





Photography: © Wonho Lee

Breva

Hotel Figueroa, Los Angeles

Words: Alia Akkam • Photography: Courtesy of Hotel Figueroa

A deluge of crime, drugs and crumbling façades once left Angelenos fleeing Downtown Los Angeles at sundown. But beginning in the late 1990s, flashy newcomers including the Staples Center and the Frank Gehry-designed Walt Disney Concert Hall as well as pioneers like hit-maker Cedd Moses of 213 Nightlife Group have helped transform this one-time ghost town into a thriving urban community. Historic architectural marvels from Union Station to the Renaissance-style Bradbury Building now seamlessly coexist with gleaming condominiums, the rejuvenated 1917 Grand Central Market and The Broad, a bastion of contemporary art.

Dubbed DTLA, encompassing such different areas as the Historic Core, Arts District and Chinatown, Downtown Los Angeles now booms with restaurants, bars and hotels. The Standard, which opened in the old Superior Oil headquarters in 2002, boldly took a chance on an up-and-coming part of the city, and numerous other upscale properties have since followed suit. The past year alone has seen the Downtown debut of InterContinental, with its 73rd-floor bar offering panoramic views, as well as the second outpost of New



York hotspot NoMad, this time situated in a bank from the 1920s. The dramatic revamp of Hotel Figueroa, in the shadow of the LA Live entertainment complex, is the latest ambitious regeneration project to turn heads in the city.

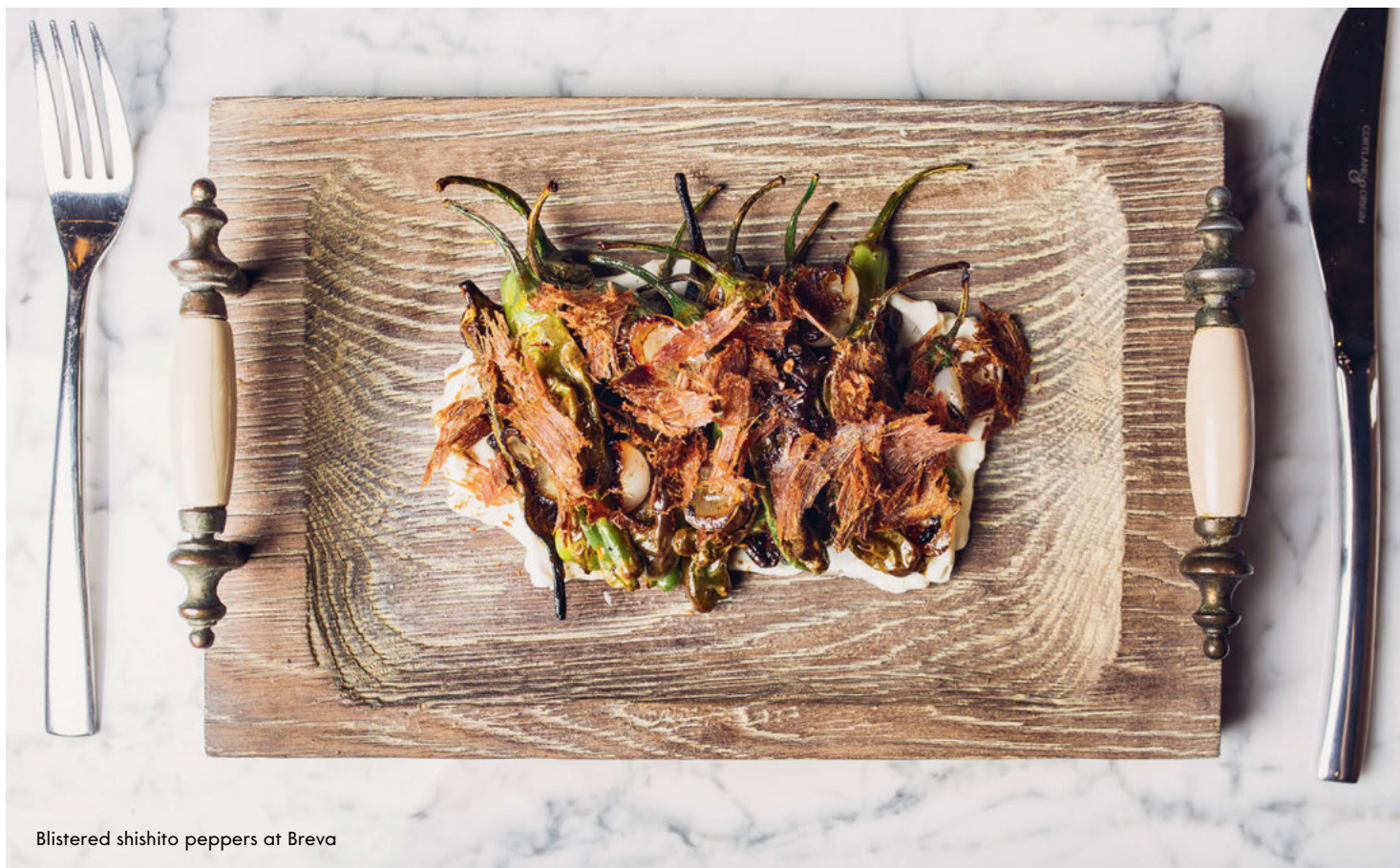
Now under the ownership of GreenOak Real Estate and Urban Lifestyle Hotel Group, the 14-storey building dates back to 1926 when it was a hostelry for female travellers. After years as a kitschy Moroccan-themed playground, the property has been restored to its splendid Spanish Colonial roots by Santa Monica design agency Studio Collective. This ambience is captured throughout the new hotel's F&B outlets Brea, Bar Figueroa, Veranda, Rick's and Bar Alta. The spaces are masterminded by local chef Casey Lane (in partnership with New York-based hospitality group Apicii) of the Tasting Kitchen in Venice, Viale del Romani at the Kimpton La Peer in West Hollywood and Casa Apicii in New York – as well as bar guru Dushan Zaric of Employees Only fame.

Brea is the heartbeat of Hotel Figueroa. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, the relaxed brasserie is an ode to the Basque Country, illuminating French and Spanish cuisine whilst celebrating California's bounty of fresh ingredients. "I love the Basque region and when we were looking at old photos of the hotel, its food felt like a natural fit to me," Lane recalls of Brea's origins. He then succeeded in persuading the hotel's owners to back his vision, telling them: "If you're into it, I'm into this style of cooking. It's what I believe in and enjoy eating."

Helmed by Chef de Cuisine and long-time Lane protégé Josh Herlihy, Brea's kitchen begins the day by cranking out bowls of faro and huckleberry oatmeal as part of an appealing breakfast menu, before switching to dishes such as Moorish spiced carrots with hazelnuts and tangerines, roasted cauliflower chops accompanied by walnuts and caper salad, and 40-day dry-aged top round steaks with green garlic butter from LA butcher shop Huntington Meats.

Originally, Brea aimed for a more polished-dining room feel "but once we saw the layout and how people were going to move in it, it organically became more casual – just like San Sebastián," Lane explains. "I wanted it to feel like Blue Ribbon and Raoul's in downtown New York, not pretentious fine dining. There is nothing else like that to service the creative crowd here late at night."

Brea also shines because of Studio Collective's subtle design approach; Principal Adam Goldstein points out that "it's a relatively small space for a three-meal-a-day restaurant," so to maximise it Brea purposely spills out into the lobby's animated Bar Figueroa. "It's a centrepiece for guests, a dialogue between the restaurant and the lobby," he adds. Designed to engage patrons, the curvilinear bar is crafted from hot rolled steel, walnut, antique brass and leather. At any given time, the bar is packed with guests and locals snacking on, say, grilled oysters while drinking a Sweet Pea Fix (Spring 44 Gin, Yuste 'La Kika' Manzanilla Sherry, Green Chartreuse, lime, sugar snap peas



Blistered shishito peppers at Brevia

and mint) or one of Zaric's signature Gintonico concoctions starring botanicals flash-infused with dry ice. The two-storey bottle display, set against a peekaboo glass box showcasing a staircase, adds a further sense of visual enticement.

"I like to evolve as a craftsman and the Figueroa concepts were something I always wanted to develop," says Zaric. "I'm interested in an overall gastronomic experience. How can we use cocktails to improve the atmosphere so that you can't pinpoint what you like. I don't think just having good cocktails is a reason to come back to a bar anymore."

Brevia, with its white-oak floor and banquettes, is a lighter and brighter juxtaposition to the bar. "We wanted this space to be airier, with the same attention to detail but with different finishes," says Goldstein. "It has this nice double-height ceiling that makes the space seem larger." The overall impression is amplified by a large custom mirror fashioned from hand-carved walnut and faceted glass, as well as sidewalk seating that strengthens the connection between indoor and outdoor environments across the hotel.

At the rear of Hotel Figueroa is Veranda, overlooking the hotel's coffin-shaped pool. The lush garden setting complements a menu of

straightforward, satisfying drinks, including the horseradish-infused Aylesbury Duck Vodka Bloody Mary already familiar to Employees Only fans, and flatbreads incorporating zucchini, lemon, basil and burrata. "The gazebo and wood-fired burning oven bring a European culinary element to the outdoors," says Lane, reinforcing the synergy between California and the Basque Country.

Meanwhile, Rick's – a bi-level bar with an alfresco white-plastered fireplace and custom black wrought-iron stools – instills a "pool-house vibe" as Goldstein describes it. Its breezy pops of turquoise and black-and-white flooring elicit a fitting backdrop to Zaric's tropical libations, dreamed up in tandem with Beverage Director Michael Lay, like the Media Vuelta with tequila, Campari, fresh lime and Thai chili.

By contrast, Zaric considers the swanky, reservations-only Bar Alta akin to a philharmonic orchestra because its menu is "completely classic," with cocktails served in vintage glassware. Just like Hotel Figueroa itself, Bar Alta's intimate table and roving drink carts exemplify an alluring mix of old and new.

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