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LAS
VEGAS

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PREFACE

Las Vegas

Las Vegas has turned itself into one of the premier cities to go for eating. New York. Los Angeles. San Francisco. Las Vegas should be counted among those in the same breath. Some would balk that the city is still in its infancy at this point, that it is only built upon the excess of America and the desire to sin and commit oneself to less than savory acts and therefore lacks any heritage to give it a valuable character so that it may compete with the more esteemed food cities. These people have too much time. And I will happily admit I sin in

the city. I'm a glutton. I go and I eat. Three meals a day and there better be a place for me to grab a snack. No shame.

In no place but Las Vegas can one find culinary superstars like Bobby Flay, Wolfgang Puck and Francois Payard (sure, New York has Flay and Payard, but Puck is a West Coast loyalist, unless you count his WP Expresses in the airports, I don't) and hit restaurant concepts that would only be possible in a city built upon excess. Simply put: Vegas is a culinary capital that should not be overlooked.

-sean

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LAS VEGAS



The facade of CUT at The Palazzo.

CUT

Wolfgang Puck - The Palazzo

CUT is the first of many Wolfgang Puck restaurants listed here (and no I'm not getting some kickback from Mr. Puck, probably should though). This is for the simple fact that no restaurateur is as consistent and has the variety as Wolfgang Puck. You can go back to the same place several times and have a fantastic meal each and every time and never get the same thing twice. Each dish deserves its spot on the menu and holds its own.

CUT is Puck's premier steakhouse located in The Palazzo. Walking in, you wonder, is this a restaurant? I mean, I see people eating there, so it must be, but it looks

more like a socialite hotspot or an art gallery. Tall walls of glass and exquisite lighting adorn the place. And the food only makes it better.

Starters whet the appetite appropriately without being overindulgent. Get the Burrata, a semi-solid Italian cheese. Drizzled with olive oil and balsamic, joined by thin slices of prosciutto and melon, it is more than good. Good doesn't even begin to describe it. It is milky, creamy, luscious, smooth, sweet, tart, rich, and more.

Did I mention there's a bread tray? There is. A selection of several bread is offered to each guest. My recommendation? Take two of the pretzel rolls for yourself



CUT's stunning interior design.



and make someone else grab the others so you can just take a bite of them to taste. Because it will be the pretzel roll that steals your attention. I made the mistake of trying one of each. But I dug deep, got a second pretzel roll and knew I'd be hurting that night. Eh, walk it off the next day. Living should not be squandered.

The steaks range from small cuts to the largest Porterhouse



Wolfgang hard at work on the line at CUT.

wonderful splashes of flavor to an already perfect steak.

If you have the room left, and you should, try a Giandua Souffle. The airy souffle with hazelnut and chocolate ice cream doused in chocolate sauce will send you into cardiac arrest, but if it was my last meal, I wouldn't be disappointed. CUT never disappoints. Admittedly, don't think you're gonna get out of this place on the cheap. The word "Premier" alone costs a Jackson. And I don't mean a nickel. But you're in Vegas, do it right.

Did I mention there's a bread tray? There is.



you could ever lay eyes on. There are, of course, chicken, fish, and lamb dishes available for those not so into the red meat. But getting an American Wagyu Filet Mignon medium-rare crusted to perfection has no equal. Stacks of onion rings joined my steak with a lovely array of sauces that added

MESA Grill

Bobby Flay - Caesar's Palace

Just around the corner from the Pussycat dolls and adjacent to rows upon rows of slot machines, MESA Grill offers a quite place from the insanity of Vegas under fire-roasted reds, sun-hued yellows, salty blues, and cactus greens. This is American Southwest cuisine at its best. Chef Bobby Flay does it like no other and, in my mind, tops them all. The blend of flavors he creates is uniquely American but plays to the Southwestern roots he developed. From duck in blue corn pancakes to roasted



Colors abound on the plates at CUT and MESA Grill.



Left: MESA Grill Chef Bobby Flay
Above: Bold and brave, the style of MESA

MESA Grill does a Sunday Brunch that offers a completely unique menu. You shouldn't sleep in Las Vegas, so go get brunch on Sunday.

were over-spiced and under-sweet. And they had the audacity to not make Churros during lunch. Being a die-hard Californian, Churros run in my

prawns with a garlic tamale, the appetizers will get you going and awaiting more.

The main entree menu varies by season, and as such, each meal might be different. One season it might be a Green Chile Cioppino. Another may be Red Snapper or Spiced Pork Tenderloin. Either way, order a tamale on the side and dig in. The heat in the dishes is never overbearing or tear-inducing. The balance is maintained and it is the flavor that comes through. Cactus-Pear and Peach Margaritas make great accompaniments if you're in the mood (I'll stick to my Roy Rogers). It is worth noting that



The classic Southwest of America influences the design.

One disparaging note. As of my last visit, the Pastry Chef had changed from Vicki Wells, a goddess or at least minor deity of the pastry world, to a new chef. The desserts that time simply lacked the elegant flavors Wells composed and



Roasted Garlic Shrimp Tamale



MESA Grill's perennial favorite Sixteen Spice Pork Tenderloin and their well-appointed bar.

blood. If Wells isn't back, go around the corner and grab something at Payard. The rest of MESA Grill will more than satisfy however.

Payard

Francois Payard - Caesar's Palace

Down the lane from Beijing Noodle No.9 and across from Rao's is the chocolate-covered dream Payard that could have only been concocted by one of the world's finest pastry chefs, Francois Payard. The flowing chocolate colored curves, rich golden accents, and overall luscious architecture that comprises Payard are enough to give you diabetes on approach. But you should never worry about getting anything that is less than balanced and decadent at Payard. From French Macarons to Roches, crisp cookie bits drenched in different kinds of



Above: Chef Francois Payard, Below: The Payard Storefront





chocolate, there are plenty of take-away items to pass to your friends if you are so kind to bring them back anything. I'm not. It's too good. Okay, you can have one. A small one. Roches are the chocolate equivalent to crack.

Aside from the chocolates and other delectables available from the storefront, you can also walk up and grab a croissant or other assorted pastry for breakfast (go for the almond or chocolate ones) or even a sandwich for lunch. But you would be missing a golden opportunity. There is

Breakfast is so indulgent, it's not funny. It's awesome.

also a Dining Room adjacent to the storefront.

Orientated in a circle, all centered around a chef doing his dance out in the open, is a stellar way to kick off a day



Almond Croissants, an acceptable breakfast.

or enjoy lunch or even dinner. Who knew a pastry chef would be so accomplished in all meals? Breakfast is so indulgent it's almost not funny. It's awesome. Chocolate waffles smeared with chocolate hazelnut spread and covered in caramelized bananas are so over the top

and all kinds of awesome, I have to restrain myself from not gorging on them. It's bliss. Lunch and dinner offer great French classics like Croque Madame, but you know you want a waffle.

Thanks Francois, for making chocolate acceptable at all times of the day.



The Dining Room at Payard, the peak of elegance.



Coma-inducing deliciousness at the Payard Dining Room and Storefront.



Wolfgang Puck Bar and Grill

Wolfgang Puck - MGM Grand

Placed right out on the casino floor in the MGM Grand is Wolfgang Puck's stellar refectory. Bold colors fill the glass panels on its outskirts with an overlay of flower photography adding a wonderful texture to the modernistic design. The dining area is open and spacious, no cramped tight booths here. It is a modern bar and grill without all of the oddities normally associated with a neighborhood hangout.

The menu is classic Puck. Offerings include salads for starters, as well as less traditional potato chips with blue cheese sauce and Maytag blue cheese crumbled over it. Puck is famous for his



California Cool at Wolfgang Puck Bar and Grill.

pizzas; he created the concept of Californian-style pizza. The pizzas offered can be traditional and over the top, but always good. Sandwiches are unique and can play at Wolfgang's Austrian heritage with their fillings. But you could always order a fantastic panini or steak frites. Who doesn't love a well-seasoned steak paired with crisp French Fries.

Save a bit of your appetite for dessert. I got my first taste of Banoffee Pie here, a classic



Just like Mom didn't make.





British dessert consisting of a flaky tart shell, caramel sauce, banana pudding, and whipped cream covering it. Of course Puck punches this one up to higher levels, and that's why I love this place. It's a Californian bar with reinvented classics. Tastes like home.

Emeril's New Orleans Fish House

Emeril Lagasse - MGM Grand

I got my first taste of the culinary life through Emeril Lagasse. He got me into

cooking and fine food. I thank him for that and blame him simultaneously. My first taste of celebrity cheldom was at his Emeril's in Orlando. It was everything I imagined it would be: fine food in a stellar setting. It met all of my expectations and then some. Finding out Chef Lagasse didn't have just one outpost made me rather excited. There's one in Vegas? I'm there. He's got several places in Vegas? Oh crap, looks like I'll have to extend my stay.

Passing through wrought-iron fish, one immediately notices the styling. The quirky decor incorporates Cajun/Creole design aesthetics (and trust me, there is a different between the



two) yet retains the white linen look that signals high class eatery. A wine cellar rises to the ceiling around which tables

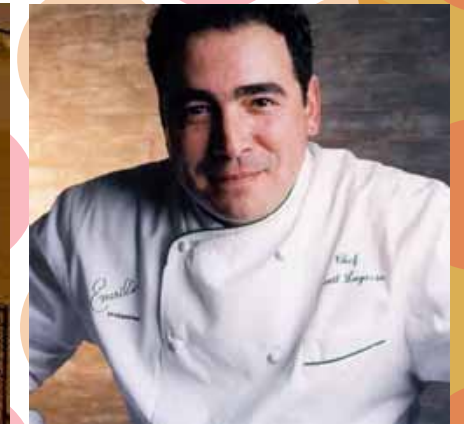
I thank...and blame Emeril.

are orientated putting guests in the middle of the action.

The cuisine offered bared a striking resemblance to the Emeril's in Orlando, something I enjoyed, getting to relive my first taste of culinary greatness. The Barbecued Shrimp appetizer with a petite rosemary scone is my top pick. Just don't intend on sharing the scone, I tried that once. It doesn't work. You'll be like a little kid vying for the bigger half. And the shrimp aren't like

a traditional barbecue, full of tomatoes and sweetness. No, they are smokey and rich. Luscious and deep. A fantastic

alternative to my original conceptions of barbecue. Entrees run the gamut from fish to steaks and back again. You



Chef Emeril Lagasse



The interior astounds...as does the food (see below)

can't really go wrong. Well, you can, if you're a vegan or vegetarian. But surely you can make an exception this once? There you go.

This outpost of Emeril's is a stunning example of why Emeril Lagasse is a household name and why he put Food Network on the map.



Inspired design gives an open feeling to this hotspot.



Tony Chi once again works his magic on the design of Noodles.

Noodles

Bellagio

Housed in the Bellagio, tucked neatly away in a corner of the casino out of earshot from the clanging coins, blinding lights, and glitz of casino waitresses, is Noodles. This Asian eatery is a twist on modern design and food culture. Varying styles and types of noodles inside glass jars cover the wall. Everything from Italian Orecciete to Hong Kong style noodles can be found in the jars. And the floors? They've got noodles in them too. This fanciful creation is tactfully done and give a pleasant, fun atmosphere to dine in.

The food hovers around the Pacific Rim sector, showcasing all kinds of noodle-based

dishes found throughout Asian cuisine. A steaming bowl of udon is always welcome to me. It satiates the appetite and fills the soul at the same

Noodles offers steamed BBQ Pork Buns. Get Some.

time. But some effort should be made to visit Noodles during lunch on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday. During the weekend lunch crowd, Noodles offer traditional Chinese Dim Sum in addition to their regular menu.

The dim sum collection covers all bases of pork, chicken, and shrimp dumplings, but be sure to ask the waiters with the carts for some baked BBQ pork buns. These golden-hued circles of artistry are, well, I think the description I just gave should give you a good starting point. The pastry is

tinged with sweetness and crisp, offsetting the BBQ pork on the interior, an unctuous blend of sweet and savory. Noodles also offers steamed BBQ pork buns as well. Get some. They offer a different, more traditional, take on the same dish through varying preparation. The steamed bun has a wonderful chew and toothsome quality to it. The filling is the same great flavor found in its baked cousin. They offer varying points of greatness along the same culinary line.

Bouchon Bakery

Thomas Keller - The Venetian

An offshoot of Chef Thomas Keller's Bouchon Bakery in Yountville, CA, this Vegas iteration of Bouchon Bakery is of the same class and caliber as any of Keller's other establishments. Operating as a storefront in The Venetian Hotel, Bouchon Bakery offers a wide array of baked goods ranging from morning pastries to afternoon cookies (or really, anytime cookies, because when is a cookie not good?).

In my endless pursuit of the perfect chocolate croissant, something I blame on Giada DeLaurentiis after hearing her numerous recounts of wonderful croissants and salivating over the idea of flaky, buttery crust merged with a chocolate bite, I turned to Keller in hopes he would give me something to write home about. I'm not home currently, but I'm writing about it. The guy is an acclaimed master of cuisine with strong French roots. How could it not be good? Truth be told, it was beautifully



The TKO, sable cookie dough and ganache in harmony.



A rare moment of quiet at Bouchon Bakery.

done, but something else stole its limelight.

We all know of the ubiquitous Oreo cookie, Nabisco's perennially favorite cookie (it is, in fact, the number one cookie in America, surpassing the revered chocolate chip cookie in terms of sales). I've downed my fair share of Oreos

with milk, won't deny it, I like 'em too. But Keller does a riff on that classic, a TKO as it is called. And true to its name, it's a knockout. Chocolate Sable cookies, so delicate and soft, sandwich a white chocolate ganache filling. I had to have two. Which were gobbled in quick succession.



The TKO: Better in a double dose.

If Oreos all tasted like this, I wouldn't balk on the fact that they're "more popular" chocolate chip cookies.



FIX
The Light Group - The Bellagio

Taking its name from the pre fixe menu, FIX is one of the best offerings from The Light Group, which owns several restaurants in Las Vegas. The cuisine is Updated American and the decor something out of a post-modernist's dream.

It's low lighting and dramatic decor make FIX a great place for starting out your night. Classic dishes like burgers, chicken, and salads, staples anywhere else and boring anywhere else, are reinvented with a deft twist. A trio of Kobe Sliders with fresh French Fries is a standout.

Don't think the modern decor stays on the walls though, the plating takes a hint from the restaurant and is often wild and dramatic. The sugar-covered doughnut are plated alongside a pair of sauces. And there's a surprise on the inside too. Banana filling. Dip one of these into either the chocolate or peanut butter

If Oreos all tasted like this, I wouldn't balk on the fact that they're "more popular" than chocolate chip cookies.

sauce (or both) and get ready to die in elation.

Often FIX works with the nearby Cirque Du Soleil show, O, to create special pre fixe dinner and a show options, giving you perfect timing to make your show after a fantastic dinner. Jump on that bandwagon.

The quality of the curved ceiling in FIX is matched only by the food.



Beijing Noodle No. 9

Caesar's Palace

Something like Beijing Noodle No. 9 could only be conceived by the glitz of Las Vegas and the futuristic minds

of the Chinese. This eatery is covered in white cutouts that excite the mind and set the perfect backdrop for the food. Passing through two massive goldfish tanks, one finds the dining room to be pleasantly planned and spacious.

The menu is a conglomeration of noodles, dumplings, meat, fish, and other assorted entrees. Some stuff to look out for is, however, the soup dumplings and a bowl of fresh udon noodles. Soup dumplings





A detail of Beijing's ceiling.



are a unique breed. Encased in a dumpling skin is a small meatball and a filling of crystalline clear broth. It can take some skill to eat one, grabbing it with chopsticks and holding it partially with a

Below: Handmade noodles. Enough said.



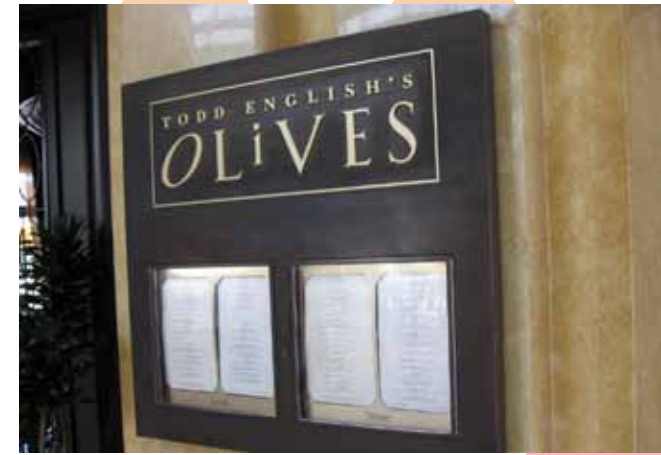
soup spoon. The soup will be rocket hot, but once you bite into it, the waves of fresh broth and chew of the dumpling will make it worth the burn. House-made noodles are always something to look forward to. There simply is no substitute. Not that dried noodles are bad, given that Beijing Noodle No. 9 makes killer ones. But the fresh noodles are a different kind of animal. Order a bowl of noodles and slurp the noodles up as loudly as you can.

Because slurping is the greatest sign of enjoyment.

Olives

Todd English - The Bellagio

Todd English brought his hit concept, Olives, to Vegas. The flagship is in Washington D.C.,



The Bolognese with burro fuso is my main squeeze.

but thankfully now has more than one outpost. The interior takes its cue from the name, it is awash in blacks and greens with creatively done lighting and a wall full of mirrors. It is exciting and eccentric.

Starting the meal, a bread basket is given to you and a pair of olive tapenades, one focusing on green olives, the other on blacks. Drenching the bread in the green olive one is the way for me to go (I've lucked out that every time I've been, I've been the only one that wants the green). The bread selection runs from soft white bread to crisp cheesy lavosh.

Entrees take a Mediterranean approach, the home of olives and where the best ones are grown. The Bolognese with burro fuso is my main squeeze. Granted, they serve it with linguini, instead of the much



Flatbread, a must have at Todd English's Olives.



Olives maintains a warm and inviting atmosphere and plenty of bread.

better papardelle (a small nitpick). The meat sauce is full of body and flavor, the burro fuso, a light cheese and butter sauce (what's not to like?) covers the bottom of the dish like a happy surprise. Somehow, despite all these rich flavors, it never overburdens your palette and instead remains delicious bite after bite after bite.

But one of the crown jewels at Olives is the Cookie and Cream platter. This is not a single serving dessert, but rather one best when split among two people. On it is a trio of cookies and three varying flavors of ice cream. They can be sorbets or more traditional cream-based ice creams and the cookies can



Avant Garde might be the keyword for plating.

include chocolate chip and oatmeal raisin (I've still never figured out why you would ruin something delicious like cookies with something healthy like fruit). There can also be bar cookies on the plate. But it always includes a cupcake. It was at Olives that I discovered the Red Velvet Cupcake, long before it was a fashionable dessert and the cupcake boom

had taken place. It was moist, slightly tangy, and just hinted at chocolate. And the frosting in all of its cream cheese glory was eloquent. The Cookies and Cream does change occasionally, so what you get may vary from time to time, a minor gripe. Only a major complaint if the Red Velvet Cupcake isn't there.

Restaurant Listing

CUT by Wolfgang Puck
The Palazzo Resort Hotel Casino
3325 Las Vegas Blvd. South
Las Vegas, Nevada 89109

MESA Grill
Caesar's Palac
3570 Las Vegas Blvd. South
Las Vegas, Nevada 89109

Payard
Caesar's Palace
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Wolfgang Puck Bar and Grill
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