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featured restaurant

FIG Restaurant



by Elyse Glickman

Go FIG-ure!

A decade ago, many fine dining destinations could be fit into one cutesy, catchy term—(Global adjective here) Fusion. Lucky for us, today's chefs are stripping away all the extra sauces and seasonings and getting back to basics with concepts that they call either "Farm-to-Table," "Sustainable" or "Seasonal." **FIG** is part of that new wave (going under the "Sustainable" banner), and represents it brilliantly with a menu that is simple and yet has something for everybody—even a dining companion who is avowedly Kosher and vegetarian.

Everything about Fig boldly announces "**fresh**," from the cheerfully retro coral and beige interiors to a gorgeously arranged cheese and charcuterie station manned by the house cheese master to the on-point menu. **Executive Chef Ray Garcia's** concept of a menu itself is crisp and fun, not only listing up-to-the-minute dishes but also a handy little chart on the bottom that tells the diner what's just arrived in season, what's peaking and what's hitting the market in the future. Reinforcing that message are attentive waiters with an encyclopedic knowledge of the origin of vegetable in every dish, from the farm to the market purchased. They also like to bounce around a catchy motto—if a dish is salty, sugary or sauced, somebody's trying to hide something. Garcia, meanwhile, executes his dishes with absolutely nothing to hide. **The roasted tomato soup** tastes like tomatoes, **the warm quinoa salad** bursts with the flavors of the chard, squash, apples and string beans added for color. **The vegetable risotto** is a vegetarian's dream come true—a gorgeous pink mass (from beets in season) enlivened with anything the chef can find from the local market, and artistically arranged.

There are classic French bistro inclusions, including the wildly popular **Steak Frites** and a very decadent and authentic **onion soup gratinee** that tastes of Paris. However, things as simple as cauliflower, parsnips and pickled vegetables are stellar because even with seasoning we could still taste the vegetables as nature intended. The same goes for their cocktail list, including the signature **Fig Mojito**, which is flavorful but definitely clean and fresh on the palate. To finish a perfect meal, we passed on

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dessert and instead went for a cheese platter loaded with lactic treasures. My vegetarian dining companion was by this time in a state of bliss, thrilled with the range of culinary pleasures and saving just enough room to go to "cheese tasting school" with the aid of another great little menu and the guidance of our servers. We graduated happy, and planning to go back for refresher courses.

101 Wilshire Boulevard, Santa Monica. (310) 319-3111
www.figsantamonica.com

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Ago

8478 Melrose Ave. Hollywood. 323.655.6333. Italian. Although it is mainly known for being owned by Robert DeNiro, the cuisine is noteworthy and reminiscent of traditional Italy. The primarily Tuscan menu includes favorites like flaky monkfish and brick oven pizza. Start with the burrata, which is not on the menu.

Andaz

8401 Sunset Boulevard, West Hollywood. 323.785.6058
 "California Marke". Open, warmly-lit and airy Mid-century-inspired dining space, customizable menu and three-dimensional open concept kitchen coming out to meet restaurant guests and the very Sunset Strip itself. The value for the diner comes in with the "market-to-table" offering that allow guests to create their own feast with the freshest items available on the chef's table.

A.O.C

8022 W. 3rd St., Los Angeles. 323.653.6359. Mediterranean. A wine and-tapas chic bistro by Suzanne Goin and Caroline Styne (Lucques). Cheeses (daily selection), charcuterie, pâtés, boudins, lamb skewers, along with other French and Mediterranean delicacies. A great opportunity to experiment, with more than 50 wines offered by the bottle, carafe, and glass.

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Backyard

W Hotel, 930 Hilgard Ave., Westwood, 310.443.8211. French. The W Hotel's upscale poolside restaurant and bar serving summertime fare for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Sip The Backyard's signature cucumber martini, then let the perfectly chilled oysters on the half-shell slither down your throat.

Bastide

8475 Melrose Place. West Hollywood. 323.651.5950. French. Arguably the best French restaurant in Los Angeles. True to the extravagance of French haute cuisine, this prestigious restaurant does not skimp on indulgent luxuries like first quality truffles and foie gras. If you are in on an expense account, or feeling flush, we wish you luck getting a reservation at this exclusive eatery.

Bin 8945

18945 Santa Monica Blvd. West Hollywood. 310-550-8945. Californian. Owner/sommelier David Haskell has created a real gem of a place that packs a lively "scene," fun small course dining and a thrilling wine experience into one dazzling little package.

Beechwood

822 Washington Blvd. Venice 310.448.8884. New American. Both a lively bar scene and a serious foodie dining experience, Beechwood offers the best of both worlds.

Bond Street

Bond Street at the Thompson, 9360 Wilshire Blvd, Beverly Hills. 310.601.2255. Euro-Japanese. Jonathan Morr's third installment (NY/Miami/Beverly Hills) featuring outdoor dining, sushi bar and