

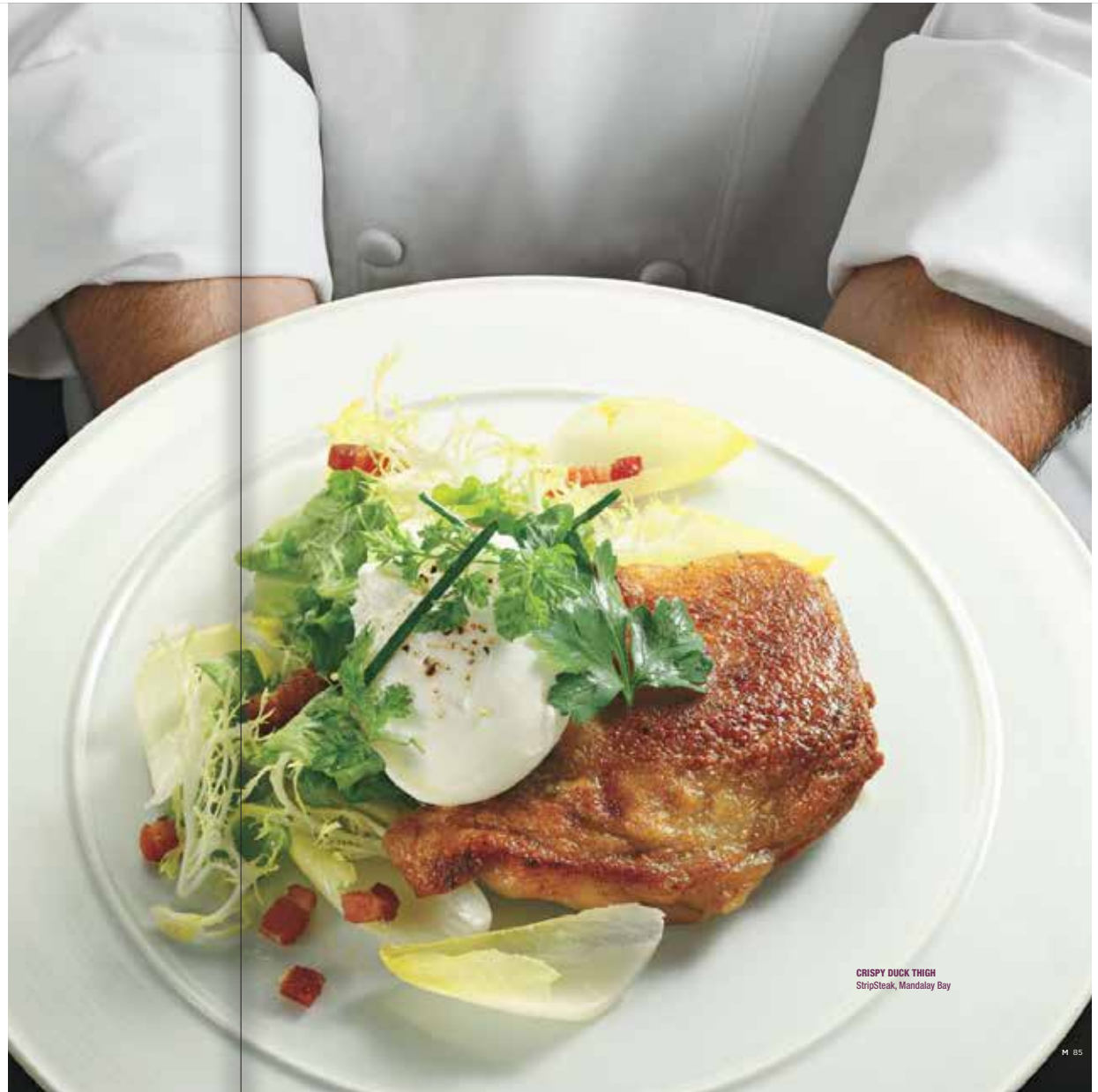
NOT JUST YOUR AVERAGE *steakhouse*

Las Vegas restaurants strike a balance between the classics and the unexpected.

BY ANNELIESE DOYLE KLAINBAUM • PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAIME BIONDO

Talented chefs on The Strip continue to evolve steakhouse fare by using the standard menu as a springboard for contemporary and expansive cuisine. In addition to sublime steaks cooked to perfection, which remain front and center at these restaurants, chefs are honing their creative talents and tempting diners with fresh seafood, wild game, scrumptious sides and even vegetarian options that encourage them to try something they might not expect to find at a restaurant whose reason for being is prime, aged, well-marbled meat.

Celebrity steakhouses create competition, and that's in large part what has made Las Vegas a steakhouse Mecca, rivaling Chicago and New York City. Guests bring high expectations to celebrity-namesake restaurants such as Craftsteak at MGM Grand, from Chef Tom Colicchio of Bravo's "Top Chef" fame, and world-famous Chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten's two Vegas steak locations: Prime Steakhouse at Bellagio and Jean Georges Steakhouse at ARIA at CityCenter. With a handpicked team to develop and execute the menus, these restaurants raise the bar across the city.



CRISPY DUCK THIGH
StripSteak, Mandalay Bay



KING CRAB SCAMPI
BRAND Steakhouse, Monte Carlo

Vongerichten's Prime serves up the classic steakhouse dining experience at its finest. A timeless dining room – decorated in sophisticated chocolate brown and robin's egg blue – finds the right balance between elegance and boldness. Romantic lakeside views of Bellagio's fountains are tough to beat and the well-executed menu proves that you can never go wrong with the classics. Start the night with a shellfish platter and progress to the Six Peppercorn New York Steak paired with an à la carte side such as Truffle Mashed Potatoes.

Executive Chef Robert Moore said the New York steak is his favorite cut, and that this preparation "has the perfect balance of spiciness from the peppercorns along with the sweet and sour taste sensation from the red onion compote with which it is served."

The cooler months are looked upon favorably by steakhouse kitchens as the fall and winter flavors are a natural fit for rich meat dishes. Prime, like many Vegas restaurants, gravitates toward seasonal cooking, taking advantage of ingredients at their peak. "We know it is fall when Jean-Georges' classic Butternut Squash Soup with black trumpet mushrooms and chives goes on the menu," said Moore.

If you're looking for something totally different and completely delicious, Chef Vongerichten is serving a Kobe Carpaccio Pizza at the recently opened Jean Georges Steakhouse at ARIA. The paper-thin Kobe beef is dressed with olive oil, Parmesan cheese, matsutaki mushrooms, arugula and a squeeze of lime and sits artfully on the crisp pizza crust. Pair it with a cocktail from their extensive list of concoctions at this energetic, contemporary restaurant and lounge.

There isn't a more glorious winter comfort food than slow-braised short ribs, and the ones served with horseradish mashed potatoes at Charlie Palmer Steak inside Four Seasons Hotel at Mandalay Bay are utterly satisfying. "They represent everything I love about meat: big, bold, robust flavors," said Executive Chef Steve Blandino. The scene here is so inviting and relaxed, you're bound to linger comfortably well past the dessert course.

The chefs here focus on simple preparations of artisan-aged beef to create an ever-changing menu, with Chef Palmer's signature progressive American cuisine at the core. The organic spinach salad with a truffle-fried egg and warm bacon vinaigrette is the perfect example of how they combine fresh ingredients and creativity to offer a familiar yet contemporary take on fine dining.



PORTERHOUSE STEAK
The Steak House, Circus Circus

Celebrity steakhouses create competition, and that's in large part what has made Las Vegas a steakhouse Mecca.



BRAISED SHORT RIBS
Charlie Palmer Steak,
Four Seasons Las Vegas



SURF AND TURF KOBE BURGER
TENDER Steak & Seafood, Luxor

At Chef Colicchio's Craftsteak, the culinary philosophy also revolves around fresh ingredients prepared simply with a focus on flavor. "When I'm coming up with a new idea for a dish, what it's going to look like on the plate is always the last thing I think about. If I get the best ingredients, match flavors well and season it correctly, it's automatically a good dish. Making it look nice is easy once I have all the rest," said Executive Chef Matt Seeber.

Surf and turf, one of the mainstays of the American steakhouse, is served at Craftsteak as a filet with grilled Hawaiian prawns. The à la carte sides here do not disappoint: sample the Green Bean Amantine, Yukon Gold Potato Puree, Wild Mushroom Risotto or Roasted Garlic and Leek Gratin.

Another take on surf and turf can be found at TENDER Steak & Seafood at Luxor where Chef KG Fazal adds flair to the ordinary. His surf and turf offering is grilled American Kobe beef burger with truffle-flavored goat cheese, seared Alaskan king crab tail medallions, artichoke aioli and beer batter fried onion rings.

Offering everything from rib eye to sashimi, steakhouse menus across the city are certain to please just about any palate looking for a special meal.

"With these elements, we hit a homerun that really makes the taste sensations pop," said Chef Fazal.

TENDER's menu is impressive, with attention to detail and a surprise waiting in every dish, from the antelope pastrami on the charcuterie platter and popular Kobe beef meatloaf made with foie gras and truffles, to the handmade chocolate truffles served with fruit juice or cordial shooters.

If it's a particularly lively scene you're looking for, try BRAND Steakhouse at Monte Carlo. With DJs every weekend and a nice blend of fine dining and

nightlife, this place transforms from a sleek steakhouse into a hotspot by the time the second cocktail is served.


BRAND's Corporate Executive Chef Brian Massie has designed a menu that's approachable yet interesting. The king crab scampi appetizer is a perfect rendition of an American classic, served with caramelized lemon and asparagus salad and a bacon scampi sauce. The chef insists "everything is better with pork," and while most people would agree, their dry-aged steaks certainly share the spotlight.

You also can find an inviting bar scene at StripSteak, a Michael Mina restaurant located at Mandalay Bay. This steakhouse is truly upbeat, with a sophisticated menu. "I cook according to how I eat," said Executive Chef Benjamin Jenkins. "I enjoy going out to dinner with friends and being able to order different things to share and taste, which is reflected on our menu."

With appetizers such as an American Kobe beef shabu shabu, thinly sliced beef cooked by the guest in a hot pot of flavorful broth with mushrooms and vegetables, this is the spot for inventive dishes with balanced, memorable flavors. Their Crispy Duck Thigh, which delivers a fantastic caramelized texture and flavor, is a welcome newcomer to a steakhouse menu known for its bone-in top loin. Paired with their must-have spinach soufflé with Parmesan cream sauce, you've got the modern steakhouse experience in the palm of your hand.

With so many options ranging from romantic to adventurous, it's good to know that a casual and affordable place such as The Steakhouse at Circus Circus, honored as the best steak house in Las Vegas for nearly two decades, is open daily for dinner. What's not to like about mesquite-grilled steaks aged for 21 days and cooked to perfection, accompanied by soup or salad (try the black bean soup with Sherry), potatoes and vegetable?

"The Porterhouse steak is 24 ounces of pure flavor," said Executive Chef Bob O'Brien. He cooks it on a charcoal grill, seasoned simply with a little salt and pepper to bring out the steak's natural flavor.

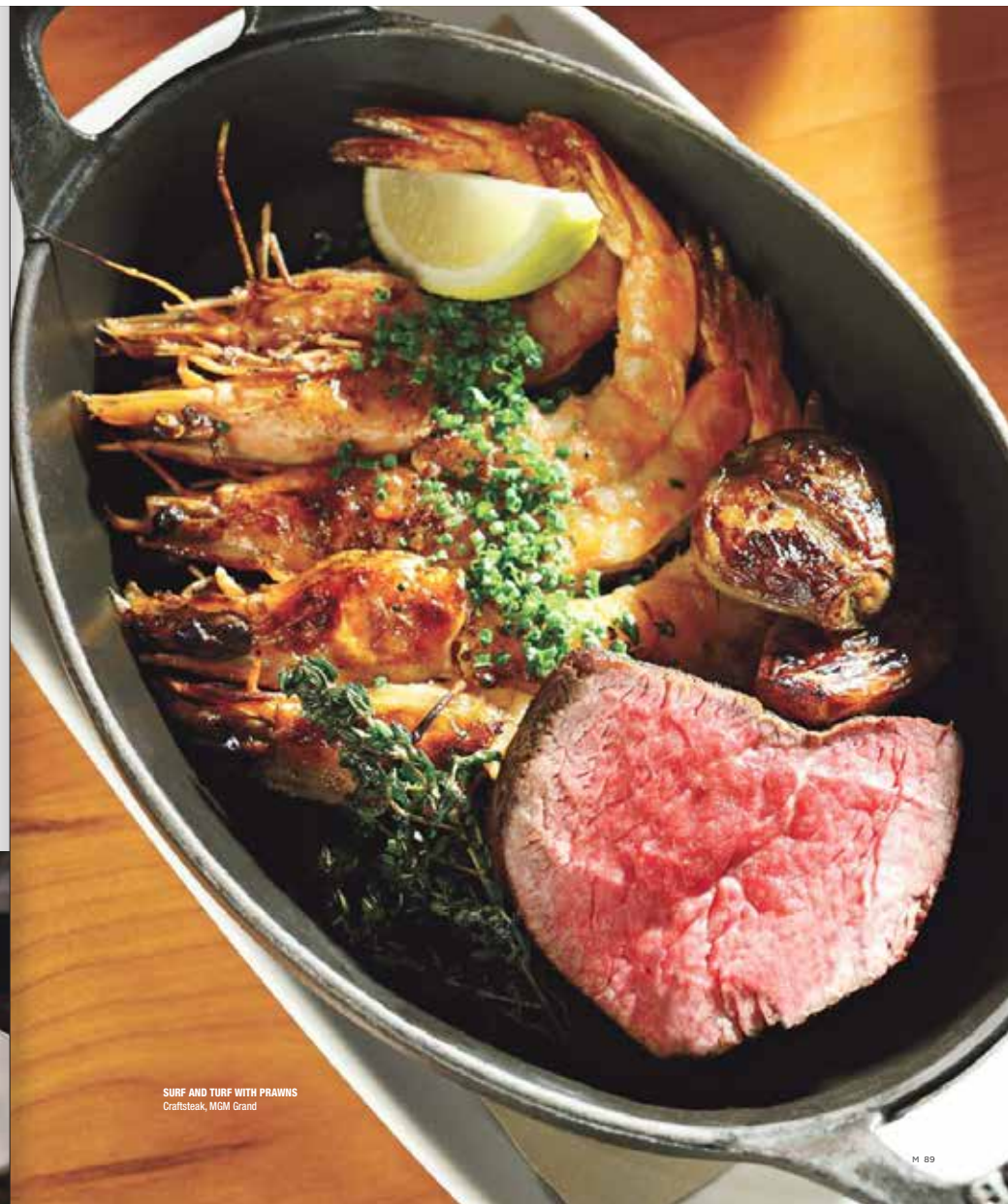
Offering everything from rib eye to sashimi, steakhouse menus across the city are certain to please just about any palate looking for a special meal. No longer occupying a supporting role, the flavorful and inventive appetizers, non-steak entrees and sides make for a knockout menu and provide the ultimate all-American fine-dining experience. 



KOBE CARPACCIO PIZZA
Jean Georges Steakhouse, ARIA



SIX PEPPERCORN STEAK
Prime Steakhouse, Bellagio



SURF AND TURF WITH PRAWNS
Craftsteak, MGM Grand