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RESTAURANTS (NEW AND OLD) UNDER THE HIGH LINE

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When the first leg of the High Line celebrated its long-awaited opening earlier this month, New Yorkers put on their comfortable walking shoes and reveled in the most chatter-worthy addition to the local topography since Christo and Jeanne-Claude's The Gates back in 2005. After years of daydreaming, planning, and headache-inducing jackhammering, a weed-choked, abandoned elevated railway on Manhattan's West Side had been magically transformed—into a high-toned version of a weed-choked, abandoned elevated railway. It remains unclear whether the High Line will ultimately be viewed—or used—as a park, as a promenade, or as a crosswalk-free pedestrian superhighway, but, all skepticism aside, the mere effect of it is stunning: bird's-eye views of the Hudson and the abandoned Cunard steamship pier; brawny loungers pointed toward



the New Jersey sunset; cantilevered benches made of ipe wood; and all those meticulously chosen native plants that have replaced all the old accidental native plants—the grasses, the birches, and, as of last week, the hummelo hedge nettles with their gorgeous sprays of purple flowers.

If nothing else, the High Line at last provides a place for New Yorkers to do something they are not known to do very well: saunter. It also provides the backbone to an impressive culinary corridor. The Meatpacking District and its environs have long been a foodie pleasure garden, with Spice Market, Pastis, Craftsteak, John Dory, and Del Posto clustered in a five-block radius. There's also the Chelsea Market, which the High Line now skirts on its way up toward Twentieth Street, not to mention a sprinkling of curiosities, including Los Dados, Sueños chef Sue Torres's high-end taqueria; Hogs & Heifers, where the jukebox still belts out Merle Haggard and the bartenders still have an aversion to shirts; and the indestructible Hector's Café & Diner, hunched under the tracks since 1962 and the alleged favorite of the High Line's civilian cofounders, Robert Hammond and Joshua David. (There's also the boarded-up R & L Restaurant on Gansevoort Street, the former home of Florent, which is rumored to open as a new bistro just in time for the High Line Festival on July 12.) But the centerpiece of it all is Andre Balazs's Standard Hotel—that hulkingly Stalin-esque diptych in poured concrete and glass by Polshek Partnership—and its brand-new restaurant, The Standard Grill.

After a couple of high-wattage friends-and-family weeks, the huge new space is now open for business. Nestled just under the tracks, The Standard's front bar/café throws a very different vibe to the street than the building that looms above it. With a red door and a big sign reading fish fowl beef pork, the feeling is English pub, but

perhaps at the height of the Carnaby Street sixties: The interior is all shiny white lacquer and sylphlike bentwood chairs. You half expect the Magical Mystery Tour bus to pull up outside for a pit stop of oysters or Iberico ham (beautifully deployed on the bar tops), of Slingshot Cabernet by the glass, or of any number of classic cocktails, from a Sazerac (made with an artisanal absinthe) to a Bee's Knees, that old-school concoction of gin, lemon, and honey syrup. Chef Dan Silverman comes from Lever House, the restaurant in the iconic building whose sea-green glazing could have been the inspiration for The Standard's own. At Silverman's old venue, the food was first class, but there was always something confining about dining in that late-nineties, retro-futuristic, honeycomb space pod designed by Marc Newson. At The Standard—with its vast dining room, deep burgundy banquettes, open kitchen, glistening penny-mosaic floors (which turn out, upon closer inspection, to be made of actual pennies), and subway-tiled barrel ceilings (“We ripped those off from the Oyster Bar!” Balazs said as he hopped from table to table)—you realize right away that Silverman has taken his Park Avenue kid gloves off. There's nothing particularly surprising about the menu, and that turns out to be a very good thing. This is haute comfort food—the kind of stuff that says New York Institution, as if “21” were given a long-awaited makeover or the Waverly hired a better chef—and it's pulled off with brio: smashed potatoes in duck fat, foie gras terrine, swordfish steak, short ribs, prime rib for two. The desserts, too, are no shrinking violets: lemon meringue tart; a molten, crunchy-edged brownie topped with torched marshmallows. There's a recession on, after all, and the Salman Rushdies and Anh Duongs in the room have come to be fed. And all that strolling along the High Line can build up an appetite.

—Mark Rozzo