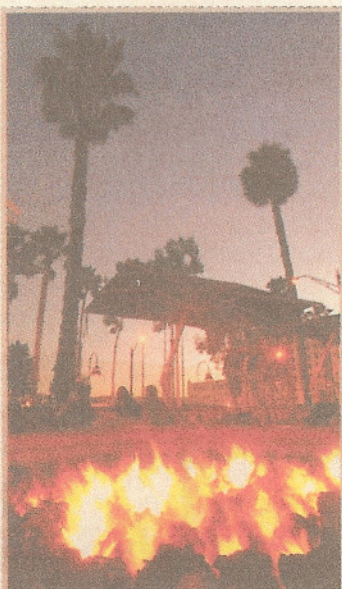


Los Angeles Times

# FOOD

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RICK LOOMIS *Los Angeles Times*  
**TRACHT'S:** *The chef-owner of Jar has opened a Long Beach spot with a patio and fire pit.*

## THE REVIEW

# Under the stars, it's pot roast all the way

By S. IRENE VIRBILA  
*Times Staff Writer*

**S**UZANNE TRACHT, one of L.A.'s top chefs, known for her delightful take on the classic pot roast and other chophouse fare, has opened her second restaurant six years after she founded Jar. And surprise, it's not in West Hollywood or Santa Monica: It's in Long Beach, a stone's throw from the Convention Center and the Queen Mary.

The diminutive chef was chef de cuisine at Campanile before she set off on her own — and in fact opened Jar with Campanile chef-owner Mark Peel (she's since bought him out). Tracht is such a talent that the Renaissance Hotel management scouted her for the restaurant in its newly revamped Long Beach locale.

With her unerring instinct for what people want to eat now, she's a natural. Her cooking is strong, yet graceful. Her plates look appealing (which isn't all that easy when steaks and chops are your main ingredients), and though steakhouses from a new

[See *Tracht's*, Page F9]

## RESTAURANTS



Photographs by RICK LOOMIS, Los Angeles Times

FROM ABOVE: From the mezzanine of the Renaissance Hotel in Long Beach, guests can look into Tracht's bar and dining area.

# A polished menu

[Tracht's, from Page F1] A generation of chefs have opened right and left, Tracht's version is still both classic and very personal, with enticing first courses and sides added to the mix.

Tracht's might as well be called Jar Two, the menu so faithfully duplicates the original. But the crowd and the feeling of the place are very different. Whereas Jar attracts a glamorous urban crowd, Tracht's gets a wild mix of conventioneers, hotel guests, airline personnel and local foodies discovering what has long been missing from the local scene: a serious restaurant. If Jar is a destination restaurant, then Tracht's is the worthy understudy to the star.

This chef's got her style and she sticks with it; the intelligent menu at Jar has barely changed since it opened. The new Tracht's benefits from that well-honed repertoire and her exacting execution. Fall in love with the char siu pork chop and the duck fried rice one night, and chances are you'll love it the next time you come. She has consistency down to a science.

But translating such a beloved L.A. restaurant in a hotel context has its challenges. And those seem to be mainly in the front of the house.

The wait staff at Tracht's seems, for the most part, very inexperienced. When you check in at the maître d's station, even with a reservation, there's a wait for the table to be set up — even though the place is half empty. A server assures us it's warm enough to eat outside one night because the terrace floor is heated — then forgets to turn on the heat.

After several earnest but very green waiters, we get a savvy waiter one night, and it feels like an unexpected gift. The server's ministrations iron away the fact that the dining room isn't exactly cozy. But the patio is alluringly done up in Miami Beach chic with cantilevered umbrellas, comfortable armchairs and, in the middle, a fire pit surrounded by sofas. Here too the ocean, mostly blocked by buildings, is a presence. The nearby Art Deco building, the Breakers, is easy on the eyes, and far off in the distance are the lights of the Queen Mary.

The patio has a sense of place, and that place is Long Beach.

## Delicious starters

ONCE the food starts coming, none of the service glitches really matters, because for the most part Tracht's delivers. The cooking under Randy Montoya, who took over as executive chef after the opening chef, Jessica Alexander, left, isn't quite as polished as Jar's, but, as Larry David would say in "Curb Your Enthusiasm," "It's pretty good. Pretty good!"

Start with Tracht's signature deviled eggs. They'll make you wonder why you don't see this typically American dish more often. How delicious, the yolk mixed with mayonnaise and a dash of hot pepper and



MINIMALIST: Signature braised pot roast is made with boned short rib, like the pot roast served at Suzanne Tracht's Jar.

## Tracht's

Rating: ★★

**Location:** Tracht's, Renaissance Long Beach Hotel, 111 E. Ocean Blvd. (at Pine Avenue), Long Beach; (562) 499-2533; [www.renaissancehotels.com/lgbn](http://www.renaissancehotels.com/lgbn) and soon at [www.trachts.com](http://www.trachts.com).

**Ambience:** Hotel restaurant with white tablecloths and dark wood, a glassed-in wine cellar and a sleek outdoor patio with fire pit and tables overlooking the action on Ocean Boulevard.

**Service:** Varies from sassy and professional to earnest and inexperienced.

**Price:** Dinner appetizers, \$7 to \$16; salads, \$9 to \$11; broilers and roasts, \$19 to \$48; braises and sautés, \$14 to \$24; sides, \$5 to \$8; desserts, \$5 to \$7. Lunch appetizers and salads, \$5 to \$11; sandwiches, \$10 to \$19; main courses, \$13 to \$25; sides, \$5 to \$7; desserts, \$8.

**Best dishes:** Crab deviled eggs, fried oysters, Belgian red endive Caesar salad, lobster cocktail, pot roast, Kansas City steak, chopped sirloin with fried egg, coq au vin, burger, creamed corn, sautéed pea shoots, chocolate pudding, ice

topped with some delicate Maryland or Pecky Toe crab.

Or order up a half-dozen oysters on the half shell with black pepper ponzu. Lobster salad, chunks of poached Maine lobster tossed with julienne green mango and drenched in a spicy lime vinaigrette makes a wonderful light first course.

Belgian red endive Caesar or a simple iceberg wedge with blue cheese dressing are delightful too; salads are always sensible and well-dressed.



RICK LOOMIS, Los Angeles Times  
APPETIZER: Deviled eggs with crab and hot pepper.

cream sundae.

**Wine list:** Mostly California, and not that interesting, but international choices are better. Corkage fee, \$25.

**Best table:** One on the patio near the fire pit.

**Details:** Open for lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. daily and for dinner from 5:30 to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, until 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Lounge is open from 11 a.m. to midnight Sunday through Thursday, until 1 a.m. Friday and Saturdays. Full bar. Two-hour validated parking available at Renaissance Hotel entrance.

Rating is based on food, service and ambience, with price factors left in account. In addition to quality: ★★★★★ Outstanding on every level. ★★★★★ Excellent. ★★★★★ Very good. ★★★★★ Good. ★★★★★ Poor to satisfactory.

The fried oysters are perfect — golden and crunchy, served with a punchy celery root remoulade on a bed of fried strands of potato.

One night the special soup is a chilled puree of watercress swirled with crème fraîche and garnished with a single leaf of cress. I felt privileged to be eating such an elegant soup outside, under the moon. And I couldn't help but wonder why so few people were eating here, not only on this particular eve-

ning, but on each of my visits. Meanwhile, nearby Pine Avenue — the equivalent of San Diego's honky-tonk Gaslamp Quarter — is jammed.

Hotel restaurants, even serious ones such as Tracht's, can't seem to overcome the perception that they're solemn and stuffy, expensive and boring. Unless the babe factor is tremendous (think the W Hotels and their ilk), few people who live in town would even consider going out to a hotel for dinner. In this case they should, because Tracht's is serving the best food I've had in Long Beach.

And for the quality, the prices could almost be considered a bargain. Sure, if you order the superb Kansas City steak, your bill is going to be high. But you can also get a fine burger here, made from juicy, flavorful beef and served with balsamic red onions, watercress, tomato and a dollop of aioli and some killer fries. I like the chopped sirloin crowned with a fried egg and served with a pungent green peppercorn sauce. The skirt steak is tasty too.

Tracht's also offers the chef's signature braised pot roast. It's a minimalist version, all about the beef, which is actually boned short rib, and short on the veggies. (One night mine came with a single — very delicious — carrot.) I'm less enthusiastic about the char siu pork chop: The sweet soy glaze is all too reminiscent of '60s teriyaki.

Coq au vin, though, is a classic that's gone missing on local menus. Here it's the real thing, chicken deeply stained from the red wine braising liquid rich with mushrooms, pearl onions and bacon. Nice.

You can also get fish, notably roasted wild salmon cooked to a shivery rose color and served in a simple lemon and shallot vinaigrette.

## Go global

THE mostly California wine list isn't that compelling. You're better off finding something in the limited international selections, such as the Vacheron Sancerre, Il Palazzino Chianti or Patrick LeSec Gigondas. Desserts are pure Suzanne Tracht. There's her individual banana cream pie: ripe bananas folded into softly whipped, unsweetened cream in a crust that always seems to be too tough. The ice cream sundae is all pleasure — vanilla and chocolate ice cream served with a sauce boat each of chocolate and caramel sauces. This is a good one to share.

But if you're going to get just one dessert, make it the chocolate pudding. Served in a big glass, it's everything it should be — heaven in every bite.

Another Suzanne Tracht restaurant in the Southland can only be a good thing. And although Tracht's doesn't trump Jar, it offers well-executed, classic chophouse fare with first courses and sides original enough to make it a standout on the Long Beach dining scene.

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