

SHOP

TEA TEMPLE

A Beverly Hills shop aims to evolve the American tea experience.

BY AMBER GIBSON

David Barenholtz is on a mission to elevate American tea-drinking culture to the height of devotion and respect that coffee has achieved. Inspired by elegant European teashops, he founded American Tea Room in 2003. Now, after a yearlong renovation, the Beverly Hills location just reopened in an expanded space as the company's posh new flagship.

Many of the 200 rare varieties discovered during Barenholtz's travels are available in the United States only through American Tea Room. State-of-the-art BKON craft brewers prepare a cup in just a minute's time. A 46-inch touchscreen lets guests learn more about the appellation, brewing techniques, flavor profile, history and international customs behind each variety — a digital encyclopedia of all things tea.

Both hot and cold options are available to enjoy in the lounge or to go, including iced matcha lattes, Hong Kong-style milk tea and Himalayan butter tea, Bulletproof coffee's not-too-distant cousin. Tea cocktails are on offer, too, as are open-faced sandwiches, pastries and sweets. *American Tea Room, 401 N. Canon Dr., Beverly Hills, 310-271-7922, americantearoom.com*



DINE

FARE FACTORY

A downtown trattoria dishes up authentic Italian.

BY AMBER GIBSON

The Factory Kitchen opened in 2013 with a nondescript name in a similarly nondescript location. But home-style Italian meals by chef Angelo Auriana, a native of Bergamo, Lombardy, keep locals coming back for more.

The downtown trattoria embraces the casual concrete left over from its former life as a fish factory, and the reclaimed-wood tables anchor the spacious, casual dining room. Garage-door windows open up to let in the light and breeze, making for a convivial indoor-outdoor environment.

The *mandilli di seta*, supple handkerchief pasta reminiscent of lasagna sheets, is a must-have. It's topped simply with a Ligurian almond-basil pesto so bright and herbaceous that diners often ask if they can buy a jar to take home. The wine list is predominantly Italian, highlighting reds and whites from around the peninsula.

Instead of traditional tiramisu for dessert, light ladyfingers are swapped for denser buckwheat cake, softened with a soak in espresso. It's the ideal foundation for a mound of fluffy mascarpone mousse and a sprinkling of toffee crunch — a sweet ending to an Italian feast. *The Factory Kitchen, 1300 Factory Place, No. 101, Los Angeles, 213-996-6000, thefactorykitchen.com*



STAY

SEASIDE SANCTUARY

Mediterranean glam meets SoCal mellowness at Casa del Mar.

BY AMBER GIBSON

Aquamarine ceramic tiles from Spain and hand-carved wooden tables from Italy set the scene at Casa del Mar's Terrazza Lounge. And the sunset views and briny ocean breeze from the two-story, floor-to-ceiling windows never get old.

This luxury beachfront property maintains its regal 1920s history yet feels modern with such design updates as an eight-foot chandelier with hand-blown glass beading, striped cabanas, and stenciled, ceramic ceiling tiles. Santa Monica's grandest beach club balances serenity and luxury with white Italian Calacatta marble bathrooms, light blue walls and coral sculptures in its 129 guest rooms and 17 suites.

Inner peace and radiance abound at the intimate Sea Wellness Spa; opt for a gentle HydraFacial after yoga on the beach. The cuisine at both Terrazza Lounge and seafood-focused Catch showcase Southern California's bounty. And great shopping and the Santa Monica Farmers Market are just blocks away.

The décor here is unapologetically pretty but not too fussy. The crowd is naturally beautiful, more flowing skirts and wedge sandals than contoured makeup and stilettos. And the personalized service — they'll even remember your favorite tea — makes it hard to check out. *Casa del Mar, 1910 Ocean Way, Santa Monica, 310-581-5533, hotelcasadelmar.com*



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALEX MAIER

STAY

LOOP LUXE

The Kimpton Gray Hotel brings the Financial District back in fashion.

BY AMBER GIBSON

Kudos to Kimpton for making its newest Chicago property the brand's most upscale yet. The 293-room hotel opened last September, restoring the original limestone, granite and terra-cotta architecture of the landmark New York Life Insurance Building.

Just a short walk from the Board of Trade, Millennium Park and State Street shopping, the Kimpton Gray Hotel attracts business and leisure guests alike. Guest quarters are inspired by a gentleman's suit: dark navy and black tones paired with sharp, confident décor. Bright watercolor flowers in the wardrobe are a surprise, similar to a whimsical suit lining, and the crisp, clean bathroom is like a neatly pressed shirt.

Year-round rooftop restaurant and bar Boleo serves Peruvian small plates and creative pisco and fernet cocktails. The concise menu boasts shareable hits like skewered beef heart and scallop ceviche. Inspired by vintage encyclopedias, Lobby bar Vol. 39 has a clubby *Mad Men* feel.

The culinary crown jewel is Steadfast, a hyper-seasonal concept with Portuguese influences by the Fifty/50 Restaurant Group. Between smoked oxtail croquettes, chocolate-covered foie-gras bites and whole roasted dry-aged duck, this is the most ambitious and delicious dining in the Loop. *The Kimpton Gray Hotel, 122 W. Monroe St., Chicago, 312-750-9012, grayhotelchicago.com*



SHOP

SUIT YOURSELF

A custom clothier offers made-to-measure wares.

BY AMBER GIBSON

You'll have the whole store to yourself and clothier Zach Uttich's undivided attention when shopping at BLVDier. He sees only one customer at a time in his Fulton Market District atelier. He'll offer you a barreled boulevardier, whiskey or espresso if it's a little too early for alcohol as you peruse linings, buttons, thread, and the finest cashmere, linen and wool from exclusive mills in Italy and the United Kingdom for your bespoke suit or jacket.

Uttich worked at Mark Shale and Suitsupply before branching out on his own in 2014. Armed with technical knowledge and a precise eye for style, he transforms even the most disheveled dressers into dapper gentlemen. His suits are canvassed, not fused, making for better fit, quality and durability. New this season is a line of ties and handkerchiefs.

But consider yourself warned: Once you've tried on your new suit complete with accoutrements, you won't want to take it off. Luckily, there are dozens of great spots in the surrounding West Loop for showing off your polished new self. *BLVDier, 211 N. Green St., Chicago, 630-200-8583, blvdier.com*

DINE

PLAYING WITH FIRE

Smoky South American barbecue storms the West Loop.

BY AMBER GIBSON

Before sitting down at El Che Bar, chef John Manion's ode to Argentine barbecue in the West Loop, admire the dancing fire and the sizzling steaks in the open-hearth kitchen. There's no better way to rev up your appetite.

A chef's table for 10 offers the best view of the action. That is, unless you're feeling especially adventurous. In that case, opt for the chef's counter, where you can feel the radiating heat and nibble on new dishes. On a date, the sexy distressed-leather banquette is a more intimate choice.

Everything on the menu is cooked by fire. Housemade *morcilla* is an *asado* mainstay, grilled to order with sweet-corn vinaigrette and succotash. Fatty lamb ribs literally fall off the bone, while head-on prawns are so succulent you'll eat the shell. And the char on these steaks puts Windy City steakhouses to shame.

You'll be too full for dessert, but do indulge in the housemade ice creams and the flaming chocolate cake. Every dish here has plenty of substance to back up the pyrotechnic showmanship. *El Che Bar, 845 W. Washington Blvd., Chicago, 312-265-1130, elchebarchicago.com*

