



DINING REVIEW

Left: An interior from *Requiem for a Dream*; Right: *Requiem for a Dream* as it appeared in the original film, reinterpreted by Dodd Mitchell; Right: *Requiem for a Dream* as it appeared in the original film, reinterpreted by

LE DÔME *She is the Norma Desmond of Sunset Boulevard's restaurant row, but is she ready once again for a close-up?*

BY BRAD A. JOHNSON PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSICA BOONE

Raw beef isn't something many restaurants serve anymore. It's not something most people care to eat. But two or three decades ago, beef tartare was as popular as the tuna tartares and chocolate lava cakes of today. Most of the old raw beef palaces have long since closed or become irrelevant. One of them, Le Dôme, was well on its way to becoming just a memory when a couple of rich businessmen came along and resurrected it. And while they completely gutted and rebuilt the restaurant from the inside out with the designer touch of Dodd Mitchell, they left a couple of things alone, the best of which is the beef tartare.

The new chef, Sam Marvin, has updated the presentation and upgraded the beef to prime filet mignon (formerly it was something akin to chuck). Steak tartare doesn't get any better than Marvin's. It hits the tongue cool and silky, then its many layers begin to unfold: rich and creamy raw quail egg, little bits of tart cornichon and capers, a strong punch of Tabasco (too tame on a second visit, though), and then a lingering beefy finish. The walnut toasts served alongside are completely unnecessary. This is something you will want to taste on its own, bite after bite, pure and natural. If simply anyone could make raw beef taste this great, everyone would be serving it.

There wasn't much else worth salvaging from the old menu, but Marvin did update a few classics for good times' sake. For example, there is the very basic but good "Belgium style" mussels steamed in Sancerre with shallots. Or, better yet, the Mediterranean fish soup whose magnificent flavor comes not from chunks of fish or shellfish but from the roasted fish bones ordered exclusively for that purpose. The spaghetti with vodka sauce and caviar is still there, but even more delicious with the addition of chive oil. Too bad the portion is so ridiculously small, like an appetizer instead of the entrée it is meant to be.

Let's be very clear about one thing. Before the new investors came along, Le Dôme was as good as dead—its day in the limelight long over, or else it wouldn't have been for sale. And that begs a very big question: Why, after spending millions of dollars to resurrect it, did some things not change? For instance, why is Eddie Kerkhofs still at the helm? Kerkhofs is a Hollywood institution and a very charming man. But why have the old guard standing watch over the new door? Someone close to the restaurant told me Kerkhofs is still there mostly for his little black book. Yet on each of my visits, the median age of the clientele (bar crowd excluded) looked about 70. No offense to anyone of any age, but surely that's not the crowd the new owners intended when they partnered with young mavericks Mitchell and Marvin to reopen Le Dôme. And maybe their target market wasn't exactly the same hot young Sunset Strip crowd who spends so much money at Katana, Chi and Balboa, a crowd that certainly