THE REVIEW

Where looks are everything

■ The Lodge in Beverly Hills is the latest hipster steakhouse. Its wacky woodsy décor gets the imagination going wild.

By S. Irene Virbila, Times Staff Writer

The Lodge, a trendy new steakhouse on La Cienega just above Wilshire, is the kind of place that almost demands a martini.

Immediately.



Service is snappy, which is helpful because the décor is so wild you'll be glad of a drink while you get your bearings. Animal skins are casually draped over the log walls of the entry corridor. Tabletops are sawed from tree trunks. The crazy zigzag ceiling remaining from the space's days as a coffee shop is now entirely covered in rustic wood planks.

It's an extreme makeover, almost as if designer Dodd Mitchell were one of the zany interior decorators on TV brought in to redo the

house while the blissfully

innocent homeowners are away. Surprise! It's a fantasy hunting lodge for die-hard carnivores with expense accounts.

But while the specifics — double fieldstone fireplaces, truncated shaggy-bark tree trunks as pillars, a private dining room screened by a floor-to-ceiling faux-fur curtain and lighted by a twig chandelier — are kind of goofy, the effect is curiously cozy.

Maybe it's because the wrap-around leather booths are so comfy, the light level so soothing and the people watching so oddly compelling. How does that guy achieve his asymmetrical bouffantdo? Where'd he find those extravagantly tooled boots? Are those two — happily chowing down on a Porterhouse-for-two — businessmen from Chicago or "Sopranos"-territory refugees in a witness protection program? Could those beestung lips possibly be for real?

It's all food for thought, which is a good thing because I'm having a hard time getting excited about eating at one more trendy new steakhouse.

Lately, we've had such a run of them it's hard to know where you want to eat your New York strip. With Dakota, the second Boa, Sterling and Chapter 8 all vying for the hipster steakhouse spotlight, only the decor sets this place apart from the pack. No one's interested in opening up any new territory with the menu, which is basically straight-