



Tuna Brochette Courtesy of Le Bernardin



Oyster Vichyssoise Courtesy of Francesco Tonally



Seki Aji Courtesy of Masa



Caviar Fantasy of Eggs Courtesy of Francesco Tonelli

EXPRESSING LOVE & ROMANCE THROUGH NEW YORK FINE DINING

BY MARALYN D. HILL

Valentine's greetings date back to the Middle Ages. History behind this holiday is still a mystery. The entire month of February has become a time of romance, gifts, and special dinners. To secure reservations at some of these fine establishments, you need to start early.

New York City has more exceptional restaurants that one could mention. Our focus will be on its seven three-star Michelin establishments. Last year, New York boasted five with this ranking and two more joined in 2012. Three Michelin star rating is considered the highest, most respected global recognition in the culinary world. Having met numerous three-star chefs worldwide, and enjoyed their cuisine, I know they are in a class by themselves and provide an exceptional experience.

These seven: Chef's Table at Brooklyn Fare, Chef César Ramirez; Daniel, Chef Daniel Boulud; Eleven Madison Park, Chef Daniel Humm; Jean Georges, Chef Jean Georges Vongerichten; Le Bernardin,

Chef Eric Ripert; Masa, Chef Masa Takayama; and Per Se, Chef Thomas Keller. All prices were accurate at the time this was written and updated in January 2014, but subject to change. You also have to allow for tax, service charge and gratuity.

Chef's Table at Brooklyn Fare is an 18-seat space at the kitchen counter, where your unique experience will be a prix fixe dinner that includes over twenty small plate courses. This menu is \$255. Wine starts at \$60 per bottle. A wait list is available and booked six weeks in advance.

Daniel offers luxury traditional fine dining with contemporary, seasonal French cuisine. Having met chef Boulud several times at Bocuse d'Or, I know many chefs who consider this to be one of their finest dining experiences ever. As a result, it is high on my personal list. A pre-theater prix fixe three-course menu is \$125, with wine pairing, \$168. The seven-course tasting menu is \$220, wine pairing \$130 or \$220 additional. Jean

Francois Bruel, Executive Chef and Eddy Leroux, Chef de Cuisine.

Eleven Madison Park provides fine dining, featuring American cuisine in an art deco building boasting 35-foot ceilings and a view of Madison Square Park. Intimate bar and private dining rooms are both local favorites. It offers an eight-course tasting menu for \$195, wine pairing option an additional \$225.

Jean Georges cuisine represents fine dining that blends French, American, and Asian influences. The atmosphere offers views of Central Park and located in the Trump Hotel. It offers a three-course \$88 prix-fixe menu and a \$148 six-course tasting menu. Wine pairing is \$65 and \$120, respectively. I deeply value his autographed gift of his book.

Le Bernardin provides casual elegance with French cuisine and specializes in seafood. It provides an eight-course tasting menu for \$198, with wine pairing \$336; and a seven-course tasting menu for

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\$155, with wine pairing \$246. However, for those on a budget, Le Bernardin still wants you to have a fine dining experience. Tuna Brochette will be available in its more casual and intimate lounge during February.

In reviewing this lounge menu, appetizers start around \$16 to \$18 and go up. This allows everyone to enjoy the romance of Le Bernardin.

Masa is simple décor, with dim lighting and a sleek Hinoki wood sushi counter and eight tables. Chef Masa's focal point is food, not décor, and his menu changes daily. Desserts change seasonally, but the Truffle ice Cream is always a favorite. Masa offers an Omakase prix fixe menu at \$450, with 20 to 25 courses.

Per Se is traditional fine dining from famed Thomas Keller of the French Laundry. Located in the Time Warner Center at Columbus Circle, guests enjoy clear views of Columbus Circle and Central Park. Its cuisine is American with classic French influence. Per Se offers two nine-course tasting menus every evening for \$310. One is the Chef's Tasting Menu and the other is comprised of seasonable vegetables. I was fortunate to meet Chef Keller at Bocuse d'Or.

A common dominator with all these talented chefs is their passion and commitment to fresh ingredients, with much seasonably and locally sourced. Most menus change daily, except for some appetizers in various lounges. All will provide memorable gastronomic experiences.

If the tasting menus are above your budget, I'd encourage trying an appetizer and cocktail or glass of wine in their lounges. Americans have started to take fine dining experiences seriously. Many enjoy these often, others possibly once a year. Either way, they are lasting and memorable events.

I know Daniel Boulud and Thomas Keller actively work towards raising U.S. skills globally, with their involvement in Bocuse d'Or. Very likely, these other chefs contribute in their own manner.

Make reservations early, as these seven book fast, but worth the wait. Six can be booked online through Open Table, Chef's Table at Brooklyn Fare must be booked directly. You may wish to check out menus on websites. Most also feature great photos of the dishes and restaurants themselves.

A little about Michelin stars—New York has received seven three-star, nine two-star, and forty-six one-star rankings. Worldwide for 2012, 93 restaurants hold three stars. If you enjoy experiencing this type of establishment, I'd encourage purchasing the Michelin Guide to New York City 2013 when it is released. There are two other U.S. cities that boast an annual guide, Chicago and San Francisco.

Whereas I've experienced all levels of Michelin star dining, I've equally enjoyed many of the one-star.

They are not all fancy, but the total New York fine dining experience counts. ■



Chefs Table Courtesy of Brooklyn Fare