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At your service

An explosion of new hotel bars brings glamour back in a big way. A guide to L.A.'s hottest, plus a preview of what's to come. Page 26

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

With a Long Beach vibe

L.A. star chef Suzanne Tracht opens a spot at a fashionable site to the south.

By S. IRENE VIRBILA
Times Staff Writer

SUZANNE TRACHT of Jar has opened a second restaurant, and it's not exactly just down the street. Called Tracht's, it's in the Renaissance Long Beach Hotel, in a town that seems to be largely off the radar for L.A. chefs until now. Part of the hotel's \$11-million renovation, Tracht's has a great spot at the corner of Pine Avenue and Ocean Boulevard.

The dining room is *très chic*, with lots of dark wood, white tablecloths and giant ruched orange fabric lampshades hovering overhead. In the bar, which serves food until midnight most nights and until 1 a.m. on weekends, water slithers down a glass wall, and more than a thousand bottles of wine reside in a glassed-in wine cabinet.

The most inviting aspect of Tracht's, other than the elegant chophouse fare, is the outdoor patio, which wraps around one corner of the building and looks out on Ocean Boulevard toward the Pacific. Though buildings block much of the water view, tables under handsome cantilevered umbrellas still can revel in that authentically salty breeze. Glass windscreens and a radiant heated floor keep you comfy enough to concentrate on the food. There's also a jolly fire pit with seating for those who want to cozy up with a martini or a glass of wine.

Tracht's menu hews very closely to Jar's, presenting a neat lineup of the Los Angeles restaurant's best dishes. The crab deviled eggs make a delightful little appetizer to share, hard-boiled eggs with a spicy stuffing topped with a little fresh crabmeat. There are Hama Hama oysters on the half shell served with a black pepper ponzu and a terrific take on Caesar salad made with crisp, slightly bitter red endive instead of the usual romaine leaves. I'm a big fan of Tracht's deconstructed lobster cocktail with chunks of beautifully cooked lobster and shredded green mango drenched in lime. If you want to go lighter, order the



WITH A VIEW: The outdoor patio wraps around one corner of the building and looks out on a dramatic yet relaxed downtown area. Features include a fire pit with seating for cozying up.

LORI SHEPLER Los Angeles Times

Tracht's

Where: Renaissance Long Beach Hotel, 111 E. Ocean Blvd., Long Beach

When: 5 to 10 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays, 5 to 10:30 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Lounge is open 11 a.m. to midnight Sundays through Thursdays, and until 1 a.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Lunch is slated to begin in the next week or so. Full bar. Two-hour validated parking at hotel entrance.

Price: Appetizers, \$7 to \$16; salads, \$9 to \$11; broilers and roasts, \$19 to \$48; braises and sautés, \$14 to \$23; sides, \$5 to \$8; desserts, \$5 to \$7.

Info: (562) 499-2533, www.renaissancehotels.com/lgbn

pretty butter lettuce salad with breakfast radishes and a shower of fresh herbs.

Over our first courses, we watch the people parade by on Ocean Boulevard. It's nothing

like the crowd streaming by farther north on Santa Monica's Ocean Avenue, and that's the beauty: Long Beach has its own relaxed vibe.

With Tracht's in residence, you can enjoy the scene while digging into a remarkably flavorful veal porterhouse or savoring Jar's signature pot roast with carrots and caramelized onions. *Char siu* pork chop is a thick one, heavily brined and basted with a sweet marinade that chars up beautifully. It may not be to everyone's taste, but if you favor teriyaki and love sweet Chinese dishes, this is your baby.

Steak lovers get their choice of Kansas City strip, skirt steak, rib-eye or filet. But there are also some braised options, such as a fine coq au vin or braised lamb shank perfumed with coriander and star anise. Most of the main courses come with an onion roasted in its skin until it's soft and velvety and stuffed with a pesto.

Tracht has always turned out appealing side dishes. Onion rings here are so crisp and delicious that when you finish one

order, you want to ask for another. Sautéed pea shoots with garlic and hot pepper are wonderful. And as for duck fried rice, it's sheer genius to put this on a chophouse menu, because it's such a fine accompaniment to most of the meats and even fish.

For dessert, the banana cream pie has the same luscious filling of softly whipped cream and bananas as it does at Jar — and the same hard, cookie-like crust.

Obviously, Tracht can't be in two places at once, so when she's in L.A. at her primary restaurant, chef de cuisine Jessica Alexander, former sous-chef at Studio in Laguna Beach's Montage resort, is in charge.

Based on a single visit a few days after the restaurant opened on the propitious date of 7/7/07, Alexander seems to have the same meticulous attention to detail as Tracht does.

For the Long Beach dining scene, it can only be a win-win situation.

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Sides to the center

At some restaurants, the sides are so compelling, it's tempting to make a meal out of them.

Dominick's

Our favorite side at this low-key Italian spot is the multicolored heirloom carrots from McGrath Farms. The tiny carrots are cooked on a wood-burning grill, then brushed with butter. Lastly, they get a touch of nutmeg, salt and pepper. For summer, there's also sautéed white corn finished with basil and Parmesan. And it's hard to go wrong with fried, smashed red potatoes tossed with a little lemon and raw garlic.

■ Sides, \$8. 8715 Beverly Blvd., West Hollywood, (310) 652-2335.

Buffalo Club

Chef Patrick Healy does a whopping dozen different sides. Four feature potatoes, but you can also get a stack of crisp cheese grit fries with house-made spicy ketchup, collard greens braised with ham hock, fresh okra dredged in egg white and cornmeal and deep fried, as well as delicious little pan-fried hush puppy cakes with a golden exterior that gives way to a custardy center.

■ Sides, \$10. 1520 Olympic Blvd., Santa Monica, (310) 450-8600.

Brooks

Among the sides chef Andy Brooks offers at his 2-month-old dining room are jalapeño cheese grits made with roasted jalapeños, Jack cheese and Parmesan, and truffled squash, a combination of colorful summer squashes stewed with tomatoes, fresh herbs and white truffle oil. All of the sides are served in adorable mini cast-iron pots.

■ Sides, \$5. 545 E. Thompson Blvd., Ventura, (805) 652-7070.

BLD

Order one of the "self-constructive dinners" such as a grilled flat-iron steak or hemp-crust tofu and choose from any two sides. Perhaps halved Brussels sprouts roasted until they're golden and soft polenta made with butter, cream and onion, or fingerling potatoes sautéed in olive oil and fresh herbs and garlic rapini.

■ Tofu dinner, \$16. 7450 Beverly Blvd., L.A. (323) 930-9744.

The Lodge Steakhouse

Along with the requisite steakhouse sides of creamed spinach, mashed potatoes and onion rings, diners at this 2-year-old looker can indulge in sautéed shiitake and cremini mushrooms finished with fresh basil; Lyonnaise potatoes seared in bacon fat, then pan fried with yellow onion; and for the season, baby squash and carrots simply roasted with a little garlic butter.

■ Sides, \$8. 14 N. La Cienega Blvd., Beverly Hills, (310) 854-0024.

— LESLEE KOMAIKO