

Esquire

MAN AT HIS BEST

NOVEMBER 2011

RIHANNA
IS THE

**OR
PERHAPS
YOU'D
PREFER
WATCHES
PG. 67,
LEBRON
JAMES
PG.
130...**

2011

**...SOME
POLITICS
PG. 144,
OR MAYBE
A LITTLE
SAKE?
PG. 52**



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Esquire's

BEST NEW RESTAURANTS

2011
EST. 1984

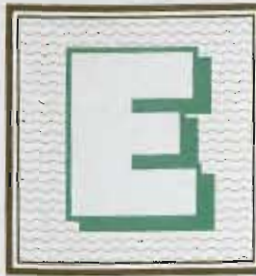
"FINE FOOD, COMFORTABLE SEATING - MORE CHAIRS IN THE BACK"

- AI FIORI
NEW YORK
- BOULUD SUD
NEW YORK
- CHICAGO CUT STEAKHOUSE
CHICAGO
- CONGRESS
AUSTIN
- COTOGNA
SAN FRANCISCO
- DOMINIQUE'S ON MAGAZINE
NEW ORLEANS
- 1500°
MIAMI BEACH
- FIOLA
WASHINGTON, D.C.
- LEGAL HARBORSIDE
BOSTON
- MICHAEL MINA
SAN FRANCISCO
- MILLESIME
NEW YORK
- PLAYA
LOS ANGELES
- THE PULLMAN
GLENWOOD SPRINGS, COLORADO
- RAY'S & STARK BAR
LOS ANGELES
- SALINAS
NEW YORK
- SOTTO
LOS ANGELES
- TICO
BOSTON
- TOWNE STOVE AND SPIRITS
BOSTON
- TWENTY FIVE LUSK
SAN FRANCISCO

↑
A HOSTESS WE LOVE
PG. 94

FEATURING

THE RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR • THE ESQUIRE HALL OF FAME • RIB EYES IN AUSTIN, FRIED LOBSTER IN BOSTON, AND CHORIZO EVERYWHERE • THE NEW ORLEANS COMEBACK • THE BEST STEAK SAUCE • AND MAYBE, JUST MAYBE, THE FIRST GREAT RESTAURANT OF 2012
BY JOHN MARIANI



everyone in the food world is always trying to pinpoint the trend of the moment. What's hot? What's next? What's going to fill seats? But right now, there is a trend mash going on. The best chefs and restaurateurs are leaving behind the recent comfort-food fad and heading off in strange new directions—pop-ups, comebacks, smaller small plates, bigger big plates, richer dishes, light touches. It's all a little confusing, and much of it is wonderful. We're here to celebrate the wonderful.

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RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR
MICHAEL MINA
SAN FRANCISCO

After three decades of compiling this list, most years I know which one will be the very best Best New Restaurant after fifteen minutes. In the case of Michael Mina, I was delighted to be back in the airy space, lighted by the soft, foggy San Francisco sun, that had long been Aqua, which Mina, the chef, helped open in 1991. Since then he has built an empire of mostly

high-end restaurants from Atlantic City to Vegas, a rampant expansionism that made me lose interest in him as a working chef. So Mina's return to his roots, at this stylish namesake where he swears he'll be cooking most of the time, was promising news. Mina's Web site says his food has "his sensibilities with Japanese ingredients and a French influence," which tells you lit-

tle—I pictured a high-mileage Citroën with cupholders. But Mina has learned from the global kitchen, and in this civilized dining room, he shows it. His Alaskan halibut is warmed in a ginger-carrot broth with steamed dumplings. He makes a *shabu shabu* of foie gras in a dashi broth with Asian mushrooms, and his Maine lobster pie comes with smoked potato, corn pudding, and roasted tomatoes—the best New England dish on the West Coast. If Mina is there the night you visit, you'll have one of the great meals of your life by an American master. •252 California Street; 415-397-9222; michaelmina.net

CONGRESS

AUSTIN

Austin has good barbecue (Iron Works), Mexican (Garrido's), even sushi (Uchiko), but a city this youthful, modern, and powerful has long needed the kind of fine-dining restaurant Rick Perry can brag about. Chef David Bull is no fanatical locavore, but he draws on the huge Texas cornucopia to create dishes like grilled sweetbreads with smoked poppy seeds in a buttermilk crema and beef tartare with fried oysters and truffles. There's a seven-course tasting menu that will tell you everything you need to know about Bull's talent; he can tell you why he's committed to Texas: "Texas is the underdog in the world of cuisine. Even today it conjures visions of barbecue and taco stands. And yet we have deep culinary roots with Mexico, but also a solid tradition of German cooking, cowboy chuck-wagon food, Italian, Native American, and an increasingly strong Asian influence. We have venison, antelope, peaches, figs, red snapper, oysters. It all makes my job a lot easier."

• 200 Congress Avenue; 512-827-2760; congressaustin.com


HANNAH MARY MARSHALL

Meet Esquire's 2011 Hostess of the Year, from Congress in Austin.

AGE: 24

HOMETOWN: Houston

EDUCATION: Studying dietetics at Texas State University

INTERESTS: Science,

dinosaurs, ice cream

HOBBIES: Raising goats and chickens (pictured)

ADVICE FOR OTHER

HOSTESSES: "Every hostess should get

chickens. Having to deal with something that is frequently obnoxious will teach you how to be a good hostess. You learn tolerance and patience."

LINCOLN RISTORANTE

NEW YORK

Part of Lincoln Center's grand restoration, Lincoln is a glittering wedge of glass suspended above the clamor of Manhattan street life, soaring out of the plaza next to a reflecting pool and Henry Moore's *Reclining Figure*. The roof doubles as a grassy park, so when it's sunny, you can get a tan before your meal.

Inside, at night, candlelight glows in shadowy corners, and brightness emanates from the glassed-in kitchen where Jonathan Benno, longtime chef at Thomas Keller's Per Se, has evolved from making New York-Italian cuisine to creating his own vivid interpretations of *la cucina*

italiana moderna, adapted to both the visual drama of the restaurant and the operatic ambience of Lincoln Center itself. (Full disclosure: My son is one of the managers, but that can't keep me from praising it.) The menu changes every night (one constant: Benno's name emblazoned across the front), but recently, his terrine of octopus and pork belly, played off the tanginess of pickled vegetables, dazzled. Fat tortelloni bulged with nettles under a sweet-sour mostarda, walnuts, and salty ricotta salata. And squid ink *strozzapreti* gained a briny edge from bottarga, capers, and taggiasca olives. There is a great wine list, and Richard Capizzi's superb desserts include warm crosta-

ta of pear and cranberry with a muscovado-sugar-and-brown-butter gelato. All that, and my kid saw Tom Cruise

and Katie Holmes one night!

• 142 West Sixty-fifth Street; 212-359-6500; lincolnristorante.com



We called a few of this year's restaurants with fake requests, to put their customer service—and their patience—to the test.

—Jed Moran

LEGAL HARBORSIDE, BOSTON GRADE: A

ESQ: I just called about a reservation for Saturday, and I wanted to make sure you had a place where I could tie up my falcon.

HOSTESS: [Pause.] I'm sorry, is that a boat?

ESQ: No, no. A bird. I'm a falconer.

HOSTESS: Uh, I'm trying to just think of where we can...

ESQ: I have these leather things that go over the eyes so he doesn't move

around a lot. But he's big.

HOSTESS: Yeah—what we do with pets is have them stay outside on the harbor walk. But I'm not sure if it's legal for him to sit on the pole. Can we put a chair out on the harbor walk? Hopefully his claws are... the material on our chairs—

ESQ: Well, I can put claw guards on. But this is a champion falcon—it's like

a \$50,000 falcon. I wanted it to be inside the door.

HOSTESS: If I may ask you to hold just a brief moment?

ESQ: Sure. [Pause.]

MANAGER: Hello? Yes, just for liability purposes—I'm sure you've heard this—

ESQ: What if I paid a server to watch him? I'll buy some entrées for him.

You have salmon?

MGR: I just—I wouldn't feel comfortable.

anyone in Houston. They succeeded. • **HUSK, Charleston, S. C.** Sean Brock is a locavore in extremis—even growing his own salt