



Restaurants 

Gold Coast hotel restaurants get revamped

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Steve Dolinsky

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June 22, 2011 (CHICAGO) (WLS) -- One of the byproducts of the recession has been a readjustment of pricing, especially in the world of fine-dining.

Two of our local hotel gems have recently undergone a revamping of sorts.

The days of the \$40 dollar might be over for good in Chicago. Diners are looking for value, but there's also been a transformation to more casual fine dining. That means fewer white tablecloths and more affordable dishes. Two of the city's top hotels recently underwent some remodeling in both their interiors and on their menus.

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The facade of The Elysian Hotel in the Gold Coast is certainly impressive, but it can also be intimidating. Combine that with a post-recessionary mood among

diners, and it's no surprise the hotel's more casual dining room, Balsan, has recently undergone some changes.

"We kind of softened up the room a little bit, put some wooden tables in, and kind of played around with the idea of more family/comfortable style of dishes," said Danny Grant, the Executive Chef for the hotel.

Part of that approach is offering sharable dishes meant for a few diners at a time. Cote de boeuf is essentially a giant ribeye topped with caramelized shallots and an intense bordelaise sauce, served with the thin, French green beans called haricot verts. Whole, roasted chicken is paired up with grilled romaine lettuce for a unique inspiration.

"It's kind of a glorified version of a Caesar salad: little gem romaine from Shooting Star Farm, some Caesar dressing that we make in-house, and then just a beautiful, juicy, oven-roasted chicken," Grant said.

A massive suckling pig leg is presented in a way that can only be described as a picnic in a pot.

"Slow cook them overnight, and then on pickup we roast them in the wood-burning oven, serve it with some fingerling potatoes, charred spring onions and a little bit of a watercress salad," said Grant.

Just a few blocks away, the mood and decor has also been revamped inside the Park Hyatt Chicago Hotel. NoMI still has the killer view of the Water Tower from seven floors above ground, but gone are the tablecloths and fine china, and there's a new name: NoMI Kitchen.

"We wanted to create more of a casual atmosphere, and lowering the prices is certainly gonna help that situation," said Ryan LaRoche, the chef at NoMI Kitchen.

Begin with summery pea soup, bumped up with cream and a chiffonade of finely-chopped mint or a hearty chicken Panini. Bearnaise aioli-slathered bread is stacked with Nueske's bacon, gouda cheese, lettuce and tomato.

"It's simple but something that you want to eat during the day, during the summertime it's a great lunch sandwich," LaRoche said.

Dinner offers entrees like simply grilled steak with a choice of seasonal sides; the sumptuous garden patio also features a redesigned bar area and the menu inside the bar/lounge has lighter dishes like open-faced sandwiches with feta, roasted garlic and marinated olives.

"The fine dining dollar has changed so much and the old NoMI was a great concept but the new NoMI is more conducive to the return maybe once or twice a month - three times a month - however many times you'd like, and on your birthday and on your anniversary," said LaRoche.

The Ritz-Carlton went through this transformation a little over a year ago. When it closed its fabled "dining room" restaurant for good, and then remodeled its lobby cafe into Deca with a much more affordable menu.

Balsan at the Elysian Hotel
11 E. Walton St.
312-646-1400
www.elysianhotels.com

NoMI Kitchen at the Park Hyatt Chicago
800 N. Michigan Ave.
312-239-4030
<http://www.parkchicago.hyatt.com/hyatt/hotels/entertainment/restaurants/index.jsp>

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