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A GOURMAND'S GUIDE TO HOLIDAY DINNER

Food critic **Gael Greene** schools us on the best places to feed everyone on your naughty and nice lists.

WHEN I'M DINING ALONE

How about me? I need my holiday latkes. I could celebrate 101 years of Joel Russ on the Lower East Side with lunch at **Russ & Daughters Café** (127 Orchard St., russanddaughterscafe.com), but I live way uptown, so I'll be reserving sometime between Dec. 6 and 14 at **Bustan** (487 Amsterdam Ave., bustannyc.com), where a Filipino chef is now turning out the house's Israeli specialties. There are the traditional potato and onion latkes, of course, four per plate (\$11) with a side of sour cream and apple sauce (both housemade), and chef Jose Paulo Cortes will feature his own invention as well: sweet potato and zucchini latkes topped with creme fraiche, smoked salmon and salmon roe (four to a \$14 order). Unwilling to choose one over the other, I'll order both.

WITH MY EX'S NEW WIFE

It's not that I'm not reasonably fond of my ex's new wife. It's just that she's 10 years younger and 15 pounds thinner. That's why we'll be going to **L'Amico** (849 Sixth Ave., lamico.nyc) for our holiday reunion. It happens to be my favorite right now. In his passion for cooking Italian, French-born Laurent Tourondel has reinvented the pizza (from \$12), turning out a tasty, scorched and blistered beauty. We might have to order two of the crab crostini (\$12) as well, and the meatballs with the seductive garlic toast (\$17). And, count on my ex—he'll insist on pasta. Before anyone can groan, "Enough," two or three irresistible desserts will arrive along with my favorite duo of housemade gelato topped with a just-baked pastry disc (two flavors for \$7). The new wife can either eat like a trooper or come across as a wimp.



SWEET SOMETHINGS
From top: The open kitchen at Laurent Tourondel's L'Amico; the restaurant's gelatos and sorbets are served in metal coupe glasses and topped with a house-baked pastry disc.

« "...We'll be taking [my boyfriend's daughter] and her vegan wife to **The Clocktower** inside the **Edition Hotel**. ... I've no doubt chef **Jason Atherton** can put together a few leaves of lettuce for them, but I'll be sharing the excellent bone-in 40-day dry-aged strip with Daddy..." »



CHICKEN HERING:
CLOCKTOWER PHOTO BY NICHOLAS KOENING

DINNER IS THE SHOW From top: One of three of **The Clocktower** restaurant's themed dining rooms, a suitable place for a holiday dinner meant to impress; **Sugar and Plumm's** chicken and waffles.

WITH MY BOYFRIEND'S DAUGHTER

My boyfriend's hopelessly spoiled only child has finally condescended to meet us for a holiday dinner. I've been a saint to her, but there I am, his live-in darling, and she hates me. That's why we'll be taking her and her vegan wife to **The Clocktower** inside the **Edition Hotel** (5 Madison Ave., editionhotels.com). Each of the rooms is stunning and the crowd can be so chic, she can't help feeling short and shabby. I'll order crab and crispy uni (\$21), or maybe the mac and cheese with slow-cooked ox cheek (\$23) to start. That'll make her queasy. I've no doubt chef Jason Atherton, Michelin-loaded in London, can put together a few leaves of lettuce for them, but I'll be sharing the excellent bone-in 40-day dry-aged strip (\$52) with Daddy (it comes on a fabulous skull-adorned plate). If—surprise, surprise—she likes the place, that's points for me too.

WITH MY BEST FRIEND AND HER HUSBAND (WHO USED TO BE MY LOVER)

She's my best friend and he used to be my best lover. I'm taking us all to the **The Four Seasons Restaurant** (99 E. 52nd St., fourseasons.com) to say goodbye before it closes next July. After all, it was ours for 57 years. We'll have no problem getting a poolside table. Julian [Niccolini, co-owner] will send flutes of Champagne. I'll insist we all order farmhouse ducks for two (\$65).

While the kitchen may stumble a bit, the duck always seems to work. If we're lucky, we'll have an indulgent captain, a master of tableside tricks. Don't let him send the carcasses away. Get seconds. Sadly, the dessert cart is no more, but you can still have an approximation of the chocolate velvet cake. Or order sorbets, like me.

WITH MY GRANDCHILD

I've got my cherubic grandchild to myself for the morning. The men are watching football. His mom's got some last-minute shopping to do. I've reserved for the **Breakfast With Santa** (\$40 per child, \$55 per adult) at **Stella 34 Trattoria** (151 W. 34th St., stella34.com) on the 6th floor of Macy's. He gets to be photographed with Santa and meet elves while carolers sing. I have earplugs. I'll sip my Prosecco Bellini. If I can't talk him into ricotta pancakes, we'll fill up on pizza.

If I've got multiple offspring in tow, the whole kit and caboodle will have dinner at **Sugar and Plumm** (377 Amsterdam Ave., sugarandplumm.com) with assorted young cousins. Pulled pork on waffles for the adults. And, hopefully, the chicken will emerge fresh from the fryer. **Sugar** has a children's menu and small dishes (from \$12) of what kids like to eat. I'll order an alcoholic milkshake and the moppets will share sundaes dripping chocolate—unless they happen to be prissy vanilla-only freaks. CONTINUED...



matinee, so I'm taking us all to **The Brooklyn Diner**, which isn't in Brooklyn but at 212 West 57th Street (brooklyndiner.com). All the clans of the newly chic borough are represented on the menu—Italian, Greek, Jewish. It's no trick to find something you crave. Sometimes we share a 15-bite hotdog (\$22). Or the Chinese chicken salad with canned mandarins (\$21). And I consider it a crime if I can't persuade everyone to join in a taste of the famous strawberry blond cheesecake (\$13).

WITH MY FORMER SISTER-IN-LAW

My former sister-in-law is in town with her new boyfriend. I could take them to any one of my favorite places. But I know someone at the no-reservation **Red Farm** on the Upper West Side (2170 Broadway, redfarmnyc.com) who will save me a booth, and I'm sure Janie and her retired widower don't have anything like this brilliant inauthentic Chinese food in the middle of Florida, where they live. I'll order all sorts of dim sum (from \$13) and the shrimp-stuffed chicken as an entree (\$32), and I expect them to swoon or giggle when the pastrami egg roll (\$10) appears.

ON MY BIRTHDAY

It's my birthday this month, three days before Christmas. Where would I like to go? If money isn't an issue, **Jean-Georges** (1 Central Park West, jean-georgesrestaurant.com). In fact, if I was in love and he was broke, I wouldn't mind at all slipping my credit card to the captain. I'm perfectly happy with the three-course prix fixe at \$138—but I'm always game for the \$218 seasonal dinner. My favorite dish of all time was the exquisitely lemony sea trout draped in trout eggs. I almost swooned. Indeed, I always feel faint at least once or twice over a unexpectedly sublime juxtaposition of flavor. ■

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WITH MY BOSS AND HER HUSBAND

My boss and her husband are congenial first-nighters. They have no problem getting in when everyone else is waiting on hold. So I'll surprise them with Christmas-week dinner at **The Cecil** (210 W. 118th St., thececilharlem.com). I've taken dozens of friends to this Harlem restaurant and everyone seemed charmed by the cool diversity of the crowd and chef J.J. Johnson's way with soul, Low Country, Asian and African-inflected dishes. On my last visit, J.J. had just reinvented the menu. A few dishes had one or two items too many, but friends who would never order macaroni and cheese (from \$16) are always glad I have no shame. It's rich and luscious and everyone shares.

WITH MY COUSIN FROM OUT OF TOWN

My cousin and his family rarely come to NYC, but here they are, visiting their youngest who lives in Brooklyn and somehow grew up when I wasn't looking. They're on their way to a



DISH DYNASTIES Clockwise from top left: The interior of Jean-Georges, where writer Gael Greene has been known to swoon; the open kitchen at Stella 34 Trattoria inside the Macy's at Herald Square, which will be serving Breakfast With Santa during the holidays; The Cecil's macaroni and cheese.