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EAT WHERE YOU SLEEP

Gone are the days when dining at hotels was a culinary sacrifice. BY BETH BUEHLER

NOT LONG AGO, ordering off a menu at most hotel restaurants was a matter of convenience, not an attempt to make your taste buds do gymnastics. Those days are gone at many Colorado hotels as the food scene has become serious business with the hiring of top-notch chefs, recruiting a chef/owner to run the show and creating atmospheres that make groups and leisure travelers want to eat where they snooze.



Chefs Club by FOOD & WINE utilizes the talents of Best New Chefs award winners.

One of the state's first resorts to figure out this equation long ago is The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs. With 20 on-site restaurants, cafés and lounges, there is something to fit most every taste, but perhaps the best private dining options for groups are Penrose Room, Ristorante Del Lago and Summit with dedicated and unique spaces for this purpose. All meet up to high gourmand expectations, but we'll focus on **Penrose Room** since it is

Colorado's only Forbes Five Star and AAA Five-Diamond restaurant.

Located at the top of the South Tower and focusing on contemporary European cuisine, Penrose Room immediately feels special with glittering chandeliers, large windows overlooking the resort and mountains, and live entertainment and dancing. The semiprivate Cornet Room is an extension of the main dining room and can host two tables of 20 each

for a total of 40 guests. Just one room over is the fully private Chef's Table room with demonstration kitchen and seating for up to 16. Not only can you see chefs and a sommelier in action, hearing explanations behind each taste and sip, the dishware and individually created menus are sublime. A wraparound balcony provides additional options.

Situated within the Renaissance Denver Downtown City Center, **range** restaurant serves

PHOTOS: CHRIS COUNCIL & EMILY CHADWIN (OPPOSITE) DONALD J. RIDGWAY

breakfast, lunch and dinner and focuses on delivering cuisine that celebrates the cultural heritage and adventurous spirit of the American West. “New American West is my own term that embodies the use of ingredients and techniques unique to this area of the country. Techniques focus on grilling, smoking, wood oven roasting, cast-iron sautéing, pickling and preserving,” says Executive Chef Paul Nagan. “Ingredients are sourced as much from Colorado and the Rocky Mountain West as possible, with a focus

vate viewing window into the kitchen.

In the main area, an Onyx stone wall acts as an attractive divider between the restaurant and a lively lounge, and an outdoor patio holds a maximum of 48 seated and 55 standing.

CoBank reserves ELWAY’S several times a year for corporate and board functions. “The two private dining rooms have worked well for groups from eight up to 40 and give us a chance to show off a great Colorado restaurant to our out-of-town guests,” says Nancy

Open for lunch and dinner, The Nickel draws inspiration from its Rocky Mountain heritage to offer new American cuisine through a Colorado lens. Menu highlights include house-made pastrami and Billionaire’s Bacon; seasonal flatbreads that change daily; and freshly baked morning breads. The Nickel also offers an extensive sushi-style charcuterie list and a white-oak, wood-fire grill. Barrel Bar is the centerpiece of the space as cocktails selected for barrel aging are mixed in large



From left: ELWAY’S at The Ritz-Carlton feels urban with a Colorado flair; a mouthwatering dessert and espresso at Jill’s Restaurant; duck confit croquette crispy is a favorite at range restaurant.

on all-natural grass-fed meats, wild game, sustainable seafood, local creamery cheeses, seasonal produce and the like.”

Opened in May 2014, range has three private dining rooms uniquely located in the former bank building’s vaults and are available for groups of up to 18. Playing off the bank theme, a signature beer—Countinghouse Cream Ale—was created exclusively for range and the hotel by Denver craft brewer Former Future.

At the same time, the downtown Denver outpost of ELWAY’S steak houses, co-owned by former Denver Broncos quarterback and NFL Hall of Famer John Elway, completed renovations to its lounge, bar and dining room and introduced a new private dining room, John’s Room. Located in The Ritz-Carlton, Denver, the restaurant’s private space can accommodate up to 12 guests and offers a pri-

Montgomery, senior manager, event marketing. “We usually start out with select wines and passed appetizers (don’t miss the lamb fondue!) and then are seated for meal service. Another great bonus is that we are always able to offer tableside selection of soup/salad, entrée from three or four amazing choices, and dessert, plus three preselected family-style side dishes. This way, everyone can select their own meat temperature and side sauces, and everyone goes home full and happy.”

Only a few months later, in July 2014, **The Nickel** opened in conjunction with Hotel Teatro’s lobby floor renovation that transformed the look and layout of the space. Downstairs in the Wine Cellar there is a beautiful original vault door and private dining space for up to 40, and more private space is available on the mezzanine level.

batches, placed in oak barrels to age for several weeks and then served on tap.

In Boulder, **Jill’s Restaurant** at St Julien Hotel & Spa focuses on contemporary American cuisine with a French twist. The Onyx room holds up to 40 while the main dining room seats 70, with the more casual bistro section of the restaurant and an outdoor patio and adjoining terraces providing additional options. The restaurant supports sustainable, organic farming practices with the food it purchases. Staff enjoys interacting with diners during dramatic tableside preparations of tasty treats like steak Diane, Caesar salad, shrimp scampi, bananas foster and café diablo.

Crestone Capital Advisors holds its annual investment conference at the St. Julien every October, utilizing the whole restaurant for a luncheon with self-serve stations including

Eight K at Viceroy Snowmass offers mountain charm with a touch of class.



soups, salads, paninis, pasta and dessert. “Jill’s works perfectly for our group. The layout and large windows are a welcome change from our meeting space in the ballroom,” says Director of Marketing and Communications Patience Baldwin. “The restaurant is spacious, and they created both large and smaller tables for people to sit down. The service is incredible and Phillipe (the GM) is a superb host!”

Chefs Club by FOOD & WINE in Aspen is the flagship restaurant under the Chefs Club USA brand that has taken *FOOD & WINE*’s Best New Chefs awards to the kitchen. The magazine selects up-and-coming chefs from this prestigious group to consult and curate new menu items in collaboration

with the culinary team at the restaurant. For example, chefs for 2015 were Cara Stadler of Portland, Maine, Paul Qui of Austin, Texas, and Greg and Gabrielle Denton of Portland, Oregon. *FOOD & WINE*’s executive wine editor oversees the wine program, and the on-site beverage director creates an innovative cocktail program.

In nearby Snowmass, Viceroy Snowmass has found great success with **Eight K** since the hotel launched in 2009. Sticking to local and organic ingredients as much as possible, Executive Chef Will Nolan fashions menus featuring high mountain cuisine with southern roots. An 87-foot glass bar and large windows are the focal point of the main dining

area, and two stacked private dining rooms (one with a cozy fireplace) are divided by a wall fashioned from thin aspen tree trunks and are among the best in the area.

At Devil’s Thumb Ranch Resort & Spa in Tabernash near Winter Park, **Ranch House Restaurant** is located in the original homestead constructed on the ranch in the 1930s and dishes up stylish new American mountain cuisine made from organic and locally grown foods as much as possible, including Wagyu beef from the ranch’s own herd. Not only is this atmosphere special, so is John Ls’ Wine Cellar in the main lodge, a private dining space for up to 14 and featuring wine racks and beams crafted from 150-year-old cherry trees harvested on the owner’s family land in upstate New York, and the 40-seat Grotto Suraboza in the new High Lonesome Lodge. Customized menus for both private dining areas come from the Ranch’s in-house culinary team that includes a bona fide pastry chef. Heck’s Tavern is a more casual dining option with a spacious patio in the main lodge.

The list of Colorado’s hotel restaurants that are great for groups and leisure travelers keeps getting longer. This is just an appetizer. Bon appétit! 🍷

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