

Los Angeles Times FOOD

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RESTAURANTS

A hip perch for night owls

[Review, from Page F1]

There is, however, a DJ spinning tunes out into this dramatic loft-like space (once, if you can believe it, Fritz's Vienna Hofbrau) on Sunset Boulevard, a short stroll from the supermarket affectionately known as "Rock 'n' Roll Ralph's."

Falcon, named after Falcon Lair, the luxurious retreat of sly-eyed silent film star Rudolph Valentino, comes with a pedigree. It isn't the fleeting reference to old Hollywood. It isn't the chef, or even the architect or designer. It's the owners — Tommy Stoilkovich and Mike Garrett, whose other venues include Lounge 217, Voda and Pearl Dragon — who have the cachet in these perilously trendy rapids.

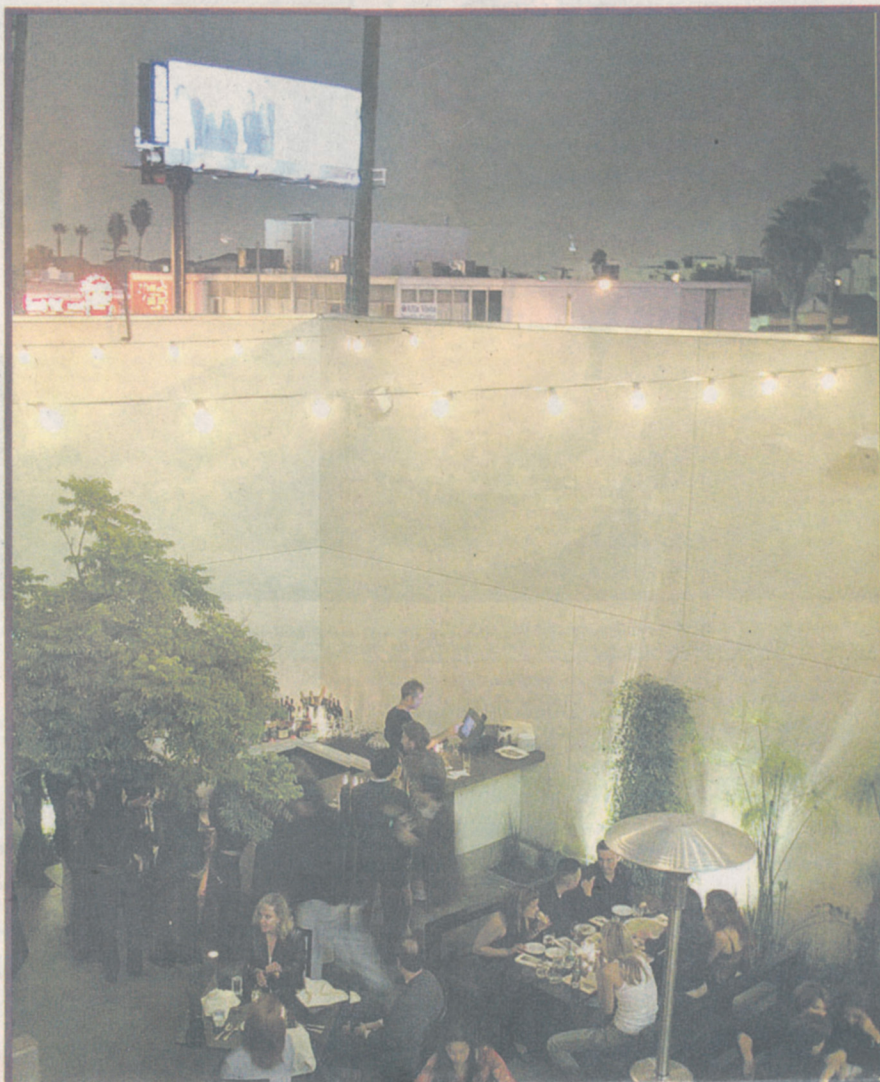
The stage is set for a scene

LIKE North in Hollywood or Katana on the strip, Falcon is about creating a setting where the young and hopeful can mingle. I say "mingle" rather than "meet," because what I observed was so far from a pickup scene it could have been a junior high dance. Girls with painstakingly assembled looks stand around in uneasy herds or perch on the edge of the bar's giant shaggy ottomans nursing pretty drinks. Guys assemble in front of the outdoor patio's fireplace, smoking, hardly talking, occasionally take a cell phone call, real or faked. And along the banquette-bleacher built along one side of this ballroom-sized space, blonds perch among the cushions like bright-feathered birds, studiously oblivious to the goings-on in the patio below.

Needless to say, if Falcon is hip, it has to be hard to get in. So every time I call for a reservation, they are fully booked — unless, of course, I want to come at 7, but how hip is that? At this sort of place, the late-night scene is the deal.

Even when I finally secure a reservation at 9 on a weeknight, the mood is still somewhat subdued. Though there aren't many empty tables, I suspect the crowds, like me, are here on a Wednesday because they couldn't get in Thursday, Friday or Saturday.

On one occasion, when I had the foresight to reserve a couple of weeks in advance, I achieve a table on a weekend night — at 9:30. Getting in means running the usual gantlet of security vetting would-be diners against the names on a clipboard. Only when they get a match will they unhook the velvet rope that gives Falcon and its ilk the illusion of exclusivity.



Falcon

Rating: Satisfactory

Location: 7213 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood; (323) 850-5350.

Ambience: Sleek, minimalist lounge and restaurant with a chic outdoor patio that has a fireplace at one end, a bar at the other and night owls crowding the space between.

Service: Amiable if sometimes clueless.

Price: Appetizers, \$4.50 to \$13; main courses, \$13 to \$38; desserts, \$6.50.

Best dishes: Pizza with fontina and wild mushrooms, heirloom tomato gazpacho, chicken with white grits, rib-eye steak, warm chocolate cake, strawberry shortcake.

Wine list: Mostly California, with a handful of few selections under \$30. Corkage \$15.

Best table: A table for two overlooking the sunken patio.

Special features: Late-night dining.

Details: Open 7 p.m. to midnight, Sunday through Wednesday; 7 p.m. to 1 a.m., Thursday through Saturday. Valet parking, \$6.50. Full bar.

Rating is based on food, service and ambience, with price taken into account in relation to quality. ***** Outstanding on every level. **** Excellent. ** Very good. * Good. No star: Poor to satisfactory.

fare. No one is going to be confronted with unfamiliar ingredients or bold flavors. The food is so understated, in fact, it's hard to remember what you ate an hour later. In fact, they don't want you to eat. They want you to drink.

Waiting for the wait staff

THE minimum per person is a modest \$15. That's just about enough for an appetizer and dessert, or a couple of orders of homemade potato chips (the best thing on the menu) and a cocktail.

But the service! Though everyone, from hostesses to bus persons and runners, is invariably pleasant, whatever you order is very slow in coming. That includes, surprisingly, drinks and wine. My martini takes so long to get to the ta-