

{ The Oscars: Who Should Win }

by Steve Erickson

Los Angeles

20
TOP
BAKERIES
IN LA

» THE MOVIE LOVER'S GUIDE

Obsessive Fans!
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Cool Screenings!
And the Best
Seat in Town!

Plus:
Kate Winslet »
On Leo, Sex
And Oscar

+

IS THE
DOWNTURN
DOOMING
DOWNTOWN?

by Mark Lacter

WHEN MOM'S
TOO OLD
TO DRIVE

by Anne-Taylor Fleming

TIPS FROM
A LOVE COACH
(SERIOUSLY)

FEBRUARY 2009 ★ \$4.95



The List

» EDITED BY LESLEY BARGAR

DOWNTOWN & MID CITY

CAFÉ PINOT ★

This kitchen has perfected its high-protein lunchtime salad (the hanger steak is a favorite). The dinner menu's crisp chicken breast with fries and veal breast with root vegetables define Cal-bistro standards. The surroundings, however, take precedence, with the terrace blending into the cypresses and gardens of the Central Library. One of L.A.'s best restaurant patios is a public one. » 700 W. 5th St. (213-239-6500 or patinagroup.com). L Mon.-Fri.; D nightly. Full bar. California \$\$\$

CIUDAD ★★

We would come for the *caipirinhas* and live Latin music alone. You can get just as strong a buzz, though, from your plate. It's in the chocolaty smoke of the cayenne-rubbed pork chop, the citrus snap of the Peruvian ceviche, and the flan that makes vanilla seem anything but. With this amalgam of flavors from Spain, Latin America, and Puerto Rico, Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger continue to bring a fiery alternative to downtown dining. » Union Bank Plaza, 445 S. Figueroa St. (213-486-5171 or ciudad-la.com). L Mon.-Fri.; D nightly. Full bar. Latin \$\$\$

LANGER'S DELI

Despite a dicey location across from MacArthur Park, this acclaimed deli thrives on the strength of its corned beef sandwiches. As proof of L.A.'s great ethnic stew, chances are the people eating matzo balls at the next table will be speaking Spanish, Korean, Tagalog, or Japanese. » 704 S. Alvarado St. (213-483-8050 or langersdeli.com). B-L Mon.-Sat. Beer and wine. Deli \$

NICKEL DINER

This may forever be known as the place that brought the bacon doughnut to L.A. It's not surprising that the pastry chef has worked with Thomas Keller, but what makes this newfangled downtown diner even more special is the cumbersome-yet-juicy burger, the spicy barbecued pork hash, the selection of old-timey soda pops, the crispy-edged buttermilk pancakes, and the painted sign uncovered during renovation that boasts "this is the place." » 524 S. Main St. (213-623-8301 or 5cdiner.com). B-L Wed.-Sun. No alcohol. Diner \$

PATINA ★★★

Being in the sweeping Walt Disney Concert Hall could give any place an atmospheric boost. But Patina's continued innovation and attention to detail remind us why Joachim Spichal has built one of L.A.'s stronger culinary empires. The menu reads like an encyclopedia of classic upscale dining: You can have caviar to start, followed by foie gras and lobster tail. Chef Theo Schoenegger's creative flourishes are evident in garnishes like a banana puree with curry emulsion, a vibrant sauce *vierge*, or a sauternes sabayon, which push what could be stuffy to the sublime. » Walt Disney Concert Hall, 141 S. Grand Ave. (213-972-3331 or patinagroup.com). L Tue.-Fri.; D nightly. Full bar. Cal-French \$\$\$

WATER GRILL ★★★

Pre-theatergoers and post-boardroom suits flock here for seafood dishes accompanied by the likes of cumin-flavored spaetzle and candied tangerines. As adventurous as chef David LeFevre's presentations can be, the milder fish, such as barramundi and cobia, are never overpowered. Despite the warm woods and deco accents, the setting at times can feel corporate, but the

» SMALL BITE

After being closed for nearly a year, Govind Armstrong's flagship **Table 8** is set to reopen next month in the former Chocolat space on Melrose.



» New This Month: Drago Centro

This is the grand downtown debut for chef-restaurateur Celestino Drago. The space is striking, with a glass wine tower and mammoth windows. The food is a mishmash of northern and southern styles. Venison carpaccio with walnuts is elemental, and grilled artichokes, Belgian endive, and pistachios make for a triumphant salad. The star of the handmade pasta menu is the buckwheat *pizzoccheri* tossed with cabbage, potatoes, fontina, and sage cream. Mains include crispy skate with balsamic and roasted squab stuffed with focaccia. As the leaning tower of vino attests, the wine list is hefty. A walnut *semi-freddo* with roasted figs is weightless. » 525 S. Flower St., Ste. 120, downtown (213-228-8998 or dragocentro.com). L Mon.-Fri.; D Mon.-Sat. Full bar. Italian \$\$\$

raw bar, which has a half-dozen types of oysters in its broad selection, is rowdy come happy hour. Don't skip dessert. » 544 S. Grand Ave. (213-891-0900 or watergrill.com). L Mon.-Fri.; D nightly. Full bar. Seafood \$\$

LOS FELIZ & SILVER LAKE

BLAIR'S ★★

On a quiet stretch in Silver Lake, Blair's fills candlelit tables and casual bar stools with regulars and first dates. They gather for sweet potato gnocchi with wild mushrooms, pan-roasted halibut with Spanish chorizo, and what could be the best short ribs in town. Doughnuts may be de rigueur on menus these days, but how many

are made with Belgian Abbey ale and dunked in toffee sauce? » 2903 Rowena Ave., Silver Lake (323-660-1882 or blairsrestaurant.com). B-L-D daily. California \$\$\$

CANELÉ ★

Chef Corina Weibel worked at Campanile and Lucques before opening her own restaurant, and you can see it in her dishes. A whole roasted *branzino* looks up from your plate alongside a bowl of fingerling potatoes, olives, and caper berries. The beef bourguignonne on a bed of egg noodles is rich and fundamental. A buttermilk biscuit topped with *crème fraîche* is filled with poached pears one day, figs the next. A token of thanks—a fresh-baked *canelé*, natch, at the door—sends customers on their way. » 3219 Glendale Blvd., Atwater Village (323-666-7133 or canele-la.com). D Tue.-Sun.; brunch Sat.-Sun. Beer and wine. New Mediterranean \$\$

LAMILL

From the tableside java experiments to the unbeatable scone, this "coffee boutique" is no mere corner café.