



LOBI SHEPLER Los Angeles Times

REFRESHED: The new Le Dome feels brighter, more spacious.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Le Dome opens up

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THE grande dame of the Sunset Strip, Le Dome, has just reopened after a major makeover. Done up by designer Dodd Mitchell in Gothic windows with metal straps, ziggurat plaster-work and smooth log walls, she now seems a grand old dame tarted up to party.

There's no denying the place was looking shabby before and, though the space hasn't really

been reconfigured, the effect is now much more spacious and glam.

The opulent curved leather booths are perfect for hushed conversation. The bar's dome, which gave the restaurant its name, has been stripped back to reveal the original cantilevered ceiling. And a column of light now illuminates the crowd at the bar — the better to see who's who.

But the real action is on the chic outdoor terrace paved in tumbled marble, with a view onto the fireplace room where

gas flames dance across a long horizontal hearth.

Longtime owner Eddie Kerkhofs is at the door, nervous and proud, as the old crowd drops in for a look around. There's an impeccably attired old gent next to me, with handkerchief tucked in his pocket, an aging rock n' roller in full leather get-up across the room and, in the fireplace room, a clutch of young comedians and actors.

THE restaurant's tired continental menu has gotten an uplift, too, from new chef Sam Marvin, who had his own restaurant down on Melrose Avenue 10 years ago, Modada. Not to despair — he's salvaged a handful of items from Le Dome's old menu and listed them with the notation "1977." So you can still find Le Dome's Mediterranean fish soup, pasta with vodka and caviar, and steamed mussels Belgian style.

The thrust of the rest of the menu is continental reinvented. The chef is still fiddling with

Le Dome

Where: 8720 Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood

When: Lunch: Monday through Saturday, noon to 3 p.m. Dinner: Monday through Thursday, 5:30 to 10:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 5:30 to 11:30 p.m. Full bar. Valet parking.

Cost: Appetizers, \$11 to \$27; main dishes, \$25 to \$55; desserts, \$10; lunch appetizers, \$9 to \$45; lunch main dishes, \$15 to \$25.

Info: (310) 659-6919

some dishes, which makes for disjunction between the printed menu and the actual presentation. The menu could use a good spell checker too.

Though the Caesar salad is pleasant enough, the steak tartare is under-seasoned and *foie gras au torchon* underwhelming. Prime rib chop (really a rib-eye) would please both old-timers and newcomers. But tandoori chicken thighs is timid in its seasoning and totally lacking in any qualities that would warrant the label "tandoori." Pheasant under glass, which sounds suitably *soignée* for Le Dome, is tough and uninspiring.

But when that harlequin soufflé comes out, wafting the scent of Grand Marnier, all eyes swivel to follow its progress across the room. One could argue that it's heavy on the sugar or that the whipped cream is too stiff, but the effect is very '70s, quintessentially Le Dome.