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## Red-Sauce Joints Are Making a Comeback

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ERIC LEVENSON | SEP 17, 2013

The Italian-American red-sauce joint is making a comeback. And this time, the restaurants have a different clientele in mind, a group for which exclusiveness is key. Kitschy Italian-American restaurants (read: Olive Garden) have been a staple of the American food scene for their recognizable yet unrefined food, red checkered tablecloths, and flowing chianti. But there are some signs that this middle America approach is going the way of most characters on *The Sopranos* — kaput.

First, there's the growing expansion of Rao's, the legendarily-exclusive East Harlem-based restaurant, which is now setting up shop in Los Angeles. Rao's delicious Italian food, combined with its intimate setting and few number of tables, has made getting a reservation there basically impossible for you poor, non-A-list celebrities, Forbes' contributor Larry Olmsted explains. Rao's "is simply the toughest restaurant reservation in this country, if not the world," he writes, a place where each table is semi-permanently claimed and reservations are a non-starter. Not content with New York's array of celebrities, Rao's expanded to Las Vegas in 2006 for a larger venue. And today, the legendary red sauce joint opens in Hollywood, hoping to take advantage of the vapidity of America's entertainment capital.

The continued spread of Rao's may just be a singular case of the rise of the red sauce, but there are other examples of the marinara-like cover of Italian-American eateries over New York. There's Carbone restaurant, which The New York Times nicely describes as a "fancy red-sauce joint." Like Rao's, Carbone limits its reservations, and requires they be made at least a month in advance. And the "wildly-popular" Parm, which opened in New York last November, is already expanding to Battery Park City. Perhaps that's because its chefs, Rich Torrisi and Mario Carbone, "studied fancy-restaurant techniques" in forming

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the restaurant.

Note to those hoping to be on the forefront of foodies: red sauce joints and the like are back and cooler than ever. So go order some baked ziti or spaghetti marinara with parmesan on top; that is, if restaurants like Rao's think you're worthy of a plate.

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