

lifestyle dish BY DAVID NELSON • PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARTIN MANN

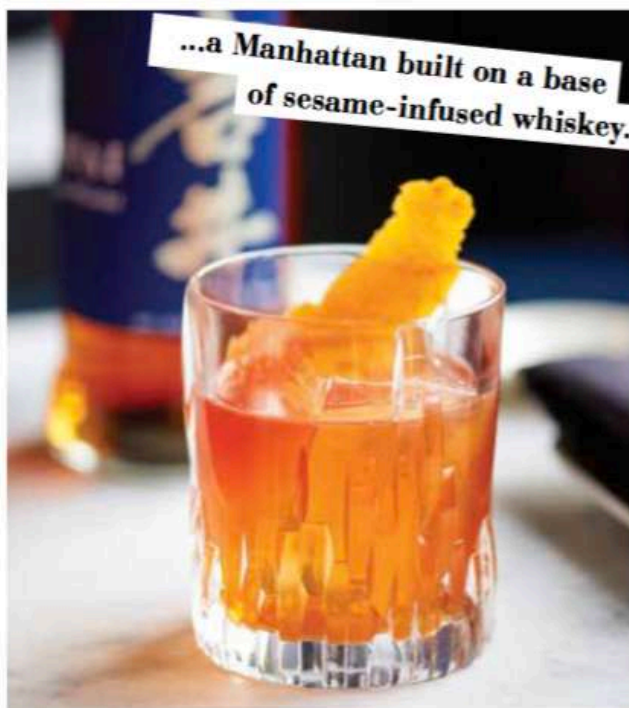
Do Like The Romans When Dining in Hillcrest



Mia Trattoria's owner Sergio Torrioni offers a glass of chianti to complement the impressive *antipasto italiano*.

A COZY NEIGHBORHOOD PLACE that seems far from the more hectic precincts of Hillcrest, **Mia Trattoria** has good looks, personality, an often-convincing cuisine and a name that rhymes. This charming *boite* on First Avenue at Upas Street features a dramatic wine bar, walls in enchanting shades of red and gray, and Adriatic blue napkins. Tangles of white minilights illuminate the lovely space, but insufficiently shadow the eyesore of an open kitchen. Oh well, as long as the food is good—which it certainly can be. The menu is long for the square footage. Among starters, the plate of sizzling-from-the-grill slices of zucchini, bell peppers and eggplant is as Italian as Rome-born proprietor

Sergio Torrioni. Even better, the *antipasto italiano* is an array of savory wonders: one-half of a house-marinated artichoke heart, some plumply attractive olives, wedges of sharp cheese, and many kinds of *salume*—from Genoa salami and mortadella to prosciutto and piquant pepperoni variations. The pastas include spinach-and-ricotta ravioli with sage butter sauce and plenty of Parmesan that becomes a taste of heaven when the server rotates the pepper mill. However, *osso bucco* with saffron risotto hardly seemed to come from the same kitchen. Dessert brightens the picture, and “Try more, more, more,” encourages Torrioni, who says his tiramisu is “killer,” a spot-on description of Mia Trattoria’s marvelous cannoli.



SOCIAL DINING ISN'T REALLY new, it's just the 21st-century update of the *table d'hôte*, the “host’s table” at which guests gathered as upscale boarding houses for travelers transitioned to stylish hotels.

Even so, Little Italy’s new **Cloak & Petal** lauds itself for bringing “Japanese social dining” to India Street. A gorgeous spot that for some reason is intended to resemble an abandoned Tokyo subway, C&P tames its



A medley of dishes from Waterbar—(clockwise from top center) whitefish ceviche, oysters on the half shell, island poke tuna, chowder and sea bass.

often-jammed 7,500-square feet with a realistic, fully in-bloom cherry tree that gladdens the heart. Take note of the sometimes inscrutably named house cocktails, like the “Japanese to English,” a Manhattan built on a base of sesame-infused whiskey. As for the menu of what the server says is “a social restaurant with dishes meant to be shared,” it can be very traditional with perfectly presented sashimi and nigiri, and shellfish cooked at table on a ceramic brazier. Or it can be thoroughly contemporary with spicy tuna baguette heated by pickled chilis and salmon tostada flavored with both cilantro and sesame. Yuzu curd tart follows everything successfully.

THE HIGH-END NATIONWIDE

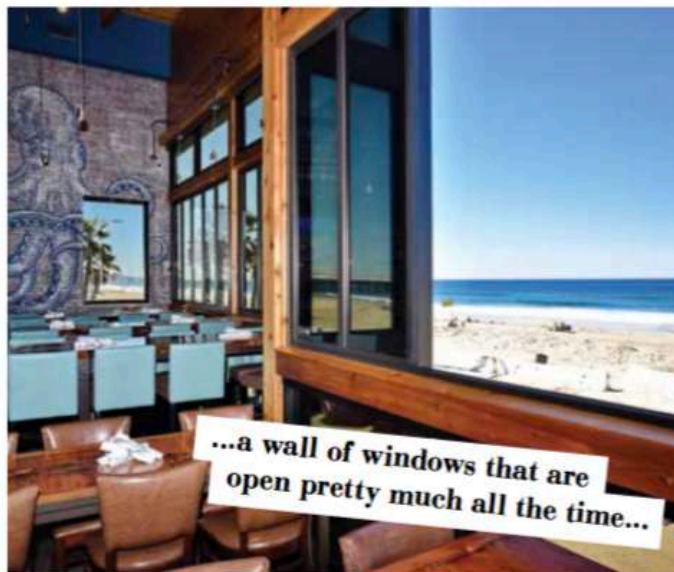
steakery that goes short on vowels but long on prime beef, **STK** has been scheduled to occupy the ground-floor restaurant space at downtown’s Andaz hotel for a couple of years. So far a no-

So far a no-show, it may be here quite soon...

show, it may be here quite soon, since signs announcing “steaks worth the wait” papered the windows by mid-winter. Prepare to be social because there will be a DJ.

IF YOU REMEMBER

long-gone Joe’s Crab Shack in Pacific Beach, it’s finally been



replaced by a striking new, second-story restaurant engineered to take full advantage of the beach and ocean views across the street. **Waterbar** has a “social seafood” focus (no fooling), a wall of windows that are open pretty much all the time and servers with so much personality you wonder if they came from a talent agency. The all-day menu opens boldly with raw options like oysters with ginger mignonette, whitefish ceviche and tuna poke with macadamias. It’s hard to imagine a So-Cal seaside eatery *not* serving clam chowder, and Waterbar’s is elegant

and excellent. There are steaks and big burgers for doubters, but swimmers dominate, notably sea bass in smoked tomato broth with onion marmalade and corn dumplings.

IF SAGANAKI BRINGS OUT YOUR

inner Zorba, enjoy the appetizer of kasseri

cheese flamed in brandy alongside a tasty Champagne cocktail at **Mezé Greek Fusion’s** engaging Sunday brunch. Besides an all-encompassing menu that stretches from blueberry-baklava pancakes to deluxe filet mignon eggs Benedict, this East Village restaurant has the ideal mood for a Sunday midday meal: Music with a bounce plays none-too-loudly as breezes flow through open garage doors and sunbeams reflect off towering, white-washed brick walls.

LITTLE ITALY

may need to annex the rest of downtown if it wishes to continue the current building boom. Coming soon in a spacious residential building, the **Little Italy Food Hall**, with varied offerings that will include Not Not Tacos by Sam the Cooking guy (and why not?), a Wicked Maine Lobster location and, carrying coals to Newcastle, PB’s excellent Milan-style pizzeria, Ambrogio15. ♦