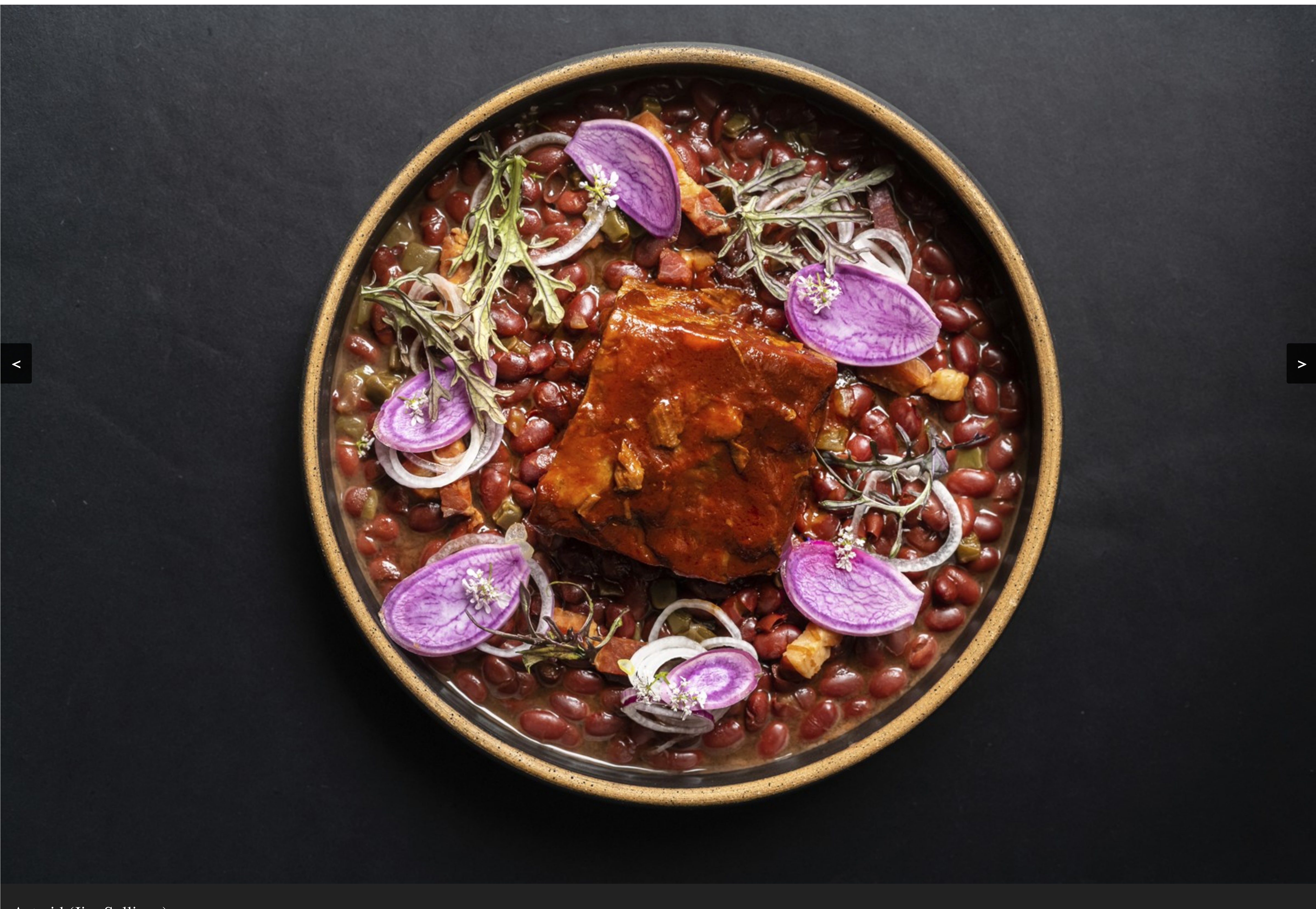


A dose of deliciousness with culture

no more stale sandwiches or sad salads. L.A. cultural institutions are upping the game

By **Danielle Dorsey**



Asterid (Jim Sullivan)

ROWING UP, I never ate at museum restaurants. Instead, my parents studiously packed brown bag lunches for museum visits, reminding my younger brothers and me that admission to the museum was our adventure for the day. Even when school field trips took me back to those cultural institutions and I was lucky enough to choose from a kids menu, I rarely found them more appealing than the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches my mother sent with me. As I grew up and began visiting museums on my own, I learned to plan ahead, mapping out restaurants nearby or eating before I left home to avoid overspending on an uninspired meal I'd probably regret. Lately my practice has shifted. A promising trend emerged among L.A.'s modern museum restaurants since pandemic shutdowns ended. Hoping to attract Angelenos and tourists back through their doors, many institutions took the opportunity to reshape their food programs, bringing in new chefs, debuting fresh menus and, in some cases, revamping entire spaces.

The pinnacle of this movement is perhaps best embodied by Lulu. In late 2021, Alice Waters, a trailblazer in the farm-to-table movement and founder of Chez Panisse, journeyed down the coast to partner with cookbook author David Tanis to open an all-day restaurant in the courtyard of the Hammer Museum. This was notable not just because it served as both chefs' first foray into L.A.'s restaurant scene but also because of Lulu's menu, which promotes similar ideals of sustainability, along with a strong local sourcing program and an often-changing seasonal menu.

Other eye-popping upgrades have followed. In May 2022, chef Chris Ono, an L.A. native with a fine-dining background that includes Providence and Eleven Madison Park, was named chef-in-residence at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center in Little Tokyo. He launched Hansei, a three-part dinner series that offers a tour of the center's lounge and garden and includes several courses at a chef's counter, where Ono dives into the trademarks of Japanese American cuisine. The dinner series has proved so popular that Ono's residency was extended through at least August. The center recently brought on Keizo Shimamoto, creator of the ramen burger and founder of San Juan Capistrano's Ramen Shack, as director of culinary events.

"I really want people to enjoy the space, experience the JACCC and what it has to offer," Ono said. "The garden is very private and the dinner is one of the only public events where people can see it." The first part of the dinner is held in JACCC's bamboo garden.

With 11 to 12 courses presented over the course of an evening, Hansei might represent a special-occasion option, but plenty of museums are bringing a similar intentionality to casual restaurants and even grab-and-go counters. Take Neighborhood Grill by Post & Beam, which just opened in the Natural History Museum. Led by South L.A. locals John and Roni Cleveland in partnership with South L.A. Cafe Hospitality, the restaurant offers made-to-order sandwiches, tacos and flatbreads, in addition to a market counter stocked with items from local Black-owned businesses.

"It means so much to me as a South Los Angeles native to be a part of the evolution of such a historic place," Roni Cleveland said. The Clevelands have a young son with dietary restrictions and one of their goals with Neighborhood Grill is to make museum dining easier for families with selective eaters.

Here, we offer 18 artful food experiences convenient to L.A.'s best museums, galleries and landmarks. The list isn't exhaustive but includes highlights such as a coffeehouse with a history of local activism and a downtown art complex with a restaurant as its centerpiece. From a garden tea at an Italian-inspired villa to a seaside brunch among sculptures, the culinary programs at these museum-adjacent restaurants are just as remarkable as the collections.

1919 Cafe and

Jade Court Cafe

The Huntington

Named for the year the Huntington was founded, 1919 Cafe is a casual, cafeteria-style dining hall with food stations ranging from sandwich shop to pizza oven to taqueria, with plenty of grab-and-go options. You can eat at the cafe without purchasing entrance to the library and gardens, but the outdoor seating still gives you a gorgeous view of the Celebration Lawn. If you do decide to visit the Huntington's extensive grounds, take a detour through the Chinese Garden, where you'll find the newer Jade Court Café, an Asian-inspired sit-down restaurant with dan dan noodles and pot stickers. Also located in the Chinese Garden and open on weekends is Freshwater Pavilion, where guests can order boba tea, pastries and a few grab-and-go items. Prior to the pandemic, the Huntington was renowned for its long-running tea service held in its historic Rose Garden Tea Room; tea service returns on May 24 after an \$11.2-million renovation project that restored the front of the original 1911 building and added an outdoor dining area. Reservations for the revamped tea room open on May 10.

1 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino, huntington.org/dining

Abernethy's

The Music Center

With its rotating residencies that highlight rising chefs and restaurateurs, you'll never tire of the menu at Abernethy's — in fact, you might wish certain spotlights lasted longer. Lenora Marouani, co-owner of Barsha, a Tunisian restaurant with locations in Hermosa Beach and Manhattan Beach, is one such talent. Find a seat at the stylish bar, in the intimate dining room or on the patio that faces the Music Center courtyard with its illuminated water installation, its colors painting a scene against the sunset. The menu that Marouani has dubbed "Tunisian Soul" features harissa-coated prawns over a spiced horia puree with collard green chips and a tabil branzino over a couscous risotto with succotash and chive tahini sauce — it's one of the most inventive branzino renditions you'll find across the city. Culinary heavyweights Govind Armstrong, Shirley Chung and Susan Feniger advise on the selection of chefs, with Michelle Muñoz of Moo's Craft Barbecue taking over later this year. While reservations are not required, the restaurant's limited hours that cater to Music Center programming require planning ahead.

1220 N. Hope St., Los Angeles, (213) 972-8088, abernethysla.com

Alta Adams

Band of Vices

In the midst of rapid neighborhood redevelopment, the commitment from Alta Adams co-owner and chef Keith Corbin to celebrate the art and culture of historic West Adams deserves recognition. Corbin partnered with Band of Vices gallery owner Terrell Tifford to curate art for the restaurant that celebrates the South L.A. neighborhoods where they both grew up as well as Black culture at large. The menu also honors Corbin's cultural heritage with California-inflected Southern dishes like vegan collard greens that are given a dash of umami with liquid smoke, plus new dishes like a spicy purple sweet potato soup and jerk-spiced grilled plantain tacos. Memorialize your visit and take a picture beneath Alta Adams' mural of a little girl throwing up a "Westside" hand symbol with a kaleidoscope background framing her smiling face. Check out the show at Band of Vices (admission is free) while you wait for a table or after your meal.

1 5359 W. Adams Blvd., Los Angeles, altaadams.com

Asterid

Walt Disney Concert Hall

Taking over the space formerly occupied by Patina next to Walt Disney Concert Hall is this sleek restaurant from Ray Garcia that celebrates L.A.'s expansive culinary heritage. It's the obvious route if you want to pair dinner with a Dudamel-led show (while you still can), but don't disregard the bar menu for late-night cocktails and bites like a buttermut squash tamal crowned with caviar, or the Sunday brunch menu, with a chorizo-laced frittata and poppyseed and blueberry pancakes. The dinner menu is built for sharing with beef tenderloin tartare, red beer risotto and a lamb shank brightened with pomegranate seeds and preserved lemon. In addition to live performances, the concert hall offers rotating exhibits and complimentary guided tours.

1141 S. Grand Ave., Los Angeles, asteridla.com

Cafe and Garden Tea

Getty Villa

Looking out over the Pacific Ocean in the Palisades is this replica of a Herculaneum seaside villa as museum, with Greek and Roman artifacts plus special exhibitions. You could easily spend a day wandering the columned hallways, zigzagging through the outdoor gardens and staring into the sculpture-lined reflecting pool. Should you work up an appetite during your explorations, you can stop by the café for a Mediterranean menu in an al fresco setting. Options include starters and shareable plates like a charcuterie box or Mediterranean sampler with tabbouleh, hummus, Greek olives and pita, along with a selection of sandwiches, wraps and salads. For a literally elevated experience, plan ahead to attend Garden Tea, which takes place in the Founder's Room (one level up from the cafe) on Thursdays and Saturdays from 1 to 3 p.m. Tea service includes scones, breads and a tower of sandwiches and desserts, with an assortment of teas available, plus Champagne and wine at an additional cost.

117985 Pacific Coast Highway, Pacific Palisades, (800) 369-3059, getty.edu/visit/villa /food-and-drink

Claire's at the Museum

Long Beach Museum of Art

Named in honor of late artist Claire Falkenstein, this oceanfront restaurant shares a campus with Long Beach Museum of Art and boasts views of the Queen Mary and Catalina Island, in addition to Falkenstein's fountain sculpture "Structure and Flow," which anchors the tiered patio that's dotted with yellow umbrellas. The interior buzzes during weekend brunch, with diners scattered across her wooden-floored rooms in the historic two-story home. It's easy to lose an afternoon here, with brunch cocktails like a bloody mary with a house-made mix of tomato, muddled celery, cilantro, cucumber, lime juice, hot sauce and vodka offered in a goblet. A bacon bloody mary comes with three crispy slices that bob in the thick drink. The menu includes favorites like a breakfast sandwich with a buttermilk biscuit and a thick-cut slab of bacon and the milkbread French toast that's battered in crème brûlée. After your meal, take a stroll around the sculpture garden or visit the exhibits at the museum.

12300 E. Ocean Blvd., Long Beach, lbma.org/claires

El Pueblo de

Los Angeles

Olvera Street

This historic monument and living museum is close to where 44 pobladores of Indigenous, African and European ancestry founded El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles in 1781, setting the growth of our present-day city into motion. You can visit Avila Adobe, the oldest existing residence in L.A., plus LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes and La Plaza Cocina, which hosts exhibitions, cooking classes, workshops and festivals that celebrate Mexican and Mexican American heritage. There's also the Italian American Museum and Chinese American Museum, in addition to Olvera Street, where you'll find an assortment of vendors selling handcrafted items, lucha libre masks, jewelry and more, plus long-standing spots like the famed Cielito Lindo, famous for its fried beef taquitos (two for \$5) presented in a takeout bowl in a generous puddle of avocado sauce. If the line there is too long, fourth-generation-owned El Rancho Grande is a solid substitute — order a No. 4 with two taquitos, one enchilada, beans and a salad for just \$9. Additional dining and drinking options include El Paseo Inn, which opened in 1930 and holds the distinction of being one of the oldest bars in the city; Las Anitas Café, serving Cal-Mex cuisine since 1947; and La Luz del Dia, which has been a bastion for Michoacán-style Mexican food since 1959.

1125 Paseo de la Plaza, Los Angeles, elpueblo.lacity.org

Fanny's

Academy Museum

of Motion Pictures

A spacious escape from the busy Wilshire and Fairfax intersection is this restaurant and cafe named after legendary film star Fanny Brice, whom Barbra Streisand depicted in the Oscar-winning musical "Funny Girl." It's next door to the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures and shares a block with LACMA and the La Brea Tar Pits. Dining during the day, when Fanny's offers a casual, counter-service menu with pastries, salads and a selection of hot items like lamb and chicken meatballs perched on a chickpea puree, even feels like a star experience with rich red booths, an Art Deco-inspired bar and a wraparound mural highlighting Hollywood's history. Dinner service steps it up with an old-school, captain-based service model, offering options like black truffle hummus with crispy mushrooms, sea bream with a macha hollandaise and a decadent, double-patty burger with bordelaise, Fiscalini cheddar and jambon de Paris.

16067 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, fannysla.com

Hansei

Japanese Cultural

and Community Center

Nestled behind a plaza that's dominated by a volcanic basalt sculpture by Isamu Noguchi, the Japanese Cultural and Community Center is one of the largest centers of its kind in the U.S. Its 2.2-acre campus includes a gallery, cultural room, exhibition center and a cutting-edge culinary cultural center that opens up to the James Irvine Japanese Garden, which features plants, trees and a waterfall that cascades in a 170-foot stream to lower levels connected by cedar bridges and feeds into a peaceful pond. This is the setting that diners journey through during their 11- to 12-course Nikkei experience led by chef-in-residence Chris Ono. Staple Japanese American dishes are reimaged at Hansei, including a California roll perched on tempura-coated nori with Dungeness crab and Santa Barbara sea urchin replacing the usual imitation crab; slivers of avocado and diced cucumber add a refreshing crunch to the wholly satisfying bite. Each course is artfully presented so that it complements the setting of the cultural center, including oysters displayed on a log with draping seaweed and morsels of chicken karaage topped with California caviar cradled in a bowl that's filled with smooth pebbles. Now that Keizo Shimamoto has joined the center's team as the culinary director of events, Ono looks forward to expanding the beverage program to include more sake options, cocktails and a wine list.

1244 S. San Pedro St., Los Angeles, jaccce.org/hansei

Lulu

Hammer Museum

Chef-restaurateur Alice Waters, of Berkeley's pioneering Chez Panisse, teamed with chef/cookbook author David Tanis to open Lulu in the Hammer's open-air courtyard in late 2021. Here, Tanis embraces the farm-forward, regenerative practices that Waters has long championed with a strong sourcing program and a seasonal menu that changes almost daily. Lulu offers a three-course lunch (\$45) and dinner (\$65), making it a popular choice for date night and UCLA students dining with visiting parents. With pops of primary colors, hanging lanterns and sprawling trees dotting the space, Lulu is an inviting idea before or after your museum visit, but be warned that it gets busy during mealtimes. Make a reservation if you can.

1 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, lulu.restaurant

Manuela

Hauser & Wirth

The vast Southern-inflected restaurant in Hauser & Wirth has its own noteworthy art collection on display throughout its interior, with commissions from artists such as Paul McCarthy, Mark Bradford and Subodh Gupta. The lush garden courtyard is the perfect setting for tucking into executive chef Kris Tominaga's seasonally driven menu, with vibrant options like a cara cara orange and kishu mandarin salad that's topped with Santa Barbara pistachios, or don't forget an order of the staple cast-iron cornbread for the table. Stroll Manuela's on-site garden while you wait to be seated and afterward take a peek into Hauser & Wirth, which hosts gallery exhibitions in addition to art talks and performances.

1907 E. 3rd St., Los Angeles, manuela-la.com

Meyers Manx Cafe

Petersen Automotive Museum

Quietly opened in the Petersen Automotive Museum in fall 2022, Meyers Manx Cafe lets you order from the cafe, breakfast or lunch menu without purchasing entrance to the museum and you'll still get a view of classic and souped-up cars on display through the floor-to-ceiling windows. Inside the cozy cafe that's named after the original dune buggy, you'll see framed memorabilia that celebrates road and racing culture, including retired pro driver Parnelli Jones' bright yellow racing suit, with a stylish bar, plenty of menu options and a star experience with rich red booths, an Art Deco-inspired bar and a wraparound mural highlighting Hollywood's history. Dinner service steps it up with an old-school, captain-based service model, offering options like black truffle hummus with crispy mushrooms, sea bream with a macha hollandaise and a decadent, double-patty burger with bordelaise, Fiscalini cheddar and jambon de Paris.

1 6060 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, meyersmanx.cafe.com

Neighborhood Grill by

Post & Beam

Natural History Museum

This new casual spot from John and Roni Cleveland represents a furthering of the mission of Post & Beam, their California soul-food restaurant in the Baldwin Hills neighborhood. Complete with a garden view, Neighborhood Grill subtly educates diners on signature soul-food ingredients and flavors, like a smoked pastrami sandwich that replaces the usual sauerkraut with vinegar collard greens, a vegan street taco with jerk-spiced mushrooms, and rockfish nuggets that recall the popular catfish nuggets served at Post & Beam. The grab-and-go section highlights local Black-owned businesses like Hotville Chicken and Southern Girl Desserts, with beer and wine curated by Crown & Hops. Guests can look forward to the debut of an additional supper series from chef Martin Draluck, who hosts Black Pot Supper Club at Post & Beam.

1 900 Exposition Blvd., Los Angeles, nhm.org /stories/new-catery-nhm

Otium

The Broad

Tucked in a courtyard next to the Broad, Otium features an engaging open kitchen that blends indoor and outdoor, with a menu from chef Tim Hollings- worth that leans on wood-fired cooking and sustainable sourcing. There are compelling reasons to return for weekday lunch, dinner and weekend brunch. Order at the counter for lunch and brunch and treat yourself to a flaky pastry-baked pastries including fluffy banana bread and apple bread butter coffee cake with a thick crumbly crust. Look out for just-added items like a duck confit pot pie cradled in a freshy crust and a fresh take on the Reuben with thick, veal-tongue pastrami stacked with sauerkraut on toasted rye bread. Reservations are recommended for dinner, which adds dishes like escargot topped with a fried garlic doughnut and rigatoni in a white Bolognese sauce with hen-of-the-wood mushrooms. Diners get a deep discount on parking at the Broad when they validate at the restaurant.

1 222 S. Hope St., Los Angeles, (213) 935-8500, otiumla.com

The Kitchen

at Descanso

Descanso Gardens

The Patina Group is behind the culinary programs at a handful of L.A. museums, including the Norton Simon Cafe and Ray's and Stark Bar at LACMA, but the Kitchen at Descanso stands out as the best, with a menu that sources from on-site growers. The purple haze goat cheese plate features a half-moon of the creamy cheese, dried fruits and nuts, grapes, Coachella Valley dates, rosemary crackers, seasonal jam, fennel pollen and flower petals over a bed of arugula for a filling snack to start your garden walks, while the vegan potato tacos with tajin-spiced tahini crema and the slow-roasted pork sandwich are well-suited for a full meal. The cocktail menu also makes good use of garden ingredients, with a Spring Bee margarita that blends honey, grapefruit and lemon juice with Patrón tequila, in addition to nonalcoholic options like a house-made hibiscus lemonade. An espresso bar and a selection of grab-and-go items also are available.

1 1418 Descanso Drive, La Cañada Flintridge, patinagroup.com /descanso-gardens

Trails Cafe

Griffith Park

Not just a convenient meeting spot in lush Griffith Park, Trails Cafe borders a pond and a children's playground and serves a smattering of picnic-friendly and refreshing items like a star experience with strawberry durban are favorites — is a must, as is the Snake Dog, a beef hot dog wrapped in a flaky croissant crust. The cafe is popular with families with kids on weekend mornings, but try visiting during weekday lunch for a more solitary experience.

1 2333 Fern Dell Drive, Los Angeles

Watts Coffee House

Mafundi Institute

The Watts Happening Cultural Center (a.k.a. the Mafundi Institute) is where you'll find the Watts Coffee House, opened by a group of locals after the historic neighborhood uprising in August 1965. Providing art, cultural and social programming, it became so popular that by 1970 the center outgrew that location and moved across the street. Watts Coffee House opened in the building in 1997, with chef Desiree Edwards leading the kitchen. The breakfast and lunch menu features Southern classics like biscuits and gravy, shrimp and grits and salmon croquettes cooked fresh to order. The only full-service, sit-down restaurant in Watts, the cafe is packed with locals most days and showcases the neighborhood's history with memorabilia on the walls. After the cultural institute came under threat in 2019, a community coalition, Friends of Mafundi (F.A.M.), was formed to restore it to its former glory. In 2021, the Watts Happening Cultural Center was designated by the L.A. City Council as a historic-cultural monument and today hosts writing workshops, music education courses and an annual poetry jam.

11827 E. 103rd St., Los Angeles, wattscoffee.house.com

Zeidler's Cafe

Skirball Cultural Center

Executive chef Sean Sheridan leads this bright indoor/outdoor cafe in addition to Judy's Counter, a grab-and-go station, and the overarching culinary program at the Skirball Cultural Center, which is home to one of the world's largest collections of Jewish ceremonial objects and art and is guided by the Jewish principle of "welcoming the stranger." The menu at Zeidler's features kosher-friendly items like matzo ball soup, a pastrami-style smoked salmon sandwich on marble rye and a Niçoise salad with olive oil-poached albacore tuna. The cultural center is celebrating Hanukkah with a gourmet spread available for takeout, including brisket slow-braised in apple cider and roasted root vegetables and Brussels sprouts glazed in Manischewitz.

1 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, (310) 440-4515, skirball.org/visit /dining