

DINING

NEW TO THE GUIDE

THE HILLMONT LOS FELIZ

VIA VENETO SANTA MONICA

THE GRAY WHALE MALIBU

UPDATE PARKWAY GRILL PASADENA

EDITED BY
MARGOT
DOUGHERTY



SUGARPLUM BAKERY

7122 BEVERLY BLVD. (323-934-7900)

B-L DAILY. Oh, the cookies. Fairy-sized fittings of marzipan dotted with fruit, tiny cloudlike *baci di damas*, bitty almond-flaked balls bursting with Amarena cherries, the crunchiest of biscotti, fig and apricot toasts with raspberry jam-lined crusts, croissants, focaccia sandwiches filled with tomato and mozzarella or pear and Brie. Perfect coffee. The place has 15 tables, it's true-blue Italian right down to the tiles in the vanilla-scented bathroom, and it's heavenly. Liquor license pending. (\$) Bakery

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Westwood Village
Corner of V

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fishes to choose from as well. Downstairs is dark and serious; upstairs is a happening bar scene with live music for an over-40 crowd. Full bar. (\$\$\$\$) Steak House

Mr Chow 344 N. Camden Dr. (310-278-0011). L. Mon.-Fri.; D. nightly. This is one of those celebrity restaurants where stars actually show up to get away from being seen. Prices are high—particularly if you let the waiter order for you—but the cooking is good. Specialties include green prawns (marinated in spinach), drunken fish (fillet of sole poached in rice wine sauce), handmade noodles, and gambler's duck (marinated, steamed, fried, and shredded). Full bar. (\$\$\$) Chinese

Nic's 453 N. Canon Dr. (310-550-5707). D. Mon.-Sat. Larry Nicola has one cool supper club/martini lounge. Nic's Oysters—lightly sautéed, with spinach, garlic, and walnuts—are brisk, baby. Live music nightly. Full bar. (\$\$\$) Contemporary American

Pammolli Ristorante 9511 Santa Monica Blvd. (310-273-7588). L. D. Mon.-Sat. Massimo Ormani, who spent more than a decade at Locanda Veneta, and wife Daniela have a romantic charmer where tiny greens are perfectly dressed and scattered with almonds, leek and crabmeat risotto is infused with lemon, and an oven-roasted veal shank comes with buttered baby carrots. Desserts like Piedmont-style hazelnut cake with candied orange keep the Tuscan theme going, and the well-culled wine list is reasonably priced. Full bar. (\$\$\$) Italian

Piccolo Paradiso 150 S. Beverly Dr. (310-271-0030). L. Mon.-Fri.; D. Mon.-Sat. This is indeed a "little paradise," thanks to Giacomino Drago, who is still in the kitchen at Il Pastaio as well. Images from *Cinema Paradiso* (his favorite movie) are projected on the walls. Salads and antipasti are simple and perfect. Entrées of note include rigatoni with wild boar ragout and veal shank with polenta. The dessert menu could use a little fine-tuning. Beer and wine. (\$\$) Italian



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Reign 180 N. Robertson Blvd. (310-273-4463). D. nightly. Regulars know to put in two orders of the smothered pork chops (one to take home) and that there's always room for fried green tomatoes, peach cobbler, and a banana cream pie that's decadence-in-a-dish. Full bar. (\$\$\$) Contemporary Southern & Soul

Spago Beverly Hills 176 N. Canon Dr. (310-355-0880). L. Mon.-Sat.; D. nightly. You've read the books, seen the TV show—now sit at the table. Who doesn't know about Wolfgang Puck's California cuisine? What could be ordinary—crawfish salad, filet mignon tartare, yellowtail, veal chop, lobster with asparagus puree—becomes, in the hands of chef Lee Hefter, quite extraordinary. Sherry Yard's desserts are equally divine. Full bar. (\$\$\$) California

Trader Vic's Beverly Hilton Hotel, 9876 Wilshire Blvd. (310-276-0345). D. nightly. You've had a few tiki drinks, sipped from a flaming coconut, and think you know Trader Vic's. Ha. Scoot around to the back dining room—where you can actually see across the table—and you're in a yesteryear of red leather booths, brass railings, giant menus, and solicitous waiters. The real surprise is the delicious food: artfully arranged sushi, whole lobsters, cashew chicken, and great steaks. Keep the mai tais to a minimum, and savor the flavor. Full bar. (\$\$\$) International

WESTWOOD WEST L.A.

Bombay Cafe 12021 W. Pico Blvd. West L.A. (310-473-3388). L. Mon.-Fri.; D. nightly. This Westside fave is cheery and informal, the nan is light, and the *fatehpur* special—*shahi bhajia* (marinated jumbo shrimp), *buti* kabobs (tender lamb chunks), and *mirch masala tikka* (marinated chicken)—is more than enough for two. Full bar. (\$\$) Indian

El Dorado Cantina 11777 San Vicente Blvd., Brentwood (310-207-0150). L. Mon.-Fri.; D. nightly; brunch Sun. Even in L.A. a velvet-rope Mexican restaurant is unusual. But so it is at this handsome spot where the scene is at the bar, but the food's tasty, too. Alongside standard enchilada and taco fare are a silky corn soup, melt-in-your-mouth *carne asada*, and spicy *pollo mole*. Desserts are full of surprises: warm chocolate-chile truffle cake, orange flan, and an apple empanada. Full bar. (\$\$\$) Mexican

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Mon - Thur 11:30 AM - 10:00 PM
Fri - Sat 11:30 AM - 10:30 PM
Sun 11:30 AM - 9:30 PM