

FOOD DRINK REVIEW

BY BRAD A. JOHNSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY EDWARD DUARTE



SOUND MACHINE: The Penthouse restaurant at The Huntley is designer Thomas Schoos' latest creation. *Left:* Chef Michael Reidt's delicious braised kurobuta pork shank.

THE PENTHOUSE *The new restaurant at The Huntley is a looker, for sure, with a magnificent centerfold view of the city and the beach*

Dear Penthouse,

Wow. Last night was my first visit, and I was blown away by the view from the 15th floor of The Huntley. And your interior designer, Thomas Schoos (Wilshire, Citizen Smith, O-Bar), has seriously outdone himself this time. This is one of the most beautiful restaurants to open in Southern California in a very long time. It was definitely worth the wait. (How long was the opening delayed, six months? 10?) And those sky-blue velvet wave-back chairs—so cute. I love the indoor cabanas, too, wrapped in gauzy white fabric, with tables large enough to seat a party of eight. I wish I had brought that many friends. And what an incredibly sexy scene in the bar! I'm glad I dressed up. I hadn't expected to encounter such a chic crowd, but I looked fabulous, as usual, I think. I had a hard time hearing, though. It was awfully loud up there. My waiter had to squat down to eye/ear level so that I could hear half of what he was saying. That couldn't have been very comfortable for him. But we worked it out. I ordered the crab cakes, and they were delicious. Huge, but delicious. I'm curious, why are the crab cakes so enormous? How many people do you intend these for? It was way too much for one person. However, it's nice to see chef Michael Reidt working in L.A. I always enjoyed his cooking at Sevilla in Santa Barbara, where I understand he's still chef/partner. Hey, Michael, the braised kurobuta pork shank with roasted yams—fantastic, so heartfelt and comforting. All those dried cherries were a tad sweet for my tastes, though. OK, so, my first impression... three-

and-a-half stars. Except I don't believe in half stars, so I'll have to round it down to three. Can't wait to return. Sincerely,

Dear Penthouse,

I just got home from my second visit, and, wow, I still love your décor! I absolutely adore the second lounge in the back, with the tall leather wingback chairs and fireplace. And the skylight that slides out of the way to let the fresh air in. I hadn't really noticed that on my first visit. I hadn't really noticed the hardwood floors last time, either. Gorgeous! And that bar top, what is it, onyx? So pretty when it's lit from beneath like that. The sleek tabletops are sexy, too. But with the hardwood floors, the rock-hard bar, the bare tabletops, hard walls, hard ceilings—and all those windows—don't you think that's just a few too many sound-reflective surfaces? The noise level is deafening. Thomas Schoos is a brilliant designer, but I'm beginning to think he's not paying attention to the needs of the consumer. My threesome had no choice but to shout just to carry on a conversation. And even though we were yelling, I still missed 40 percent of what was said. Much of the time I just nodded and pretended to know what was happening. When someone else would laugh, so would I—and then I would quietly wonder what was so funny. I didn't enjoy that. For my guests, the lovely sunset made up for the noise. I missed the sunset, though, because I was running a few minutes late, as usual. We all loved the charcuterie selection. CONTINUED...

...CONTINUED I'm always impressed by how something so simple can be so delicious. I also loved the piping-hot tomato flatbread with basil and whipped burrata. Even though tomatoes weren't really in season, it was great how chef Reidt marinated the tomatoes to coax out their flavor. And the crust was perfectly dusted with sea salt. There's nothing quite like a pizza served straight from the oven (but your waiters really should let the customers know that these pizzas are way too big for one person to eat alone as an appetizer; they're great for several people to share—one pizza and a charcuterie platter, for example, would be perfect for three typical eaters). The veal porterhouse was terrific. And the rack of lamb was very nice, too. I gasped when my friend ordered it medium (or maybe I just couldn't hear), which is way too overcooked for my tastes, but you served it medium-rare anyway, which saved the day. Thanks for choosing American lamb, by the way. That stuff from Australia and New Zealand doesn't have any flavor. But yours was bold and lamby, just the way it should be. Oh, hey, tonight was my first ride in a clown car. I'd always wondered how all those clowns at the circus cram themselves into such a tiny car, and now I know. The elevator to the Penthouse is operated by those same clowns! Who knew? I'm not sure what the capacity was supposed to be, but we squeezed 12 people inside, and we came tumbling out at the other end like clowns, for infinity. What fun. Interestingly, even with all the banter in the elevator, the noise in there was more palatable than it was in the restaurant. So, my thoughts for this visit... three stars. It would have been three-and-a-half, but you know I don't believe in half stars, and that noise—can't you do something about that? I'm concerned.

Dear Penthouse,

I returned for lunch today, and I was surprised by what I found. Up until now, the service had been terrific. Very professional. But not today. How come your A-listers all work the dinner shift, and at brunch you stick us with the trainees? I can't remember when I've had service this poor. Oh, wait, yes I can. It was last year at Wilshire, another Thomas Schoos-designed

your public relations firm insisted these were made from scratch when we called to ask, but the fries sure tasted like a frozen product to me. (Don't worry. If I'm right, you're not alone. Celebrity chef Thomas Keller serves frozen fries at his Bouchon bistros, and Suzanne Tracht uses frozen fries at Jar. Everyone's doing it—but why?) Oh, and we loved the desserts—as usual, the best part of every meal. We especially enjoyed the Angry Marshmallow Brownies. The way the marshmallows melted over the brownies, and the way you've drizzled strawberry coulis over the top—sinfully delicious. Wait, what? I can't hear you. I've gone nearly deaf from sitting in your restaurant, and my throat is sore from talking so loudly. I'm sorry to say this, but I'm afraid this was my last visit. And I don't mean that simply in reference to this review. I'm not coming back. I want to. Really, I do. But the noise is simply unbearable, even when the restaurant is half full, as it was today at lunch. I just can't tolerate it. And this saddens me to no end, because I would love to bring more friends here to show them the views and the décor, to enjoy a drink at the bar and to savor another veal porterhouse and an angry marshmallow. Alas, my thoughts on this particular visit... one star (because I don't believe in half stars). 🗳️

THE PENTHOUSE: THE HUNTLEY HOTEL, 1111 2ND ST., SANTA MONICA, 310.394.5454 **HOURS:** BREAKFAST DAILY, 6:30–11:30AM; LUNCH DAILY, 11:30AM–3PM; DINNER SUN.–WED. 6–10:30PM, THURS.–SAT. 6–11PM. **WHAT TO WEAR:** DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT COMING STRAIGHT FROM THE BEACH. PUT ON YOUR FANCY SNEAKERS AND A DESIGNER HAT LIKE JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE. **WHERE TO SIT:** ONE OF THE BEST SEATS IN THE HOUSE IS A TOILET STALL IN THE MENS' RESTROOM, WHICH SITS NEXT TO A LARGE PICTURE WINDOW WITH THE SAME INCREDIBLE VIEWS AS THE DINING ROOM. **WHEN TO GO:** WHEN NOISE ISN'T AN ISSUE. **ABOUT THE NOISE:** TRULY UNBEARABLE. RIDICULOUS. IT'S AS IF YOU'RE AT THE DRIVE-IN, AND THE GUY IN THE NEXT CAR WON'T LAY OFF THE HORN. **WHAT IT COSTS:** LUNCH, APPETIZERS \$8–\$17, ENTRÉES \$12–\$24, DESSERTS \$9; DINNER, APPETIZERS \$9–\$16, ENTRÉES \$25–\$50, DESSERTS, \$9; VALET PARKING \$6. **RATING:** ★★

What the stars mean: 1 = fair, some noteworthy qualities; 2 = good, above average; 3 = very good, well above norm; 4 = excellent, among the area's best; 5 = world-class, extraordinary in every detail. Reviews are based on multiple visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall reaction to food, ambiance and service.

I LOVE THE DECOR... THOMAS SCHOOS IS A BRILLIANT DESIGNER. BUT WITH THE HARDWOOD FLOORS, THE ROCK-HARD BAR, BARE TABLETOPS, HARD WALLS... DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S JUST A FEW TOO MANY SOUND-REFLECTIVE SURFACES?

restaurant (just a coincidence, I'm sure). This time, we waited 25 minutes (yes, we clocked it) for somebody to take our order. Twice, quite charmingly enough, the waiter said he'd be right with us, but... we waited, and then we waited an additional 30 minutes for our appetizers to arrive (yep, we're still checking the clock). Then, funny thing happened when our pizza arrived. It was cold. Is that the way you meant to serve it? I'm guessing not because last time it was so hot. Even stranger, though, the appetizers hadn't been sitting on our table more than four minutes (we counted) when the busboy/expediter showed up with our entrées. How does this happen? The poor guy didn't know what to do—deer in headlights—so we explained to him that he needed to return the entrées to the kitchen until we'd had a chance to eat the appetizers. It took a minute for this to sink in (he glanced at our entrées, then at the table, then at the kitchen, then at the entrées), but he eventually got it. No sooner had he turned around, however, we realized that was a mistake. We simply should have traded plates with him and given up on the appetizers altogether. The tuna tartare wasn't any better than the cold pizza. The tuna smelled and tasted fishy to me, and it left a shockingly strong, peppery aftertaste in my throat. I expected better, especially since the steak tartare on a previous visit was so delicious. The burger today was good, and the steak was great, too. But the cold french fries dampened the mood—how long had these been sitting in the window? For the record,



SUPERSIZED: Two crabcakes per order are perfect for sharing.