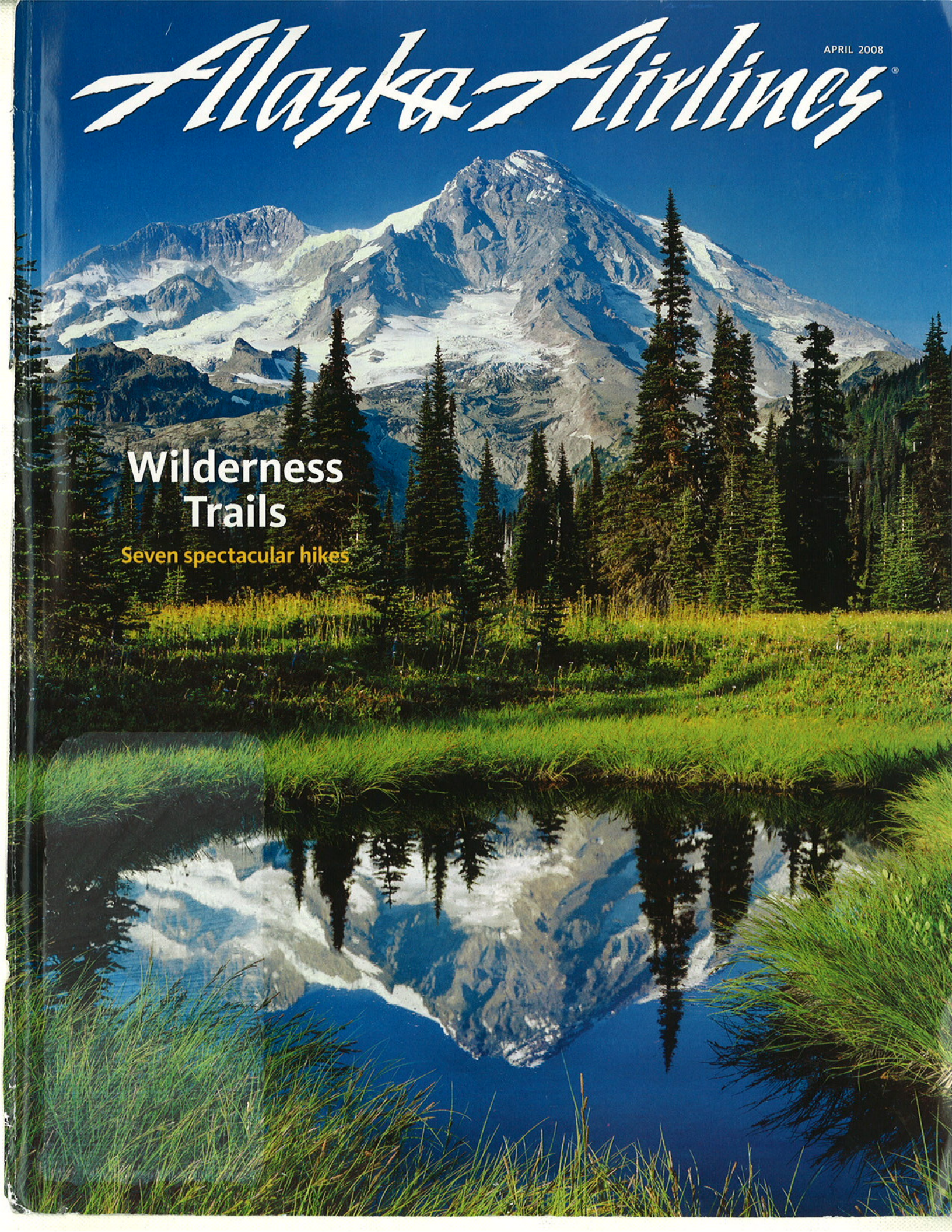


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## Contemporary Comforts

Luxury and style at three new hotels

By Maribeth Mellin

### THE GRAND DEL MAR

5300 Grand Del Mar Court; 888-314-2030; [www.TheGrandDelMar.com](http://www.TheGrandDelMar.com).

Rooms start at \$430 per night.

A sense of grandeur resonates throughout the new 249-room Grand Del Mar hotel, which is set like an English country manor amid rose gardens and sweeping lawns, and surrounded by the 4,100-acre Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve.

Designed in the style of Addison Mizner, who created the classic Palm Beach style of the 1920s, the architecture combines Mediterranean, Moroccan and Italian elements, and includes several wings, courtyards, verandas and ballrooms. High marble arches frame cozy clusters of couches in the lobby lounge. Ceiling-high, polished-wood bookshelves line the walls of an adjacent library. Framed, hand-painted Italian tiles decorate the walls near guestrooms.

The rooms' gold-and-beige-striped wall coverings, gilded crown moldings, dark-wood headboards and desks, fabric-shaded lamps and abundant mirrors make the generous space feel elegant and serene. French doors open to spacious balconies with views of chaparral-covered hills or green fairways. Goose-down pillows look like puffy

clouds atop beds dressed in Pratesi linens, facing 40-inch LCD TVs.

Another television screen separates the dual sinks and mirrors in bathrooms replete with deep European soaking tubs—bath salts included—and marble showers.

There's also much to enjoy elsewhere at the hotel. You'll want to visit the library for the lavish afternoon tea or sit beside an open-air fireplace on a terrace for sunset martinis. And you'll certainly want to enjoy the high-powered whirlpool tubs, foggy steam rooms and relaxation rooms with fireplaces at The Spa at The Grand Del Mar, where treatments such as the stone, scrub and tonic massage "Expression" render your skin luminous. Or, perhaps you'll be beckoned by one of the four heated swimming pools, the children's club, or The Grand Golf Club, a 7,160-yard, par-72, Tom Fazio-designed course.

Top: The San Diego skyline rises beyond the Ivy Hotel's rooftop pool and its inviting chaises and cabanas.

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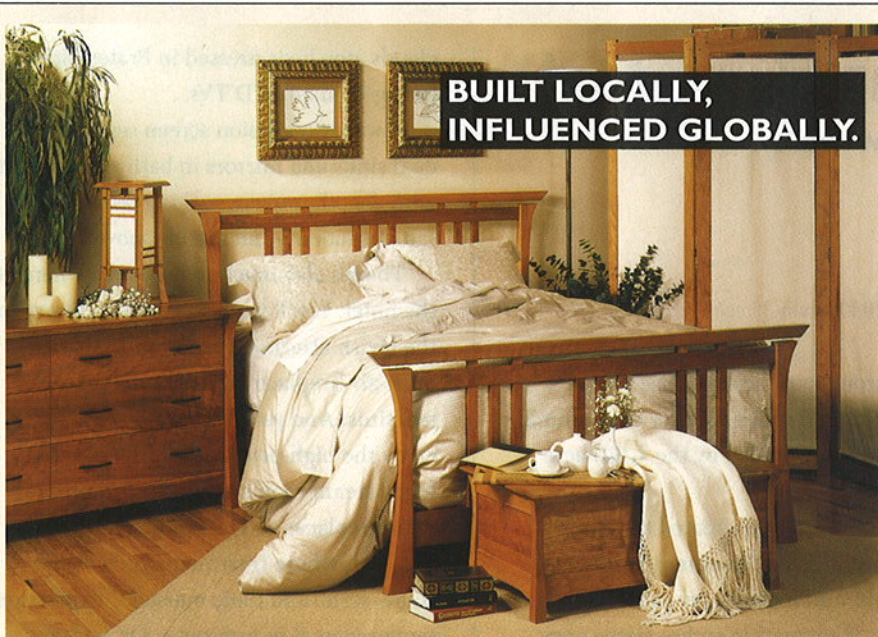
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In addition, there are numerous trails in the nature preserve. The perfect way to culminate your hike might be with a homemade mango or mint gelato at the gourmet cafe Cent' Anni—named after a traditional Italian toast meaning “one hundred years.”

Dining at The Grand Del Mar adds to the feeling of a country retreat. Amaya, the casual choice for all meals, has plentiful terrace seating and several indoor dining areas with fireplaces. The menu features Mediterranean salads, soups and entrees, and the perfect Grand Burger. At Addison, the award-winning dinner restaurant, Chef William Bradley has developed a European-influenced menu that incorporates fresh local ingredients, and Jesse Rodriguez—whom *Wine & Spirits* magazine named one of the “Best New Sommeliers of 2007”—oversees a wine list with an astounding 1,800 selections and a more than 20,000-bottle cellar. The restaurant is located up a hill from the hotel building; chauffeurs ferry guests between the two.

## IVY HOTEL

600 F St.; 877-489-4489; [www.ivyhotel.com](http://www.ivyhotel.com).

Rooms start at \$299 per night.

It's no wonder celebrities have been dropping by the Ivy Hotel ever since the doors opened in May 2007: The hotel, on the edge of the Gaslamp Quarter, buzzes with sophisticated style and energy.

SB Architects' four-year, \$90 million renovation of the 90-year-old Maryland Hotel has given the Ivy a movie-set feel. The hotel's restaurant draws a chic crowd; patrons queue up for the hotel's nightclub, Envy; and lights glow from the open-air rooftop lounge, Eden.

Inside the hotel, Powerstrip Studios, an interior design company with motion-picture credits, furthered the movie-set feel. The lobby's pillars are wrapped in braided leather; lights gleam from floor spots; and a wall-size painting dazzles with vibrant red and orange splashes. Study the painting long enough, and you'll discover the words, “I can't stand to live a day without you.”

Each of the hotel's 159 rooms and 17 specialty suites is a visual and tactile treat. As you step into your room you might find a pulsing lounge beat emanating from the

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42-inch flat-screen TV; low-slung, leather chairs tucked under a sleek, wood desktop that runs the length of a wall; and orchids gracing the nightstand. Wet bars are stocked with premium liquors and espresso machines; silken Thai linens hug low platform beds; and plush microfiber robes and soft cotton bath sheets hang by the bath.

Butlers are on call 24 hours a day to deliver flutes of sparkling wine—complimentary upon arrival—or water, or even to draw a bubble bath with your selection from a menu of Molton Brown scents: Heavenly Ginger, Blissful Temple, Sea Moss Stress Reliever and more.

In many rooms, the bathroom is separated from the sleeping area by a tub-to-ceiling glass wall. In some suites, glass-enclosed showers feature adjustable settings that make the walls as clear or as opaque as you desire.

Guests have complimentary VIP admittance to the chic, multilevel Envy nightclub, where dark leather banquettes overlook a dance floor that jumps with the DJ's beat Thursday through Saturday. Ivy guests also have easy access to the block-long rooftop, which is home to the hotel's pool and the Eden lounge, with their poolside cabanas and lounging beds.

#### HARD ROCK HOTEL SAN DIEGO

207 Fifth Ave.; 866-751-7625; [www.hardrock-hotelsd.com](http://www.hardrock-hotelsd.com). Rooms start at \$265 per night.

Just when it seemed San Diego's Gaslamp Quarter couldn't get any hotter, along came the Hard Rock. Located at the foot of Fifth Avenue, across the street from the San Diego Convention Center and San Diego Bay, and steps away from Petco Park, the 12-story, 420-room hotel opened in December 2007 with a series of bashes, including a concert with the Black Eyed Peas, who also designed one of the hotel's 17 Rock Star Suites.

When you enter the atriumlike lobby you might find a Harley-Davidson on display in one corner, a DJ mixing tunes in another, and framed guitars and memorabilia from big-time rock stars decorating the walls. This hotel is all about music, of course, and music is incorporated into nearly every aspect. Even the Rock Spa

slips some classics—such as Simon and Garfunkel's *Homeward Bound*—into the ethereal sound track that plays as masterful therapists knead away knots during the Dream Weaver massage.

At check-in, or when reserving online, guests indicate their favorite musical style—jazz, classic rock, alternative—which then drifts from speakers on the 42-inch flat-screen HDTVs when the guests enter the room.

Having your own playlist going provides a rock-star-treatment feeling, which is enhanced by the "jack-pack" technology in every room—allowing plug-and-play access to your personal audio player (iPod or MP3), video camera or notebook computer—and by the trademark Sleep Like a Rock beds dressed in 300-count cotton sheets, and the rock-candy lollipop provided during turndown service.

The Hard Rock offers three levels of rooms: Studios, Hard Rock Suites and Rock Star Suites, all of which forsake the traditional mini-bar in favor of "green-room-inspired refreshment centers": mixing stations where guests can shake their own martinis or blend their own margaritas.

Hard Rock Suites are divided into sleeping and lounging areas, with the sink and vanity set between the two. Doors hide a separate shower and water closet, and a bedside curtain provides privacy. Some Hard Rock Suites feature balconies overlooking the downtown skyline, but for an even more luxurious blend of indoor and outdoor living, reserve a Rock Star Suite, which might offer an urban-loft feel, with an outdoor deck on the rooftop just steps from the pool, or a balcony with an outdoor fire pit. From design concept to layout, no two Rock Star Suites are alike.

The Hard Rock also offers plenty of options when it's time to get out and live that rock-star life. The hotel is home to Nobu restaurant; Maryjane's Coffee Shop; two bars, the Sweetwater Saloon and the Moonstone Lounge rooftop pool bar; and a nearly 9,000-square-foot outdoor-event space called Woodstock. ▲

Maribeth Mellin lives in San Diego where she writes about travel.



DAVID JOSEPH

## Epicurean Delights

Three new San Diego restaurants

By Marcia Manna

San Diego's food scene got a tantalizing infusion late last year when three new restaurants—Nobu San Diego, Damon Gordon's Quarter Kitchen and Currant American Brasserie—made their homes in America's Finest City. One delivers a new take on Japanese fusion; another, a sumptuous spin on comfort food. And from the third, cuisine influenced by the bounty of California and the brasseries of Paris.

### NOBU SAN DIEGO

207 Fifth Ave.; 619-814-4124; [www.noburestaurants.com/sandiego/index.html](http://www.noburestaurants.com/sandiego/index.html). Entrees: \$30–\$54.

In 1994, Nobu Matsuhisa garnered rave reviews when he launched Nobu New York with business partners Robert De Niro and restaurateur Drew Nieporent. Since then, the chef has brought his flair for applying a Latin touch to Japanese cuisine to restaurants in locations ranging from Waikiki to Mykonos. In December he opened his 16th restaurant—Nobu San Diego—inside the Hard Rock Hotel.

In the lounge, just inside Nobu, couples sip Matsuhisa martinis, a blend of vodka and premium sake flavored with ginger and garnished with cucumber. Across the way, six sushi chefs slice and shape seafood specialties behind an L-shaped bar. Light bulbs encased in pinecone-

shaped lattice sculptures are surrounded by hanging rectangles of red fabric, and the yellow glow from the wood-fire oven can be seen through a wall of horizontal wood branches. As waiters carrying platters of fragrant dishes wind past tables, they call out "Irashaimase!"—Welcome!—by way of customary Japanese greeting.

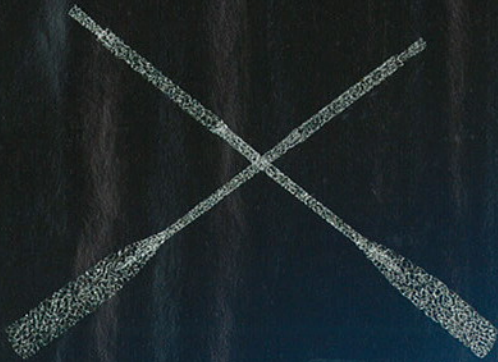
My guest, Pat Sherman—as skilled at manipulating chopsticks as he is savvy about sushi—and I listen as our waiter, Dylan, enthuses about the extensive menu that boasts hot and cold specialties, a page of sushi and sashimi offerings, and a page of main entrees.

Our culinary adventure begins with a pair of intriguing appetizers that look like miniature works of abstract art. On one plate, small curls of whitefish arranged on cucumber slices are prepared with rocoto chiles and served with citrus juices. On another, pale pink salmon is served in what

Above: Lights with bamboo detailing impart an exotic feel to the sushi bar and lounge at Nobu San Diego.

Brent Kee Young, Hotel Lobby

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Nobu calls the “new style sashimi” way, meaning the fish is seared by a hot drizzle of olive oil, and sprinkled with sesame seeds and garlic. Every bite is a marriage of salty, spicy and citrus flavors that complement the delicacy of the fish.

From there, we move on to the Nobu hot dishes, which are just as heavenly. Pat and I savor an order of black cod with miso. The fish is marinated for three days in a sauce made of sake, miso paste and sugar; flash-grilled; and then baked until the outside is caramelized and the white silken flesh inside flakes at the touch. The king crab tempura, served with a sweet *amazu ponzu* (vinegar, soy sauce and lemon) sauce, is flash-fried so that it's crunchy on the outside and moist within. Slivers of red onion and slices of jalapeño add color to the presentation.

We finish our meal with desserts that prove to be an innovative pairing of hot and cold, and bold and delicate flavors. Pat tries orange and cream-colored layers of Japanese pumpkin cream with chai tea mousse, topped with crunchy bits of caramelized pecans. I sample the warm chocolate cake, topped with white chocolate sauce and accompanied by a mound of green-tea ice cream.

#### DAMON GORDON'S QUARTER KITCHEN

600 F St.; 619-814-2000; [www.quarter-kitchen.com](http://www.quarter-kitchen.com). Entrees: \$30–\$48.

Food connoisseurs are making regular visits to Damon Gordon's Quarter Kitchen, on the ground floor of the Ivy Hotel. The restaurant has a contemporary interior decorated with luxurious, yet understated details. The high ceiling is framed by recessed, orange lighting, giving the room a warm glow. Low-back, wraparound chairs circle tables set with white china and honeycomb-style placemats.

Our hostess, in an elegant backless cocktail dress, leads us to our table—with banquette seats adorned by plump velvet pillows—where the vantage offers a close-up view of an open stainless-steel kitchen staffed by 10 chefs in tall white hats.

We start by splitting a soup and salad. The spicy duck soup arrives steaming in a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 97

FROM PAGE 96 deep, round bowl. Dense meatballs dance in a broth thick with rice noodles, shiitake mushrooms and green onions. The spiciness is tempered by a cool, crisp salad, which the menu dubs "The Raw and the Cooked." A bed of vinaigrette-coated greens is decorated with tender raw and tempura-fried baby artichoke bottoms, topped with generous shavings of parmesan cheese.

Perusing the main courses, we consider comfort-food items prepared with upscale ingredients: The "Kobe Cookout" is big enough for two to share, says the menu, with a pair of mini burgers, and mini dogs with chili, cheese and onions.

The rack of lamb and the roasted double pork chop also look enticing, but I finally choose the lobster risotto. I'm thrilled to be served a large, sumptuous piece of white lobster meat and a red claw atop a bed of creamy risotto, fragrant with tarragon and crisp-cooked baby vegetables.

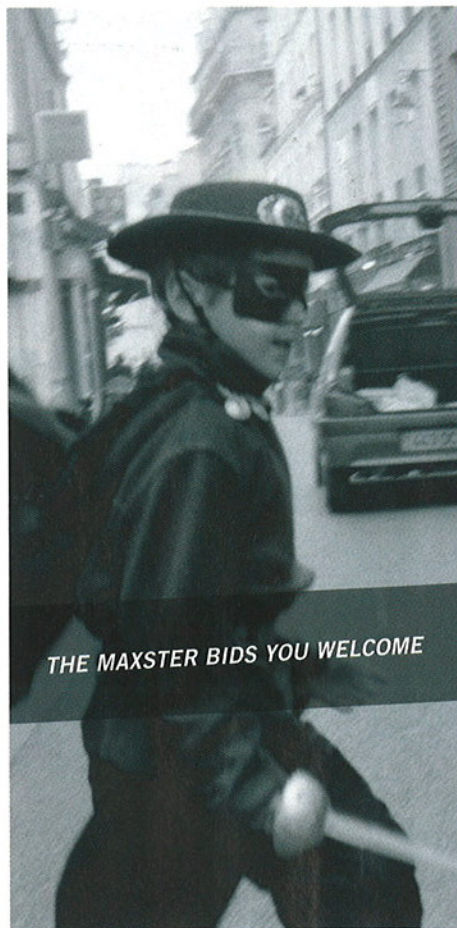
Pat orders an 8-ounce prime filet from the grill menu. It's a Meyer Natural Angus cut of melt-in-your-mouth choice steak, served with both a bordelaise and a béarnaise sauce. Side options include macaroni and cheese—laced with Gruyère—but Pat decides on truffled fries. The homemade french fries are drizzled with truffle oil and accompanied by regular and spicy chipotle ketchup, and he graciously allows me to share.

The whole meal is so rich in taste and creativity that we don't have room for two desserts, so we share a Golden Delicious apple tart, served warm with a side of mascarpone-cheese ice cream.

#### CURRENT AMERICAN BRASSERIE

140 W. Broadway; 619-702-6309; [www.currentrestaurant.com](http://www.currentrestaurant.com). Entrees: \$16–\$32.

Chef Jonathan Pflueger, who oversaw the reopening of New York's Russian Tea Room, has brought an international sensibility to Current American Brasserie, inside the Sofia Hotel. The restaurant, which evokes a Parisian brasserie, is made all the more appealing for its proximity to the Civic and Spreckels theaters. High ceilings and wide, arched doorways lend a spacious feeling to the intimate restaurant.



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