

Esquire

Man at His Best

November 2003

STARRING

BRITNEY SPEARS, →
MADONNA,
CAMERON DIAZ, CINDY CRAWFORD,
PAMELA ANDERSON,
CATHERINE ZETA-JONES,
SHARON STONE,
AND MORE!

PLUS

+ **America's Best New Restaurants**
+ **EXCLUSIVE FIRST LOOK:**
The Coolest Car in the Entire World
+ **TUCKER CARLSON:**
The Whitest Man in Africa
+ **AND... Ten Things You Don't Know About Women**

70 Years
of Women
We Love



Ms. Spears re-creates a classic Esquire pose. See the original on page 7.

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(dining)

by john mariani



(2003)
**The Best New
Restaurants
in America**

ESQUIRE'S TWENTY-SECOND-ANNUAL SURVEY

You like to eat? You like a bargain? You like cocktail waitresses? Turn the page . . .



These are strange days in the dining

world—and that would be true even if one of our best new restaurants weren't in Atlantic City. Tougher times for restaurateurs means better food for people who want to eat well without the attendant pretentiousness (and expense-account prices) of the past. Consider the options on our list this year—everything from the most exuberant Spanish food in America to French haute cuisine at bistro prices to swaggering American classics. All of which is served up with genuine appreciation. The best restaurateurs have finally realized that diners don't much like being made to feel lucky to get in. Their new rallying cry? "We're really glad to see you." To which we say: The feeling is mutual.

Illustrations by Daniel Adel

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Bastide
LOS ANGELES

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NEW ORLEANS

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NEW YORK

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Ibiza
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Monsoon
CHICAGO

Opera
CHICAGO

Pampano
NEW YORK

Piperade
SAN FRANCISCO

Simon Kitchen and Bar
LAS VEGAS

Studio
LAGUNA BEACH, CALIFORNIA

Suilan
ATLANTIC CITY

Three Birds
LAKEWOOD, OHIO

The Upstairs at "21"
NEW YORK

Plus! The sleekest john, and a lovely lady who lives to serve you.



TREND WATCH Spanish restaurants, tasting menus at bargain prices, Kobe-beef everything, seafood shacks, entrées for under thirty-five dollars, waiters wearing couture, mini foods (served in threes), mojitos gone wild, Rat-pack-themed restaurants, old-fashioned cocktails, non-Spanish tapas.

(dining)

sixty-foot ceilings, humbling Corinthian columns, and Tiffany-style skylight, the building lives up to its landmark status. And thanks to chef Franklin Becker, Capitale's food lives up to its digs. Becker's gutsy talent is evident in difficult-to-pull-off creations like oxtail tortelloni in consomme flavored with Indian spices. John Lee's desserts—including a New York vanilla egg cream spritzed tableside from a jewel-colored antique seltzer bottle—are among the city's most inspired. Dining here is a transaction you're unlikely to forget, and worth the generous deposit you'll be required to make at meal's end.

(130 Bowery; 212-334-5500)

Carmen the Restaurant,

CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA



Chef Carmen Gonzalez is an eighty-eight-pound dynamo from Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, who has emerged as a savior to a

Latino crowd hungry for the kind of food previously found only in San Juan's best restaurants. In a town dominated by Cuban cuisine, Gonzalez turns out personalized renditions of her native fare, such as a towering terrine of ripe avocado and pink lobster layered with a tangy Key-lime mayo and crisp, salty-sweet plantain fritters. Her take on a beloved street pastry called *pionono* is stuffed with Key West shrimp and sautéed with a blend of onions, peppers, cilantro, garlic, and charred tomatoes. And Gonzalez's crisp, hot churro fritter with cinnamon sugar and a dark-chocolate dipping sauce is something we'd die to have for breakfast once a week—if it wouldn't actually kill us.

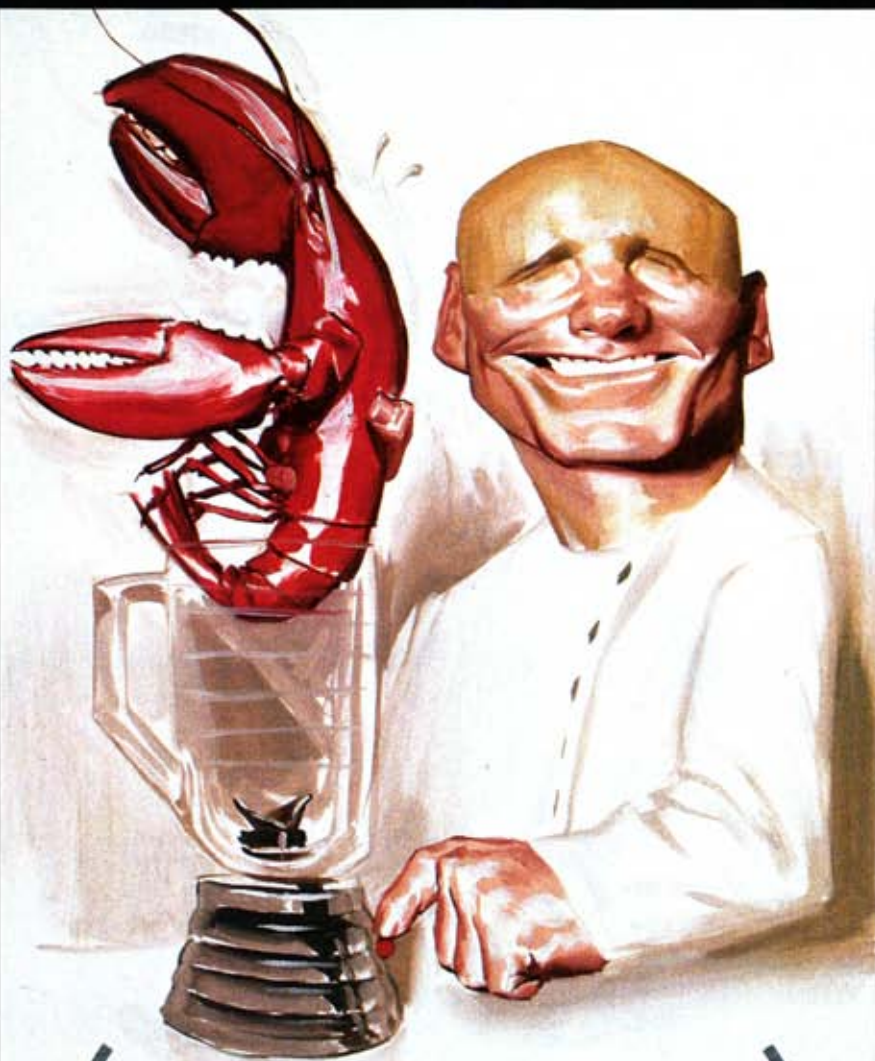
(700 Biltmore Way; 305-913-1944)

Great Bay, BOSTON



Chef Michael Schlow (whose name means "sly" in German) runs three of Boston's best restaurants: the tony

French Radius, the authentically Italian Via Matta, and now Great Bay, an upscale seafood joint near Fenway Park. In a long, tall, two-story room with the slick sixties look of *Catch Me If You Can* and a hopping raw bar smack in its center, executive chef Jeremy Sewall mixes things up: a Maine lobster roll with avocado, pickled onions,



Worst Use of a Blender: **FOAMS**. Everything from veggies to sea urchins is being whipped into a frothy, tasteless concoction that looks like the stuff that came out of Dan Aykroyd's Bass-O-Matic.

and crème fraîche; glistening hamachi with fennel, grapefruit, and just a grind of black pepper; and a wild striped bass with grilled sweet corn and chanterelles. Not too shabby for a town better known for chowder and fried clams.

(500 Commonwealth Avenue; 617-532-5300)

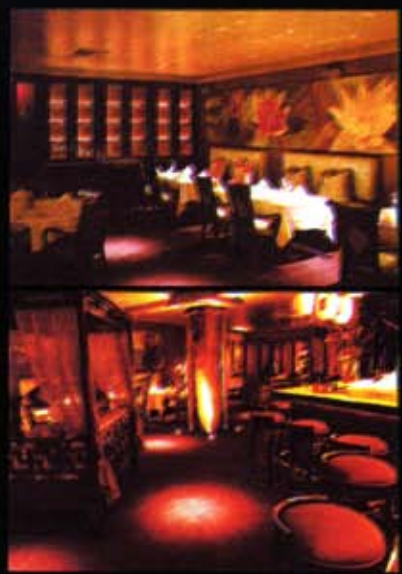


Jasper's,

PLANO, TEXAS

At chef Kent Rathbun's last project, a Dallas glam palace

called Abacus, buzz overshadowed the glitzed-up food. With Jasper's (named after painter Jasper Johns), Rathbun is more down-to-earth. His salt-crusted prime rib with onion jus and baby baked potatoes, barbecued pork tenderloin with bourbon-laced creamed corn and scallion potatoes, and crab cakes with grilled tomato and avocado cream nail the rugged spirit of New Texas cuisine. The place itself has plenty of Lone Star swagger, too, without giving in to any loopy nostalgia for cowboy arts and crafts. Sadly, Plano (twenty minutes from Dallas) is stranded in a



Best Design

CRUSTACEAN // Las Vegas

Three floors of seductive Asian antiques assembled by the An family exceed the wow factor of the original Crustacean Vietnamese restaurant in Beverly Hills. Private rooms with divans are evocative of that magical time when people actually knew what to do with divans.

IN FOODS | argan oil, pineapple, Medjool dates, chorizo, parsnips, torchon of foie gras, limoncillo, bananas Foster, watermelon, pork belly

OUT FOODS | beets, tuna tartare, coriander, olive-oil desserts, acorn squash, quail eggs

Most Unappealing Restaurant Names
Crapitto's, Houston / JamaicaMcKraze, Ventura, California / Pigasus B-B-Q, New Albany, Indiana / C. O. Jones, West Hartford, Connecticut (just think about it for a second)

Most Popular Order (Defunct)
KFC employee Carlos Ayala was arrested after handing two bags of marijuana to a customer who came for his usual chicken dinner at the franchise in Mill Valley, California. Police believe drug buyers were using the code words *extra biscuits* as a cover.

Food Fight of the Year
The owners of Brennan's restaurant in New Orleans sued Terrance Brennan, owner of Terrance Brennans Seafood & Chop House in New York, to stop him from using his own name on his restaurant. During questioning, the restaurateur said, lawyers for the New Orleans joint tried to prove "similarity" between the two places by asking, "Brennan's has fish on the menu. Do you have fish on the menu? Brennan's serves chicken. Do you serve chicken?" The judge denied an injunction.



Worst New Gimmick, Regressive Division: **SEAFOOD SORBET**, served at Ibiza in New Haven, Connecticut.
Best New Gimmick, Regressive Division: **COTTON CANDY**, served at Pao in Miami Beach.

dry county. If you want a well-mixed margarita or a bottle of Iron Horse pinot, you'll have to show your driver's license to become a club member for the night. (7161 Bishop Road; 469-229-9111)

Jean-Robert at Pigall's,

CINCINNATI



Before people go mocking Ohio's culinary sophistication, they should try to get a reservation here on short notice. Chef and owner Jean-Robert de Cavel, formerly of the five-star Maisonette, has revamped the frumpy home of Pigall's into an eye-opening venue with plenty of polished blond wood, a bar covered in green lava stone, and comfy cream-colored booths. Seventy-five dollars lands you a three-course Parisian dinner of rabbit confit with tarragon-scented mustard cream, a beautifully roasted guinea hen barded with bacon in a lightly herbed cream sauce, and a pineapple-

and-coconut strudel topped with homemade banana ice cream. The price also includes tax, gratuity, and valet parking. See if you can get that kind of VIP treatment on the coasts.

(127 West Fourth Street; 513-721-1345)

Market, ST. HELENA, CALIFORNIA



Nick Peyton has done the impossible: opened a classic American restaurant that both locals and Napa Valley's thronging tourists will love. This is a drop-in kind of place, with rugged stone walls, a stately oak bar, and a New American menu based on whatever chef Douglas Keane likes most at the local markets (hence the name). His daily shopping excursions have yielded sweet white corn (made into a chowder with chive blossoms and the crunch of popcorn), green heirloom tomatoes (fried and served with pickled watermelon rind), and Bing cherries (baked into a pie that