



Bring the kids: Pulled pork and ribs are on The Pig's menu

It's a lot cheaper to throw sawdust on the floor and buy checked tablecloths that don't show ketchup, and "chefs are much smarter business people today than in the past," says Tim Ryan, executive vice president of the Culinary Institute of America.

But opening a clam shack or a rib joint is also a lifestyle choice—a way to say goodbye to the endless fooling around with pomegranate juice and hand-chiseled rock salt, to the dread of serving an overchilled slice of melon to a food critic. And insolently retrograde sauces aren't the only way to express culinary aspirations, says Ryan; "there's a

secret desire among most chefs to do one thing perfectly, even if it's just the best rack of ribs." With a giddy sense of freedom, Daly Thompson shed the starched whites of Checkers, a Cal-French power-dining spot in downtown Los Angeles, and with his wife, Liz, opened The Pig, a barbecue place on La Brea where movie stars go for pulled pork and homemade lemonade. It's also "one of the few restaurants in this part of town where you can bring your kids," says Leslie Calhoun, who eats there weekly with her family. "I love it." Maybe the move had something to do with Daly and Liz's having children themselves. "I used to make desserts with mousse this and crème that, and now I'm making pies and brownies," says Liz. "I got to a stage where kids were my focal point, and now I'm baking things you can eat with a glass of milk. It's great." ■

FOOD

G'bye Truffles, Hello Ribs

They may never get three stars again, but some top chefs are finding joy in clam shacks and barbecue

BY JERRY ADLER AND
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POOOR ALAIN DUCASSE. AFTER A stumbling start at his eponymous New York showcase, the world's most honored French chef last week won the three stars (out of four) from The New York Times that are the minimum you'd expect for a \$145 *prix fixe*. Unfortunately, this happened just as fashion is shifting away from superdeluxe French-American restaurants serving chicken "swathed in an insolently retrograde Albufera sauce ... with foie gras butter and a blend of Madeira, Cognac and port." The new restaurant paradigm is a place like Don Juan on Halsted, opening next week as an outlet for the cooking of the highly regarded Chicago chef Patrick Concanon. It's a Mexican café with a menu built around a dozen choices of tacos (including lamb, shrimp and vegetarian) ranging in price up to \$4. "I just wanted to open a place where I'd like to go myself," says Concanon, 34. But he also thinks he's on to a trend. The next generation of chefs, he predicts, will aspire to running restaurants *where kids can color on the place mats*.

Like the role of celebrity chef itself, this trend was pioneered by Wolfgang Puck, who began opening fancy pizza cafés in malls and airports in 1990 and now has 20

in six states. But you don't expect to see him behind the counter at one. It was far more shocking to gourmets when Jasper White closed his elegant waterfront restaurant in Boston and reappeared last May in the kitchen of a Wal-Mart-scaled eatery called Jasper White's Summer Shack. After squirting sea-urchin foam on diver scallops for a dozen years, he now tosses live lobsters by the hundreds into stainless-steel kettles. To his former customers this amounted to an irresponsible waste of his gifts, like Richard Burton's giving up the stage to make "Cleopatra." "They didn't believe it when I said I was going casual," White says. "They showed up wearing coats and ties ... and turned around and walked out."

In part, White had the same motivation as Burton: you make a lot more money selling 1,000 \$30 dinners a night than 120 \$100 ones. "I want a restaurant that's sold out on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, as well as on the weekend," says Concanon. The economics of high-end restaurants are brutal, beginning with the need to hire David Rockwell to design them.



Urchin-free: Dinner at Jasper White's Summer Shack