gucci was onto something by combining fashion and food, and last year, the Beverly Hills Conference & Visitors Bureau launched "Cuisine & Couture."

During fall fashion week, chefs took creative license to evoke fashion. At Espelette, the new Mediterranean eatery at the Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills, executive chef Steve Benjamin served Langoustine Papillote with frisée salad and basil. The langoustine and basil are wrapped in a dough and deep fried. Making the dish, Benjamin explained, "resembles the process of dressing for the runway in an alluring, statement silhouette."

What's Old Is New

Even decades-old dining institutions, such as Spago and La Dolce Vita, are getting some nips and tucks. On the occasion of its 40 birthday, Spago, the flagship Wolfgang Puck restaurant, is taking the opportunity to entirely revamp its bar program, bringing it in line with current tastes and trends. The bar at Spago used to be known as a place to drink, well, alcohol. In its new incarnation overseen by Adam Founeir, there is a spirit-free menu that he says "will become as robust as the main menu, not just an afterthought." (Founeir was named U.S. bartender of the year in 2021 by the U.S. Bartenders' Guild.)

On the spirit side, Founeir creations are an homage to everything from poetry to ice cream trucks. There's the Walrus & the Carpenter drink, named after the Lewis Carol poem about oysters. The libation is served with oyster shell and sea bean-infused vermouth and comes on a tray with the final stanzas of the poem. Founeir also created "The Good Humor," a strawberry margarita meant to evoke the experience of biting into the company's Strawberry Shortcake ice cream bar.

La Dolce Vita, which opened in 1966 and closed in 2020, was brought back to life last year.

The restaurant, a Frank Sinatra favorite, reopened in May under the ownership of New York City transplants Marc Rose and Med Abrous. The menu, Rose says, "reflects the way people are eating now."

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“Of course, there’s a veal parm on the menu that is amazing and incredible,” Rose adds. “But there’s also the most beautiful branzino piece of fish that you could eat.”

The century-old Beverly Hills Hotel is also shaking up its menu and approach to food. “Over the past decades, the culinary landscape in Beverly Hills has undergone significant evolution,” said Ashley James, the property’s new culinary director.

To keep pushing the envelope of what Beverly Hills restaurants are known for, James says his focus will be on “product awareness.”

“Paving the way,“ he says, “for an increased focus on natural, unprocessed plant-based dishes.”