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Everybody Eats Where?

What's Your Reaction?

I grew up in a family obsessed with food and restaurants; at the same time, we are all extremely health conscious. Kind of an oxymoron for foodies. Nonetheless, whenever anyone travels to New York or abroad, they call me to find out where everybody eats.

I am a great cook, and so if I really want to eat well, I can just stay home and cook. But I love restaurants, so much so that I co-authored with William Stadium, famed foodie and restaurant observer, a book about the world's legendary restaurants called *Everybody Eats There*. It seemed that when we traveled the first question asked upon returning was "Where did you eat?" We also want to know where it is that everybody eats. Usually a restaurant where everybody eats is a restaurant that becomes quite legendary, at least if they have longevity and the ability to attract an exciting clientele. By exciting, that meant a cornucopia of famous faces from entertainment, art, politics and business. The food had to be good but not necessarily haute cuisine.

In New York City we included the power lunching spots -- **The Four Seasons** and **Michael's**, The Italian places **Rao's** and **Gino's**, and **Da Silvano**, as well as places like **Balthazar** and **La Grenouille** among others. What all of these places have in common are their staying power, people power, and very dynamic owners and hosts. Alas, that is all in our book, so enough with the sales pitch, it is available on Amazon.com if you want to read more. (I will revisit these restaurants and fill you in on what is happening there today.)

Now before I get started, I need you to know that I am not a food critic, and do not aspire to be one. I am just somebody who really enjoys restaurants, and, having worked in and grown up in a restaurant family (my brother Peter Morton created the **Hard Rock Cafes** and **Mortons** in London and Los Angeles. Mortons was *the* place in LA for a very long time and it was also the home of *Vanity Fair's* annual Oscar party for 15 years), I think that I have more than a little understanding of what goes on behind the scenes to make a restaurant function well. I have also traveled extensively and have made a point of knowing where to eat and what to eat in every place that I visited. I have had the privilege of breaking bread with many of the chefs and owners of the restaurants that I have visited and hope to do the same with the new ones that I discover.

New York is a fabulous restaurant town, maybe the best in the world, and there are so many places to discover and rediscover. This is also the home of the Food Network where chefs are the stars and so New York plays host to many events devoted to food and also to wine. I will try to attend many of these events and visit the new as well as old restaurants in this great city, so I hope you will come along on my journey as I report on my culinary adventures. If I can be of assistance to you, please feel free to write to me as my family and friends do when they want to know, *Where does Everybody Eat??*

My first entry: (I have so much to write, but I will take it slowly so you don't get indigestion!!)

I returned to New York City mid-September after spending the summer at home in LA. Upon my return, I was so sad to see that so many restaurants had closed. I guess it is a sign of the economic mess that George W. left us. It takes a lot of money these days to keep a restaurant operating, and if the rent is high and the food costs as high, it is necessary for a restaurant to attract a certain amount of customers every day to just break even.

I was especially saddened to learn that one of my favorite fish restaurants, **The John Dory**, closed its doors. The owners are the very talented chef April Bloomfield and Ken Fydman, who also own the **Spotted Pig** in the West Village (where *everybody* does eat).

We put the Spotted Pig in our book, but after our wonderful editor Chris Pavone, a fellow foodie and cook himself, finished editing and quit our publishing house, we were thrown to the wolves who edited out this fun gastro-pub that attracts the likes of Bono, Jay-Z and neighbors like Peter Saarsgard, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Julianne Moore, and *Sopranos* star James Gandolfini. There are also many Food Network stars like Iron Chef and restaurateur Mario Batali. Even former President Bill Clinton has been to the Spotted Pig. It is a place where you can eat a great burger accompanied by amazing garlic and rosemary spiked fries at two in the morning, or these amazing little gnudi (kind of like gnocchi), or bar food like deviled eggs (the best I have ever had), and bacon wrapped prunes stuffed with poached pears, called Devils on Horseback. You can go on line and see their terrific menu at www.thespottedpig.com. They have a terrific wine list and serve great beers, local and otherwise on tap. It is truly one of the most fun little spots in the West Village and worth a trip there for lunch, dinner or just a drink and snack.

April and Ken have just opened a new place called **The Breslin** in the Ace Hotel on 29th and Broadway, but I haven't had a chance to check it out yet, so stay tuned.

There may have been many closings but being this is New York, there were also many new restaurants that opened over the summer while I was gone. **One was the Standard Grill in Andre Balázs' new hotel in the meatpacking district, the Standard.** I have been five times already, twice to eat in the Grill and three times to eat at the bar of the Grill. I had a great time, every time. The place is very good looking, and so is the crowd. Everybody from the general manager to the bartenders are extremely professional and gracious. I have often found this to be rare in trendy New York restaurants. The food is also very good, another rarity in trendy new restaurants. When one sits down at the table, there are bowls of big French radishes, sea salt and good butter, crunchy good rolls and chunks of Parmesan cheese. Who needs to eat after that, but of course we continue on. The menu has some classic grill room dishes, like a New York strip and rib eye steak for two, plus wonderful lamb chops and an organic Berkshire pork chop. My favorites are the country pate, the charred Spanish octopus with sweet potato and chilis, and the Atlantic swordfish with soy, lime and ginger. And oh, those French fries that give Balthazar a real run for the money -- don't eat too many of them, or they won't leave you room to try the decadent chocolate mousse, so big that you need a big group to share it and save you the calories. The chef is Dan Silverman, who worked at the **Lever House** (now **Casa Lever**; I will visit very soon). He sends every table a complimentary bowl of crispy potatoes with a smoked paprika aioli that is so good I would like to suggest they serve it at the bar. (I am always the one who has to stop the waiter from taking it off the table when we are finished.) Silverman has a big job at the **Standard Grill**, for this is one of the busiest restaurants in NYC.

I love that the restaurant serves some very good wines by the glass, especially in the rosé section. This is a wine that is so misunderstood, but Andre obviously likes rosé enough that he is even producing one with his name on the label. They serve Château Minuty (a favorite of mine, and a better value than the very well known Domaine Ott) by the glass, but have four other rosés on the wine list.

The wine list is separated by price, which for most people is very helpful, but if you are a real connoisseur looking for a particular region or type, this can be a bit frustrating.

When you happen to be out late and searching for a place to eat after hitting all the bars and lounges in town, come back to the Grill's front room and bar, where you can eat till 4 a.m., and eat quite well. I especially liked the Late Night Omelet -- yes, that is what it is called, with goat cheese and fresh herbs, surrounded by those fries again! You can also have oysters or market charcuterie of cured meats and sausages, a chopped salad, a few types of sandwiches and a classic steak frites ... yes, the fries again. Then there are the desserts, the same as the grill, so watch out, because they could you up for another day and night!

After dinner at the Standard Grill, you should take a trip up to the top of the Standard and visit the Boom Boom Room. This has to be the the most beautiful bar and lounge to arrive in NY for a long time. It is like the **Rainbow Room** 70 years later with 360 degree views of the city, Hudson River, New Jersey and beyond. The bartenders are dressed in starched white jackets while they are mixing cocktails and pouring glasses of champagne ... Dom Perignon by the glass at \$45 dollars a glass, but there is also the very good Moët & Chandon Brut Impérial for \$14 dollars a glass. The glasses they fill are exquisite Marie Antoinette coupes, right out of a 1940s motion picture. The gorgeous waitresses wear sexy satin dresses designed by Rubin Chapelle. The place has an elegance not usually found in a late night lounge.

There is a small but very good little menu, but watch out for the addicting bar snacks that are brought to you when you order a drink: red and yellow candied beet slice chips, pistachios with Cajun spices, marinated green olives (marinade includes orange oil, orange zest, toasted fennel and coriander seed). You absolutely must visit the bathrooms, because each bathroom has floor to ceiling glass windows that kind of leave you breathless (if not a bit off balance).

I went to the Boom Boom Room the last three Thursday nights. This last Thursday was insane. It felt like the 1980s all over again. There was a crowd five deep at the door to get in, and famous faces seated in all the crevices of the lounge. What makes the place so great is that there is a real mix of old and young, gay and straight, fashion, art, music, TV, theater and movies and some Wall Street that sneaks in, along with the obligatory Euros and Russians. It is the best people watching place in town! My hat is off to Andre Balázs and his marvelous staff lead by Kamil Parchomienko, who has been part of the Balázs family for a very long time working at Andre's hotel in Sag Harbor, **Sunset Beach, The Mercer Hotel and Kitchen**, and in Los Angeles at both the **Chateau Marmont** (which I love) and The Standard Hotel. Their job is very difficult but they handle it with grace and charm.

To recuperate from a late nights at the Boom Boom Room, or just to prep for a late night, I have been going to my favorite refueling stations, **Via Quadronno** and **Bottega Del Vino**, where they make the best best coffees (espresso, cappucino and other coffee delights) as well as serving up Italian grilled panini like those found in the bars of Milan.

I have my favorite concoction, a very deep dark chocolate moccacino. I am very picky when it comes to this drink. The hot chocolate is too sweet for me so I have them mix it with a cappucino, and then it is absolutely perfect. I also love their breakfast mozzarella and tomato and basil panini on bread that is kind of like a very thin foccaccia. Of course this picky eater asks for extra tomato and basil and then pours a lot of their very good olive oil all over the sandwich. They also have the Italian version of croissants called brioche. I always get a sugar brioche and an apricot brioche. No ... I don't eat them all, just a little of each. If you want these, it is sometimes necessary to call and have them hold them. They sell out very quickly in the morning ... especially the mozzarella and tomato sandwich.

Bottega del Vino and Via Quadronno are partners. Via Q, as everybody calls it, is on East 73rd between Madison and Fifth. It is small, very Italian, and usually very crowded, so I have been going to Bottega del Vino on 59th between Madison and Fifth when I crave the coffees. If the weather permits, there are tables outside and many wonderful Italian wines by the glass. The glasses are exceptionally beautiful. There is nothing like drinking wine out of great stem ware. The people watching is great. It seems that Bottega del Vino has really caught on and has become a meeting place. There is also a very good restaurant in the back. I love their gnocchi with pesto and tagliolini with cherry tomatoes.

Today I returned to Via Q and was lucky to find a little table. I ordered the Madonina grilled panini which is mozzarella, tomato, prosciutto and olive tapenade, I asked them to leave out the prosciutto and add lots of basil. Then I opened up the sandwich and poured that great olive oil onto everything. What a fantastic sandwich. I also love the Tiroler which is kind of like an Italian BLT. It uses speck which is another type of charcuterie and has goat cheese, shredded romaine lettuce, tomato and a special pink sauce that is similar to thousand island. I eat that only when I am feeling naughty. I don't eat meat that much, but that sandwich is irresistible. I washed it down with two of those incredible moccacinos.

On my way home from the movies this evening, I stopped off at **Mezzaluna** on Third and 74th for a plate of pasta. Mezzaluna is one of the best little Italian restaurants in New York. I have been going there for years and years. They have a wood burning oven where they make their pizzas. The soups, pastas, salads and specials such as dover sole roasted in the wood burning oven are exceptional. Some of my favorites are their pasta fagioli; penne bisanzio, which is fresh tomato, basil and mozzarella; and the insalata mezzaluna, which has arugula, radicchio, baby artichokes, celery and mushrooms. The place is adorable and filled with a lot of Italians and locals from the neighborhood. I have also spotted many famous faces and many chefs from around the city stopping in there to eat, such as Jean Georges Vongerichten and Daniel Boulud, among others.

Mezzaluna is an institution next to another institution ... **JG Melons**, where I sometimes succumb to eating their famous burgers and cottage fries. I actually had one a few weeks ago and boy was it ever delicious! I didn't feel guilty for a minute.

On my next entry, I will take you to what I expect will be another big success, the New York branch of London's **Le Caprice** owned by the dynamic Richard Caring, who bought the **Soho House Group**, **The Ivy**, **Scotts** in London and LA's **Cecconi's**, where my brother's **Mortons** used to be. Don't miss my first impressions of this fabulous new restaurant!

Again, please send any questions to *Everybody Eats Where?*

Thanks
Mara Gibbs