

RESTAURANT JOURNAL

A little eye candy with your meal

TELEVISION screens have long been central to the setting at sports bars, casual chains such as TGI Friday's and nightclubs. Now they're turning up at high-end restaurants around town too.

Restaurant designer Dodd Mitchell incorporated TV screens with custom videos (of "art shows and more abstract stuff," says Mitchell) into the décor at Cinch in Santa Monica

and Le Dôme on Sunset Strip.

"It gives it a little edge. It creates movement, which creates energy and gives people something to focus on, especially if you're dining by yourself," he says.

At Cinch, your gaze might linger on hypnotic footage of a meteor shower or wild animals frolicking behind the bar. At Le Dôme, two large screens create a dramatic faux fireplace in one dining room. In another room, a video plays of fish swimming in an aquarium.

Meanwhile, at Orchid Restaurant & Café, a 2-month-old Asian fusion spot in the mid-Wilshire area, three 42-inch plasma screens hang in lieu of art on the walls of the main dining area. At lunch, they're usually tuned to CNN; in the evening, music and

atmospheric environmental videos are the norm.

And a plasma screen is planned for Enoteca Drago, the Italian wine bar Celestino Drago is opening later this month in Beverly Hills.

"The point of it isn't to do a Cinch-like bar thing," explains project manager Chuck Craig. "It's more of a community thing, with everything from CNN to sporting events. It will play the role of a morning newspaper."

Not everyone thinks TV and fine dining go together. At Pearl on Robertson, there's a large screen in the main dining room. "But we keep it off during dinner service to maintain a more intimate atmosphere," says general manager Jonathan Way. Only late in the evening, when the space turns into a lounge, does the TV go on.

The latest news in media saturation is televisions in restaurants.

A flat-screen TV in the women's room at Café Bazel, a newish Mediterranean eatery in Encino, plays MTV or an



LAWRENCE K. HO *Los Angeles Times*

FOCAL POINT: Restaurant designer Dodd Mitchell says TVs help give Cinch in Santa Monica a feeling of energy.

Israeli station (many of the patrons are Israeli).

At Gulfstream, the contemporary fish house in Century City, flat-screen TVs in the men's room are tuned by day to CNBC. "At night, we usually put the

Food Network on, so you're watching Emeril or Wolfgang or some type of cooking show," says general manager Tony Grippo. "It represents the restaurant in a way."

— LESLEE KOMAIKO