

F & B Special

All Restaurants Lead to Rome



In Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, John Cleese's anti-Roman protagonist asks a room full of comedy insurgents what, if anything, the Romans have ever given the people. Much to Cleese's displeasure, a long list is compiled, covering everything from roads, irrigation and sanitation to law and order, viniculture and so forth. To this list we could add restaurants, which first made an appearance in ancient Rome.

Thermopolia were small tavern-style establishments that served wine and pre-prepared dishes – probably limited to dried foods, though hot meals may also have been available – from L-shaped solid stone counters. These early diners were closer to modern fast-food outlets than sit-down restaurants and catered mainly to the poorer classes who did not have access to a private kitchen, the preserve of the wealthy in Roman society. Thermopolia may also have performed a social function in the manner of village pubs or workingmen's clubs.

The next milestone in the evolution of the restaurant can be found in the Middle Kingdom, or more specifically in Kaifeng, then China's northern capital, where eateries started to flourish during the Song dynasty. These early restaurants served the merchant classes and provided a wide selection of food. For the first time we can see establishments serving different cuisines and catering to different budgets.

By the 16th century dining out was a common occurrence in England, with people of all classes enjoying food, wine, ale and tobacco at city and country taverns, which also served as social centres... for men. In most cases entry for women was prohibited, beginning a long-standing British tradition of gender-segregated establishments.

The next station on our whistle-stop tour of the history of restauranting is, fittingly, 18th-century France where the concept of the restaurant as we know it today emerged. This explains why the gastronomic terminology used in many languages today is derived mainly from French, including the word 'restaurant' itself, which originally meant 'to restore'. By the early 1700s the term was being used to describe a nutritional dish, usually a soup or broth, supposedly with 'restorative' powers. 'Restaurant' later came to refer to places that sold these bouillons, before evolving into the generic meaning it has today.

In 1782 *La Grande Taverne de Londres* opened in Paris (not London), and was the first establishment to have menus and private tables for diners – laying down the blueprint of the modern restaurant. The establishment's owner, Antoine Beauvilliers, would go on to write a cookbook that defined French cuisine as we know it.

The late 1800s saw the first cafeterias begin operations in the US. These large self-service restaurants, the Big Apple's Exchange Buffet being amongst the earliest incarnations, catered to the growing workforces in the industrial heartlands of New York, Chicago and beyond.

The last century saw the restaurant given a modern twist, with the drive-in making its first appearance in – surprise, surprise – California circa 1936; by the 1950s the first of the now-ubiquitous fast-food franchises had hit the high streets. And since then we have seen the emergence of just about every kind of eatery imaginable, catering to all possible tastes, budgets and themes.



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Today, with a plethora of restaurants catering to our every whim, design is often the key factor for diners when choosing one establishment over another. There are a number of trends that seem popular at present: there's Boiler Room Chic – utilitarian, architectural, exposed brickwork, etc; there's the Lady Parlour – sumptuous cocktail lounges with a kaleidoscope of colour; we have the Gentleman's Club – ivy on the outside, antiques on the inside; the Boy's Club – a youthful version of the Gentleman's Club, ie with newer furniture, more colour and a pool table; there's Retro – pick a theme, a decade, a style, and go overboard; there's the uber cool minimalist approach; the IKEA fit – for the austere times in which we live... we could go on. One particular design approach that's gaining traction at the moment is the 'let's-show-the-customer-everything' concept, part of the broader 'let's-give-the-punters-something-to-look-at' masterplan. Watch the chefs cooking behind a glass wall... or in some cases, right in the middle of the restaurant. Come see our fancy wine rack! Look at our walls, which we haven't even painted... or look at our walls, on which we've drawn pretty/cool pictures. Yes, restaurant design is a creative battlefield where successful establishments make the glossy pages of architectural mags, whilst others put up 'closing down' signs in less time than it takes to make a good cheese. So, now let *hinge* introduce a smattering of the former.

Ma. Velous, San Francisco

Adeeni Design Group

In designing hybrid coffee/wine bar Ma.Velous in San Francisco's Civic Center, much attention was paid to creating a 'green' design that celebrates local creative talent. The long and narrow cafe is divided into a bar, cafe seating, small library section and lounge area. The chic, eco-friendly space is made up of repurposed vintage pieces, including a mid-century sofa, antique barber chairs, tabletops derived from a single walnut tree, custom benches made from recycled aluminium and light fixtures crafted from reclaimed materials. Eco floor tiles and low-VOC paints were used on the ceiling and the original wood wainscot was stained with a dark espresso eco-finish. The cafe's proximity to the War Memorial Opera House, the San Francisco Ballet and Davies Symphony Hall also inspired Adeeni, the designers, to pay homage to the arts. A 50ft-long mural by local street artist Eddie Colla commands the space above the wainscotting on one side of the cafe.

Ma.Velous' singular art piece and environment-friendly materials and practices adequately reflect the hip, up-and-coming vibe of the bar and its Civic Centre location.







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