

New York  
**RESIDENT**



*The City's 19 Best Restaurants*

*April 10, 2007 - Dining*

By Sylvie Bigar

For Manhattan diners, it's not just enough to eat good food anymore. We want to know where our food comes from; we want it to be organic; we want our favorite chefs

to shop at the Green Market; we want downtown buzz uptown. Craving inspiration? Head to the West Village and let yourself get lost in the left-bankish maze. To fuel our collective food fever, here are a few favorites.

**BEST MARKET DRIVEN**

TELEPAN

72 W. 69th St., 212-580-4300

It's a miracle; a market-inspired restaurant by a creative chef on the Upper West Side who packs them in day after day. Whether before or after Lincoln Center, or just coming home from an afternoon stroll at Strawberry Fields, the clever mix of small, medium or large plates are all winners. As we head into spring, Bill Telepan will surely be looking for the first fresh asparagus or morels of the season.

**BEST CHEF UNDER 30**

WESLEY GENOVART

Degustation, 239 E. Fifth St., 212-979-1012

A Spanish Vongerichten alum, Genovart invents new dishes on a theme of tapas behind the counter, in the minimal Siamese twin of celebrated sushi bar Jewel Bako. Best to go in pairs and on the early side, but the head-on shrimp a la plancha tastes of brine and ocean breeze, the short ribs in their squid niche offer a nice surprise and the ethereal cheese foam adds an important touch to the slowly poached egg. Sophisticated techniques and warm, knowledgeable service ensure a great night.

### **BEST COUNTER DINING**

L'ATELIER DE JOËL ROBUCHON

Four Seasons Hotel, 57 E. 57th St., 212-350-6658

Tucked in a corner of the stately Four Seasons Hotel is definitely the most comfortable and luxurious counter in town, presenting creative and sophisticated cuisine of the highest caliber. In the mood for foie gras or perfectly cooked sweetbreads, crisp on the outside and moist inside? Looking for simplicity? The trio of hamburgers in brioche rolls is luscious. Oh, and you can't leave without a smear of mashed potatoes.

### **BEST MEGA RESTAURANT**

BUDDAKAN

75 Ninth Ave., 212-989-6699

How can the food at Stephen Starr's 16,000-square-foot theatrical eatery be so refined when it's prepared for 200? Chef Michael Schulson's fusion menu keeps us sated and intrigued. Tangy steak tartare and silky tuna tartare were memorable, perfectly crispy frog legs paved the way for braised veal cheeks with green apples. Designer Christian Liaigre's dramatic staircase is a show-off and the out-of-towners will gawk at the whole package. Don't expect intimacy though, this is as loud as it gets.

### **BEST CLASSIC FRENCH**

DANIEL

60 E. 65th St., 212-288-0033

The maestro's glittery flagship remains as reliable and consistent as ever. Order the now classic black sea bass wrapped in potato shell with Syrah sauce or the trio of organic veal. Yes, you do need to dress up and you may feel like you are in a board room, but for any formal occasion, the bastion of French cuisine is a no-brainer.

### **BEST CREATIVE FRENCH**

JEAN GEORGES

1 Central Park West, 212-299-3900

The simple grey room in the middle of Columbus Circle truly makes this odd square a destination. The chef may be busy opening outposts around the world but this one still has his name on it. The top-notch wait staff makes you feel taken care of as you savor the spices of the world matched to haute French technique. The foie gras brûlée is still one of the best appetizers in town.

### **BEST WORTHWHILE SPLURGE**

MASA

Time Warner Center, 10 Columbus Circle, 212-823-9800

The menu is \$400 per person but the experience transcends price. In

order to enjoy yourself at Masa, you have to be into submission and money. There is no set menu and the chef will serve you what he decides. On the plus side, Masa's sushi is probably the best you will ever taste, so if after these warnings you still want to go, just know that bliss will be waiting.

### **BEST KEPT SECRET**

#### **LA LUNCHONETTE**

130 Tenth Ave., 212-675-0342

Long before Tenth Avenue became hot, the small corner bistro was already luring us with wonderful escargots, cassoulet and tarte tatin. In the comfortable corner room, look for the specials on the blackboard. If you are a fan of organ meat, call ahead to make sure calf's liver and brains are served that day. On your way out, pinch yourself, it's the Hudson River not La Seine.

### **WORTH A TRIP UPTOWN**

#### **SFOGLIA**

1402 Lexington Ave., 212-831-1402

It's good news that Sfoglia is expanding. On this dire strip, Sfoglia brings a fresh approach to Italian favorites with impeccable ingredients and a delicate touch. Choose the romantic banquette for two in the back and relax in the rustic chic dining room. The plump and sexy mussels make a fine lunch but if you have a large appetite, order the bollito misto or the soft pappardelle bolognese and finish with the bread pudding created from the excellent homemade bread.

### **WORTH A TRIP DOWNTOWN**

#### **SPICE MARKET**

403 W. 13th St., 212-675-2322

The behemoth two-level Southeast Asian fantasy at the core of the Meatpacking District is party central into the wee hours, but Vongerichten's interpretation of street food is worth waiting for. From heavenly chicken wings to spiced-up paper-thin lobster summer rolls with vinegary gelée, the banquet may not have much in common with the street carts of Bangkok, but it's delicious and fun. For those of us with kids, it's a great place to take them for a leisurely weekend lunch.

### **BEST TASTING MENU**

#### **ELEVEN MADISON PARK**

11 Madison Ave., 212-889-0905

Now that Chef Daniel Humm has been there a year, it's high time to discover his 11-course tasting menu. Sit under a towering ceiling in the stunning art deco space. Yes, it sounds like a lot of food, and all the buzz centers around his crackling suckling pig, but the whole range

of his talent is what we want to experience. Thankfully the portions are small, allowing room to sample the loup de mer, the celery cappuccino and the foie gras laced with Venezuelan cocoa.

### **BEST WINE LIST**

CRU

24 Fifth Ave., 212-529-1700

You might want to come an hour ahead of your date, just to study the two leather-bound books that cover the extraordinary 65,000-bottle collection. Shea Gallante is busy in the kitchen working successfully to hold his own. Match the fine cuisine to the chosen wine and join the group of wine-crazies humming, sniffing, gargling and treasuring the nectar in their glasses.

### **BEST UP-AND-COMING CHEF**

DANIEL HUMM

Eleven Madison Park, 11 Madison Ave., 212-889-0905

At only 31, this modest Swiss chef has quietly redesigned the menu and is winning hearts and palates. He came to us from Camton Place in San Francisco where he earned four stars from the San Francisco Chronicle, and this year, garnered three stars from The New York Times. The best New York import of the year. Go judge for yourself.

### **BEST FREEBIE**

Popover at BLT STEAK & BLT PRIME

106 E. 57th St., 212-752-7470

We knew Laurent Tourondel's fish was excellent when he cooked at the now defunct Cello, and when he opened BLT Steak, we learned that he was just as gifted in the meat department. Obviously, he is also a fine businessman – this winter, he launched BLT Steak in San Juan's Ritz-Carlton and more such ventures are planned – but amongst all the good reasons we flock to his growing empire is a gigantic cheesy warm popover that serves as bread.

### **BEST GOURMET VEGETARIAN MENU**

THE LONDON BAR AT THE LONDON/NYC HOTEL

The London/NYC Hotel, 151 W. 54th St., 212-468-8889

Ignore Gordon Ramsay's talent for histrionics and focus on the food. Such as the sweet onion gratin with orange zest and a moist risotto of grilled corn. End with caramelized pineapple sprinkled with crystallized cilantro. At lunch, the London Bar is quiet and relaxed, the perfect setting to close that important deal.

## **BEST WAY TO CONVERT YOU TO TOFU**

MORIMOTO

88 Tenth Ave., 212-989-8883

The second Stephen Starr eatery has the look of a 1980's nightclub, but in the kitchen reigns Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto, and the offerings are all quite good. All but one, and that one is fabulous. I never understood how anybody could even tolerate the pasty white brick glob. That is until I tasted Morimoto's homemade so-called silken tofu. Not only is it homemade, it's created at your table while you wait. And it's delicious. Silky indeed, but also somehow fluffy with a sweet almond bouquet.

## **BEST NEW CONCEPT**

ROOM 4 DESSERT

17 Cleveland Place, 212-941-5405

It's hard to understand why no one had thought about it earlier, but a dessert bar makes perfect sense. Instead of dinner or after dinner, Chef-owner Will Goldfarb rules behind the packed counter, preparing and assembling ingredients ranging from cotton candy to brioche sorbet, amaretto panna cotta and lapsang souchong meringue. Thankfully, several dessert bars are about to open south of 14th Street.

## **BEST 24/7 EATERY**

FLORENT

69 Gansevoort St., 212-989-5779

Opened since 1985, Florent Morellet's French diner/bistro is as hip and busy as it was on day one. The '50s décor is new again, and the crowd can choose between a late supper of mussels and boudin, or an early breakfast of airy French toast or all the favorites in between. The Meatpacking District may be one of the hottest in town but Florent and his offerings are unfazed and consistent.

## **BEST OFF-BEAT FAMILY FRIENDLY**

CHURRASCARIA PLATAFORMA

316 W.49th St., 212-245-0505

If meat is your thing, both branches of the Brazilian eatery are wonderful lunch spots to visit on the weekend with the family. In Brazil, just like in Italy, a child is king and the waiters won't stop fawning over your little ones, and will do everything in their power to entertain them. There is plenty of space for strollers and it is impossible not to find something for them to eat at the boat-like salad bar.

*Photos: Cover story link, Spice Market; This page, BLT Steak.*