

California Grill at Disney's Contemporary Resort: A Disney Restaurant Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

Disney's California Grill will undergo a major rehab that will see it closed until late summer 2013.

In light of this, I thought now was a good time to look back at our relationship with this restaurant, which has been a firm favorite of ours for many, many years.

Birthday and Christmas dinners have both been enjoyed there, along with many other wonderful evenings. It's one of the most consistent eateries on Disney property, always delivering superb food, and of course there are those wonderful views across to the Magic Kingdom, the Grand Floridian, and Polynesian. But that's only half the story with the view. We've been seated at most points in the California Grill, and from some, you have a wonderful view over Bay Lake towards Wilderness Lodge, and if you play it right, you may even have a ringside seat for some of the higher fireworks from IllumiNations.

□ We've eaten there twice in the early evening, missing out on the fireworks, but despite that, it's lovely to see the vista in the daylight, and on both occasions, we've been treated to beautiful sunsets that have more than made up for the lack of fireworks. If you do want a table for Wishes, what's the best way to do it? We've found that you probably want to book a reservation for about an hour-and-a-half or two hours before Wishes, as the meal can easily take that long. If you book too close to Wishes, you'll find that the people already seated in there linger, ensuring they can see the fireworks before leaving, which is very frustrating if you're waiting to get in.

□ Of course, not everyone can get a window seat for Wishes. We've only lucked out like this twice, and one of those occasions was our dinner on Christmas Day. To be honest, while it was amazing to be able to sit there and watch it, it wasn't the greatest experience, as we had people crowding around behind us, which was frustrating. There's a viewing platform, open only to diners at the California Grill, and that's just as good a place to watch it from.

The wait staff are superb at timing your meal around your fireworks viewing. We've come back to our table to find our appetizers or desserts waiting for us, literally just put down. It's an art that they have down to a

tee.

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□So what keeps drawing us back to this beloved restaurant? Well, I'd be lying if I said anything else; the food is the main draw. The inventive menu changes all the time, so there's no guarantee of what you'll find on it, but I can guarantee that there will be some old favorites, particularly the selection of flatbreads and sushi. Let's hope that doesn't change during the rehab, as we always enjoy ordering both and sharing them between us.

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□Entrees we've enjoyed have been wide ranging, as it really does just depend what's on the menu that night. However, if there isn't anything that takes your fancy, don't despair. There are first courses, and in the past, I've had two of those, rather than an entree, and that's been plenty for me. You can also make changes to the meal that's offered, such as asking for a different sauce, as most dishes are cooked from scratch. I doubt that's something they'll change during the rehab.

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□There is one dessert that's something of a signature dish, and I hope that remains the case when the California Grill re-opens in the summer, otherwise I'm going to be one very disappointed diner. That's the warm Valrhona chocolate cake with its molten center. It's been served up with raspberry sauce and raspberry ice cream for as long as I can remember, although a server told us that there have been other combinations. As far as I'm concerned, this is perfection on a plate, so Disney, take note, and don't mess with this dish!

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□Almost without exception, the servers here are some of the best you'll find at Disney. They're knowledgeable about the menu, the wine list, and can always come up with perfect suggestions, as I've found many times before when I've been debating about which bottle or glass of wine to get with our meal. It really is the place to get to know your server. We've found out so many fascinating things over the years from talking to them, as they have the time to interact with you here. We've also been impressed by how much attention you get from managers, checking on your experience. Sure, it doesn't happen on every visit, but when it does, it's a nice extra touch.

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□Whatever you do, if you do dine here, allow plenty of time, particularly if you have something to go on to later in the evening. A meal can easily last a good couple of hours, and we've been caught out a couple of times before, when dining here has taken longer than we anticipated it would.

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□I'm going to be fascinated to see what changes they make over the next few months to the California Grill. I personally hope that too much doesn't change, as this is one of those places that delivers every time we

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visit, and I wouldn't want that to change. As you can probably tell, the California Grill has a very special place in my heart. I'm so glad we discovered it all those years ago, and I've loved the many nights we've spent there. I will certainly be booking it for our fall trip to see what it's like after the rehab, and I'll be reporting back on what I find.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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