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## Opening Night Report: NYC Landmark Rao's Debuts in L.A.

9:00 AM PDT 9/18/2013 by Gary Baum

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Rao's in Hollywood

Gary Baum

The legendary East Harlem Italian restaurant fittingly hangs its shingle at the Hollywood Canteen's historic address.

Old-school Rao's – the notoriously tough-to-get-into dining spot in Manhattan – has compelled its devoted regulars, drawn from the city's intersecting spheres of politics, show business and the underworld, to head all the way up to East Harlem for 117 years. **Woody Allen** and **Martin Scorsese** make the trip for the family-owned restaurant's particular mix of cozily backslapping camaraderie, Sinatra on the jukebox and red-sauce Southern Italian specialties.

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On Sept. 17, a Rao's outpost officially opened in L.A. along the decidedly off-the-beaten-path side streets of southern Hollywood, which are defined by anonymous postproduction houses. It may only be situated a meatball's toss from the Paramount lot, but those moneyed acolytes living on the Westside who typically blanch at driving east of La Brea Ave. for anything but a Lakers game are clearly going to have to be enacting their own West Coast version of the East Harlem Schlep. (For his part, co-owner **Frank Pellegrino Jr.** is sure they'll do it. When Rao's announced its new location exclusively to *The Hollywood Reporter* back in March **he said**, "it's a bit of a journey, but they'll come. For us, they'll come.")

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**STORY: NYC Landmark Rao's Opens in Odd Hollywood Location**

The new Rao's has taken over 1006 Seward St., the one-time address of the historic Hollywood Canteen, founded by **Bette Davis** and MCA head **Jules Stein** during World War II. It's been completely gutted, the facade painted the same tomato red as the one in New York, which is half its size. Interior design cues -- signed celebrity headshots, dark wood booths, white linen tablecloths, Christmas wreaths proudly displayed in September -- hew strictly to on-brand tradition.

By 8 p.m. on opening night the place was packed, except for the rear patio, which was treated as Siberia. Orders of classics, from linguine with clams to veal parmesan, emerged from the kitchen

with no jitters. (It no doubt helps that **Nicole Grimes**, the executive chef, transferred from the well-oiled third Rao's location, at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, and that **Dino Gatto**, the top toque at the Manhattan original, was on hand too.)

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Servers were in the full rhythmic swing of things too, as though the new Hollywood location had been operating for years. Co-owner **Frank Pellegrino**, known in Manhattan as "Frankie No" for his frequent response to table requests, was far more "Frankie Hello" on Tuesday evening -- an outgoing, genial host, introducing himself to strangers and first-timers as he worked the room.

The crowd, though, was mostly Rao's worshippers, along with **Owen Wilson**, who took a seat opposite a date in an intimate rear booth. Just about everyone was notably at least middle-aged, not the marauding, young, Instagramming horde typically found at a buzzed-about new L.A. restaurant.

At the valet stand, an older married couple descending into their Prius was happy with their dining experience. Then again, they were happy just to have gotten a table. "We were surprised it was so easy tonight," said the wife. "By next week, trust me, it won't be."

DINING

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 11 Trailer #2 (Lionsgate) 7/21/13  
**3,206,106 views last week**  
 Movie release: Nov 22 | 10,091,559 total views
- 3 300: Rise of an Empire**  
 4 Trailer #1 (Warner Bros.) 6/12/13  
**1,675,813 views last week**  
 Movie release: Mar 7 | 27,564,777 total views
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 NEW Trailer #1 (Warner Bros.) 9/12/13  
**1,451,365 views last week**  
 Movie release: Dec 25 | 1,451,365 total views
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