This week: Baltimore, Charleston, New York and Paris…

Fodor's Editor | June 21, 2011

Daniel Boulud goes casual in NYC with a contemporary bistro…

A Go-To Parisian Bistro

Les Cocottes de Christian Constant. Chef Christian Constant has an unfailing sense of how Parisians want to eat these days, as proved by the latest addition to his mini-restaurant empire, located near the Eiffel Tower. At Les Cocottes he's shifted the normally leisurely bistro experience into high gear, allowing him to keep prices moderate. Seated at a long counter on slightly uncomfortable stools that discourage lingering, diners can mix and match from a menu of soups, salads, *cocottes* (dishes served in cast-iron pots), *verrines* (starters presented in tapas-style glasses), and comforting desserts, all made from fresh, seasonal ingredients. Food is served nonstop from breakfast onward, but since no reservations are taken, plan on showing up outside peak times to avoid a wait. 135 rue St-Dominique. Trocadéro/Tour Eiffel. 01-45-50-10-31. www.leviolondingres.com. No reservations. MC, V. Median entrée price: €15.

In Baltimore, Upscale Thai

Lemongrass. Thriving, trendy Lemongrass is proof that Baltimore needed an upscale Thai restaurant. A two-story stone statue of a Thai princess greets diners at this stylish warehouse-turned-eatery just outside Little Italy. The décor is done in deep earth tones, and the food can be fiery hot, depending on the dish. A see-and-be-seen crowd of mostly thirty- and forty-somethings flocks to Lemongrass for its late-night menu, which is served until 1 a.m. Whether you're there to nibble at the bar or sit down for dinner, be sure to order a plate of the crispy string beans — a hearty, addictive appetizer. 1300 Bank St. Little Italy. 410/327-7835. No lunch Sun. AE, MC, V. Median entrée price: $12.95.

A Boulud Bistro in NYC

Bar Boulud. Acclaimed French chef Daniel Boulud, known for upscale New York City eateries Daniel and Café Boulud, brings diners his most casual venture yet with this lively and contemporary bistro. The long narrow space accommodates 100 people and has a 14-seat round table for special tastings. An additional level has three rooms for larger parties. The menu emphasizes charcuterie such as terrines and pâtés designed by award-winning Parisian charcutier Gilles Verot, as well as traditional French bistro dishes such as steak frites and *poulet rôti à l'ail* (roast chicken with garlic mashed potatoes). The 500-bottle wine list is heavy on wines

from Burgundy and the Rhône Valley. Wallet watchers won't feel left out: a pre-theater three-course menu starts at $39, and weekend brunch has two hearty courses for $28. 1900 Broadway (between 63rd and 64th Sts.). Upper West Side. 212/595-0303. www.barboulud.com. AE, D, DC, MC, V. Median entrée price: $20.

Wolfgang Puck Goes to Washington

The Source by Wolfgang Puck. Wolfgang Puck's first foray into Washington D.C. provides diners with two separate dining experiences. The downstairs area is home to an intimate lounge, decorated in the cool brushed-metal accents reminiscent of a Manhattan club. Patrons can order specialty cocktails, hand-rolled pizza crowned by homemade sausage, and a juicy quartet of miniature burgers with feather-light fries or tempura onion straws. Upstairs is a separate dining room that dials the notch up to haute cuisine, with a strikingly backlit wine cellar that takes up an entire wall. You'll find irresistible curry red snapper that teems with lemongrass, suckling pig juicy enough to fall off your fork, and service so dedicated it borders on slavish. Don't miss the lacquered duck with huckleberries and the mango soufflé dessert. 575 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W. Downtown. 202/637-6100. Reservations essential. No lunch. Closed Sunday. AE, MC, V. Median entrée price: $14 at the bar; $28 upstairs.

A Modern Stay in Historic Charleston

Charleston Marriott. Following a multimillion dollar top-to-bottom renovation, this hotel in the up-and-coming North Lockwood district offers a chic lobby and bright, sunny rooms with smart amenities like trundle desks, double-massaging shower-heads, and refrigerators. The service is efficient and full of Southern hospitality, and the intimate lobby restaurant is a tasty bargain that attracts locals. Pros: inviting and well-equipped fitness center; regular shuttle service to and from downtown. Cons: located a few miles from downtown; sometimes inattentive concierge-level staff. 170 Lockwood Blvd. Medical University of South Carolina. 843/723-3000. www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/chsmc-charleston-marriott/. 348 rooms. In-room: safe, refrigerator, Wi-Fi. In-hotel: 1 restaurant, room service, 2 bars, (leisure) pool, gym, spa, laundry service, concierge, executive floor, public Wi-Fi, parking (fee and no fee), no-smoking rooms. AE, DC, MC, V. Rooms start at $239.

A Custom Stay in Los Angeles

Custom Hotel. Close enough to LAX to see the runways, the Custom Hotel is a playful and practical re-do of a 12-story, mid-century, modern tower by famed LA architect Welton Beckett (of Hollywood's Capitol Records building and the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion). Playful touches include espresso at check-in, sheep-shaped chairs throughout the lobby, and a pool bar with fire-pit and DJs. Practical are the soundproofed windows, ample bedside lighting, and free LAX shuttle. Close to Marina del Rey, Venice and Manhattan Beach, with a decent public park across the street, the hotel is a welcome addition to the West side. Pros: close to LAX and beach cities; designer interiors. Cons: located at the desolate end of Lincoln Blvd. 8639 Lincoln Blvd. LAX. 310/645-0400 (ph.). www.customhotel.com. 248 rooms, 2 suites. In-room: safe, refrigerator, DVD (some), Wi-Fi. In-hotel: restaurant, room service, bar, pool, gym, laundry service, concierge, public Wi-Fi, airport shuttle, parking (fee), some pets allowed, no-smoking rooms. AE, D, DC, MC, V. Rooms start at $149.

Contributors: Karen Catchpole, Rosa Jackson, Kathy McDonald, Elana Schor, Sam Sessa, Shivani Vora