Crème de la Crème
The top 10 American restaurants you should experience in your lifetime.

BY DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL

hen I was asked to name the top 10 restaurants in the country, I was floored. Just 10? How would a jet-setting foodie pick between Thomas Keller’s Per Se, in New York, and his original French Laundry, in Napa Valley? For me, I picked the original, because I feel it expresses more about Keller’s cooking soul, and also what’s important about California as it relates to global cuisine. Would I respect an argument that Per Se was better? Yes, but I’m not sure I’d accept an argument that you could fully appreciate the elegant pageant of Per Se without experiencing the farm-rooted French Laundry. Which is to say that in the end I did pick just 10, these 10—my humble list of the top American restaurants every advanced food-lover must experience. Of course, once you hit this 10, you’ll want to add more, and that will be the time for Per Se, and time too to agree that experience is its own reward.

1) DANIEL
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
WWW.DANIELNYC.COM
Daniel Boulud’s namesake restaurant features contemporary, seasonal French cuisine in a setting that combines striking neoclassical architecture with elegant modern furnishings. The sophisticated bar and lounge are a welcoming spot for before and after dinner drinks. Daniel is a three Michelin star restaurant and one of only five Manhattan restaurants with a coveted four-star rating.

2) LE BERNARDIN
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
WWW.LE-BERNARDIN.COM
For 20 years, Le Bernardin has maintained its status of excellence and its international acclaim as one of the world’s top seafood restaurants. Zagat’s top pick for 2007, celebrity chef and owner Eric Ripert’s hot spot has also been awarded The New York Times’ highest rating of four stars.

3) THE FRENCH LAUNDRY
YOUNTVILLE, CALIFORNIA
WWW.FRENCHLAUNDRY.COM
Celebrity chef and television personality Anthony Bourdain has called world-renowned chef Thomas Keller’s Napa Valley hot spot “the best restaurant in the world, period.” The moment Keller laid eyes on the rustic two-story stone house that had been a French laundry for more than 100 years he knew immediately that the comfortable, fine dining restaurants he’d visited in France could be replicated stateside. More than 20 years and countless accolades and awards later, The French Laundry is a must-visit for any foodie. With 15 tables, dining time is three to four hours with two prix-fixe menus from which to choose. Reservations are taken two months in advance to the calendar date.

4) FRASCA
BOULDER, COLORADO
WWW.FRASCAFOODANDWINE.COM
Frasca is the creation of master sommelier Bobby Stuckey and chef Lachlan Mackinnon-Patterson. Their shared passion for Friuli-Venezia Giulian cuisine and fine wine is reflected in the exquisitely prepared fare and a comprehensive wine list boasting more than 200 varieties. The meticulous attention to detail, expert wine pairing, extensive knowledge of the menu, and a friendly feeling sets the award-winning Frasca apart.

5) ELEVEN MADISON PARK
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
WWW.ELEVENMADISONPARK.COM
Eleven Madison Park expresses the spirit of grand New York dining with executive chef Daniel Humm’s masterfully prepared, pure, market-driven cuisine. With two magnificent balcony-level, private dining rooms that overlook the main dining room and offer spectacular views of Madison Square Park through 20-foot windows, Eleven Madison Park is the quintessential New York dining experience.

6) ALINEA
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
WWW.ALINEA-RESTAURANT.COM
Alinea represents one of the most radical reimaginings of fine food by any chef in American history and has propelled
Grant Achatz to chef superstardom. Everything about his restaurant is unique, from the deconstructed food, unfamiliar flavor combinations, and theater to the tableware, with dishes served in and on all manner of implements: test tubes, cylinders, multilayered bowls that come apart. It’s boundary-shifting stuff.

7) CHEZ PANISSE
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA
WWW.CHEZPANISSE.COM
Chez Panisse opened its doors in 1971, founded by the famed Alice Waters and a group of idealistic friends. The award-winning neighborhood bistro offers a fixed dinner menu consisting of three to four courses. The menu that changes every night is designed to be appropriate to the season and is composed to feature the finest sustainably sourced, organic, and seasonal ingredients.

8) THE BAZAAR BY JOSE ANDRES
BEVERLY HILLS, CALIFORNIA
WWW.THEBAZAAR.COM
Named “Outstanding Chef” by the James Beard Foundation in 2011, José Andrés is an internationally recognized culinary innovator, passionate advocate for food and hunger issues, and chef/owner of ThinkFoodGroup. The Bazaar is a vibrant mix of sophisticated cuisine and playful lounge spaces where dining transcends into fête extraordinaire.

9) DEL POSTO
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
WWW.DELPOSTO.COM
Del Posto is the ultimate expression of what an Italian restaurant should be. Joe Bastianich, Lidia Bastianich, and Mario Batali represent a convergence of different styles and experiences. The restaurant concept generated at Del Posto can best be described as trans-generational: an expression of the evolution of cuisines, menus, service, and ambience that have characterized the history of the Italian dining experience in this country.

10) L’ATELIER DE JOEL ROBUCHON
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA
WWW.MGMGRAND.COM/RESTAURANTS/ATELIER-JOEL-ROBUCHON-FRENCH-RESTAURANT.ASPX
A masterpiece from France’s Chef of the Century, L’Atelier de Joël Robuchon is the culinary workshop of the gourmet mastermind. Featuring unique counter service where your dinner is prepared right before your eyes, the restaurant offers tapas, a tasting menu, and wines from around the world in a friendly and interactive atmosphere.

Dara Moskowitz Grumdahl is a James Beard Award-winning food and wine writer who frequently contributes to Gourmet magazine.