



Merkato 55

the workers had to place every piece that was removed from Le Jules Verne on a scale to deduce what the weight budget would be for the additions and improvements. Jouin says that the existing concrete floor was replaced with one made from lighter concrete to counteract the heavy new kitchen equipment. Ducasse also had an underground auxiliary kitchen constructed near the restaurant's south-pillar lobby entrance. Chefs convene there in the early morning to scale fish, butcher chickens, and perform other prep work before sending the partially finished ingredients up to the main kitchen.

The only means that Ducasse's team had for moving material and people during the renovations was a single freight elevator; the tiny private elevator that transports patrons to the restaurant was unavailable because it, too, was being redone. "It was pretty crazy," Jouin says. "It all had to go in one elevator, and the pieces couldn't be big, because you had to assemble them at the top. In the last month [before the opening], we worked almost 24 hours a day. There was no other possibility."

Ducasse could not alter the odd configuration of the space. The three dining rooms—which seat a total of

120 people—and the kitchen surround the private elevator in a formation that resembles a square donut. Jouin's design includes two exits at opposite ends of the kitchen to prevent waiters from bumping into each other on their journeys to and from the dining rooms. Having solved the science part of the equation, Ducasse and his chefs can now concentrate on preparing and serving their imaginative dishes high above Paris.

—SHEILA GIBSON STOODLEY

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[www.lejulesverne-paris.com](http://www.lejulesverne-paris.com)

**M**athias Dahlgren (+46.8.679.35.84, [www.mdghs.com](http://www.mdghs.com)), which opened in May 2007 in Stockholm's Grand Hotel, is in fact two restaurants. Matsalen ("the dining room" in Swedish) seats 37 for dinner in a salon that combines velvet banquettes with green-gray walls and gleaming brass chandeliers. At Matbaren ("the food bar"), patrons are encouraged to order one small plate at a time, so that meals progress at a leisurely pace. The restaurant's namesake, Swedish chef Mathias Dahlgren, draws on a range of local and imported ingredients—lemon sole from the

Kattegat channel, Småland veal pâté, Spanish *jamón serrano*, and yellow chanterelles from the forests of Romania—in his elegant yet nonfussy preparations. This being Sweden, potatoes, dill, brown butter, and an astonishing array of berries provide the few constants on the ever-changing menu. —ANDREW FERREN

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Marcus Samuelsson, best known for his Swedish cooking at New York's Aquavit restaurant, was born in Ethiopia as Kassahun Tsegie and adopted by his Swedish parents when he was 3. He made his first trip to Africa in the early 1990s and soon embarked on a quest to understand the continent through its food. His efforts culminated in **Merkato 55** (212.255.8555, [www.merkato55.com](http://www.merkato55.com)), a two-story restaurant that opened in February in Manhattan's Meatpacking District. Instead of focusing on specific countries or regions, Samuelsson takes a pan-African approach that extends to the Caribbean and the American South. Merkato 55, which derives its name from an Ethiopian bazaar and the numeral in its own street address, presents a broad range of surprising, delightful tastes that have never before received the attention of an elite chef. Samuelsson hopes it will do for African food what Nobu did for Japanese food. "Someone has got to go first," he says. "We must start somewhere." —S.G.S.

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Last July at **B&B Ristorante** (702.266.9977, [www.mariobatali.com](http://www.mariobatali.com)), one of Mario Batali's Las Vegas restaurants, two middle-aged women perused the menu and debated which *primo*, or pasta dish, each should order. "How about the lamb's-brain ravioli?" one asked in a skeptical voice that indicated that she had never before considered eating such a thing, and found the notion mildly frightening. After much discussion, punctuated by friendly urging from their waiter, the pair took a chance on the dish, which Batali also serves at his New York restaurant,



Rockpool (fish)



Fearing's

Babbo. The menu invites you to expand your palate by sampling lamb's brain or warm tripe (cow's stomach) with Parmesan cheese, but it also includes familiar favorites such as barbecued skirt steak. —s.g.s.

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For almost 20 years, Neil Perry's restaurant Rockpool, in Sydney, Australia, defined modern Australian cooking. Connoisseurs came from around the country and the world to sample his salad of abalone, mussels, tea-smoked oysters, and noodles with soy and truffle oil. But in late 2007, Perry demonstrated his talent for capturing the zeitgeist. He closed Rockpool for 12 days, revamped it, and then reopened it as **Rockpool (fish)** (+61.2.9252.1888, [www.rockpool.com](http://www.rockpool.com)). The rechristened restaurant has a lighter, brighter setting that allows tables of dressed-to-the-nines diners to coexist peacefully with neighbors clad in shorts and T-shirts. Seafood still headlines the show. Line-caught bar cod, which is pulled from deep waters on the edge of the Australian continental shelf, is grilled with herb butter or appears in a currylike broth. Wisely, Perry carried over select Rockpool classics such as the stir-fried spanner-crab omelette and his creamy date tart dessert, which remains dreamily impressive, two decades on.

—SIMON THOMSEN

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Dean Fearing could have held court at Dallas' Mansion on Turtle Creek for as long as he wanted. Instead, after more than 20 years in the kitchens of that venerable hotel's restaurant, he moved on, although he did not move very far: **Fearing's** (214.922.4848, [www.fearingsrestaurant.com](http://www.fearingsrestaurant.com)) is located in the new Ritz-Carlton, Dallas, barely one mile from his former place of employment. The establishment is divided into seven distinct rooms and spaces that welcome you whether you are wearing your Sunday best or your favorite pair of jeans—a notable contrast to the formal-at-all-times Mansion. Fearing's buffalo tenderloin