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Dining in Beverly Hills

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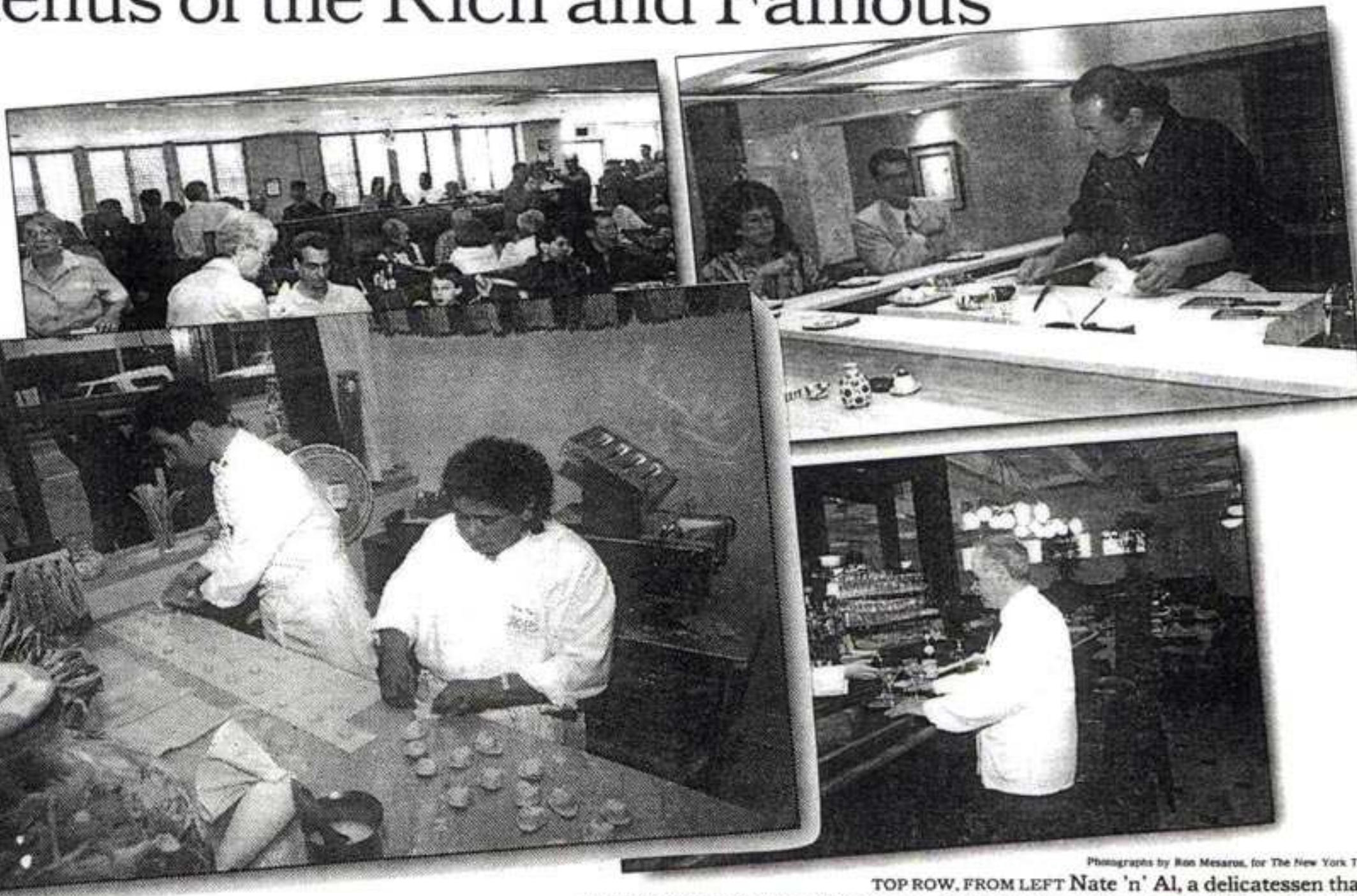
CHOICE TABLES

Menus of the Rich and Famous

NONE of the many glittery enchantments of Southern California radiates more cachet than Beverly Hills. Even its ZIP code, 90210, is famous.

Over 12 million visitors come to this city annually, attracted by its palm-shaded Mediterranean climate, luxury hotels and spas, and reputation as a kind of national park where the rich and famous still roam free in their natural habitat, nourished by fine California cuisine and wine, shopping in the boutiques along Rodeo and Beverly Drives.

Scattered among the shops are a variety of restaurants, from a New York-style deli to an exquisite sushi bar. The dress code is California casual to casually elegant, and celebrity spotting is as promising at the least expensive as at the priciest.



Il Pastaio

Walk a block east from Beverly Drive to Cañon Drive, carelessly fling a Cartier diamond ring in any direction, and it's apt to land near a casual open-air Italian cafe. The best is Il Pastaio. You may see the owner, Celestino Drago, who also runs the upscale Drago in Santa Monica, and his chef-brother Giacomino working the crowded, noisy dining room, which is prettily outfitted in tiles and original art. Il Pastaio serves mostly antipasti, salads and a big selection of fresh pastas and risotto, with nothing on the menu more than \$13.

There are sophisticated appetizers such as bresaola (cured beef) beautifully presented with hearts of palm and arugula crowned with shaved parmesan, and airy zucchini soufflé with red bell pepper sauce. More arugula shows up in a fine salad of grilled shrimp and lentils with tangy lemon dressing. We loved both the handmade green ravioli stuffed with mushrooms in an elegant cheese fondue and truffle sauce, and the perfectly textured Carnaroli rice risotto with banana squash and sautéed shrimp.

From the dessert tray we chose one of the best tiramisù we've ever had, and a commendable lemon meringue tart. We drank a gentle Atlas Peak California sangiovese (1993) for \$27.

Photographs by Ron Mesarus, for The New York Times

TOP ROW, FROM LEFT Nate 'n' Al, a delicatessen that's over 50 years old; Masa Takayama, chef, owner, sushi master at Ginza Sushi-Ko; BOTTOM ROW, FROM LEFT Making raviolis at Il Pastaio; the Grill on the Alley is filled with entertainment honchos.