

Don't Change Anything

By Michael Callahan

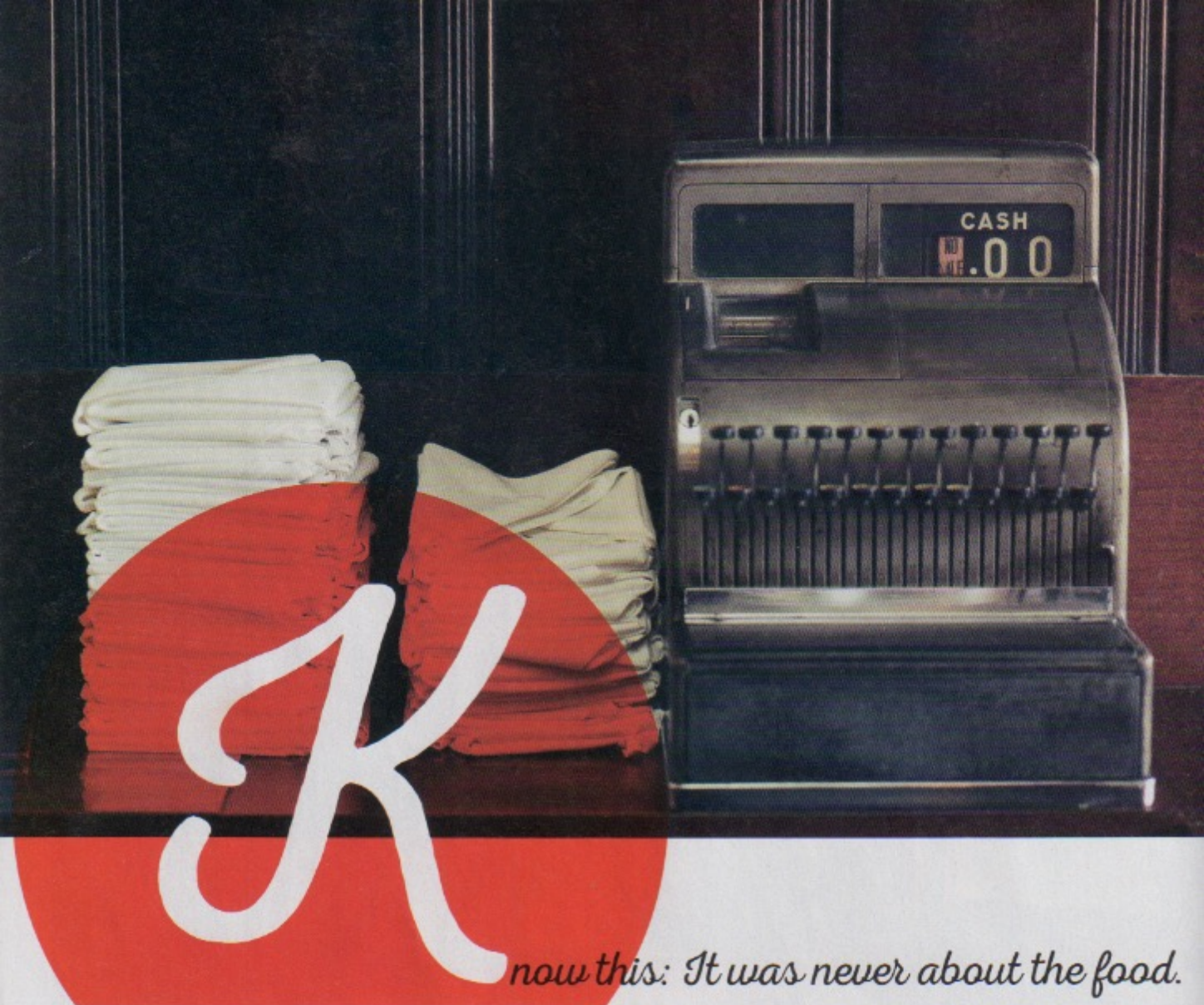
» FAME CAN BE FLEETING, YET MUSSO & FRANK'S CAREER ARC HAS SPANNED ALMOST A CENTURY. WHAT'S THE SECRET OF HOLLYWOOD'S OLDEST RESTAURANT? COME ON IN AND TAKE A SEAT



Photographs by Rene Radka



• Walter Alonso Castillo has been serving meals at Musso's for 46 years



now this: It was never about the food.

The gooey sauces, the cured meats, the dashes of marjoram and *herbes de Provence*—these were the tools of the starched chefs of Paris and New York, their gray mustaches bristly as shaving brushes, theatrically ranting their way through their kitchens. It was to their plush-carpeted restaurants that the Michelin critics crept in undercover, as grand dames named Millicent and Constance swanned in after cards and cocktails, sipping chilled martinis and picking at beef bourguignonne. Musso & Frank's wasn't any of that, never wanted to be any of that. What it had—what it still has—isn't on any menu.

The first time I walked into Musso's—its official name is the Musso & Frank Grill, but everybody calls it Musso's—there was only one thing I knew for certain: I had never been in a place like it in my life. At first blush it can come off as rather ridiculous, more movie set than restaurant, because it looks like nothing has been changed in 50 years. The truth is, little has been changed in nearly a hundred.

From the beginning, Hollywood has always had restaurants where the rich, famous, and infamous have come to dine, repositories of champagne and stardust, photographers' flashbulbs popping like popcorn: *Ciro's*, *Chasen's*, the *Brown Derby* (which gave the world the enduring gift of the Cobb salad). Seventy percent of restaurants never make it to year five. In 2019, Musso's will mark its centennial. Even if you never actually eat at Musso's, there's a

sense of comfort that comes merely from the fact that it's still *here*.

The restaurant has inspired everything from a moody jazz tune to a short black-and-white film by famed photographer Bruce Weber. It was the basis for the title of Edmund Wilson's *The Boys in the Back Room*. It is the place where bitter antihero Tod Hackett engages in a rape fantasy in Nathanael West's *Day of the Locust*; where Philip Marlowe dines in *The Big Sleep* (Raymond Chandler is rumored to have written part of the book sitting in a booth here); where brassy Kit Sargent memorably picks up the check in Budd Schulberg's polemical indictment of Hollywood, *What Makes Sammy Run?* ("Every time a man discovers what a woman thinks, the only way he can explain it is that she happens to have a male mind," she expounds drolly over dinner). Musso's has served as the backdrop for almost every Hollywood-based period film of the last half century and continues to reap a quiet bonanza on Sundays and Mondays, when it has been closed, as a film set. (In January the restaurant began offering supper from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. on Sundays.) Several pivotal scenes of *Mad Men* were shot here. Because, really: With his facile, aftershave urbanity and matinee-idol glamour, could there be a better face of Musso's than that of Don Draper?

James Pappas, the son of a former lifeguard at the old Ambassador Hotel, is the current "mayor" of Musso's, an honorific passed down on special regulars through the decades. As befits someone who spends



enough nights in a bar to earn such a title, he's a great storyteller. He's imbibed at Musso's bar with everyone from Mickey Rooney to Buzz Aldrin. "Gore Vidal used to go in there a lot," he tells me. "And there were times when he would come in with a friend who would get so drunk, they wouldn't be able to drive him home. Or they would get into a fight. On more than a few occasions, I gave him a ride home."

"Once, he and I were talking about why we liked the place so much," Pappas says. "He said, 'It's like stepping into a warm bath.'" Dining at Musso's is warm and curative, a tonic for the day's stresses. Its potency comes from the alchemy created by its disparate elements, ingredients just as vital as the ones that go into its signature dishes.

THE LOCATION

BY THE TIME John Musso and Frank Toulet set out to open their restaurant, Frank's Cafe, on Hollywood Boulevard, the town was already blossoming into the film capital of the world. Joseph Carissimi bought in a few years later. Studios were cropping up all over the neighborhood, founded by visionaries like Cecil B. DeMille and the Warner brothers, and Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks, who called



Because of the restaurant's no-photo policy, shots like these of Frank Sinatra with Lauren Bacall in 1957, Dennis Hopper in 1955, and Paulette Goddard with Charlie Chaplin in 1933 are rarities

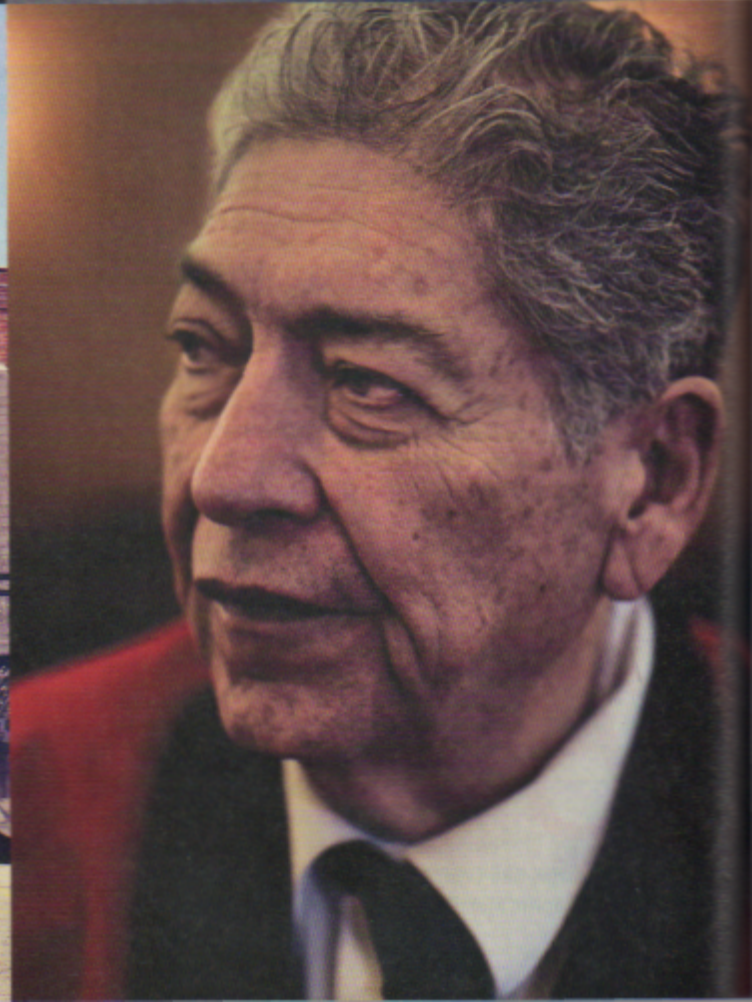
their studio United Artists. The area was flooded with actors, writers, film crews, and extras who all needed a place to eat—and drink.

Some early patrons rode in on horseback, parking their steeds in the stalls behind the restaurant (those

disappeared by the 1930s). Chaplin is said to have challenged John Barrymore to a horse race down the boulevard, the loser buying the winner dinner at Musso's. No one seems to know who won, which should hardly be surprising because another version of the tale has Rudolph Valentino and Douglas Fairbanks as the jockeys saddling up. No matter. At least everyone seems to agree that a race happened.

A hit from the day it opened, the restaurant changed hands eight years in, when Carissimi and his new partner, John Mosso, bought out the other two, changing the name to the Musso & Frank Grill. (The irony was not lost that the one guy named neither Musso nor Frank ended up with the place.)

"The story my grandmother would tell—and it's not totally accurate—is that my great-grandfather got into Hollywood, wanted to get into the restaurant business, saw Musso's, decided [the name] was close enough, and came in and bought it." That's John Mosso's 36-year-old great-grandson, Mark Echeverria, who now serves as the CFO and general overseer. Congenial and folksy—more Toots Shoor than Danny Meyer—Echeverria has a head of thick dark hair





tinged with wisps of gray. "It's not the true story," he says with a soft chuckle. "But it's a good story."

As its fortunes rose, the restaurant expanded half a block east, only to see its popularity wax and wane as other star chambers emerged. By the mid-20th century Musso's had been largely eclipsed in the power-meal wars by Romanoff's, which opened in 1941 on Rodeo Drive with the backing of an impressive A-list of investors that included Cary Grant, Darryl F. Zanuck, and Jock Whitney. But in 1962, it was closed, having outlasted Citro's by five years. Chasen's would hang on for a few more decades, leaving Musso's as the sole survivor of the Old Hollywood dining scene, a nod to its mystique and the business acumen of its owners. "You know why it's still there?" says Indolfo Rodriguez, the restaurant's marquee grill man. "Because the family owns the land."

Today the place seems a bit of a curiosity on Hollywood Boulevard, plopped between the Walk of Fame stars of Andy Williams and Christoph Waltz. It still looks the same, with its green-painted wood, tan-stucco exterior, and a stone base like those found in your better mountain lodges. To the restaurant's left is a *taqueria* festooned with palm fronds; on the right is Starworld, where you can buy a commemorative Elvis plate for \$19.99. A neon sign above the chophouse proclaims OLDEST RESTAURANT IN HOLLYWOOD SINCE 1919. There is an ugly metal grate that gets pulled across the entrance after closing.

As kitschy, even melancholy, as its surroundings are, Musso's wouldn't be Musso's without them. The stars still come out to pay



OPPOSITE: Artifacts from various eras saturate Musso's, though it's people like Ruben Rueda—a bartender here for 49 years—who keep the regulars coming back.
ABOVE: Executive chef J.P. Amateau, the restaurant in 1930

homage, to steep in the history of a restaurant that has outlived many of the studios that once fed it and, maybe, to revel in an environment that offers them authenticity and that rarest of amenities, privacy. Johnny Depp is a regular; Scarlett Johansson, with her hubby, baby, and mother in tow, was in just last week; Toni Collette, Drew Barrymore, and Cameron Diaz dined here two nights ago. "One of our philosophies is we don't phone paparazzi to tell them 'so-and-so is in the restaurant,'" says John Echeverria, Mark's father and Musso's president. "They have

a sense that if they want to go to the Ivy to be recognized, they can do that. If they want to go to Musso's, they can have a quiet dinner by themselves. Our customers are amazing about not bothering them."

THE DINING ROOMS

ORDER THE STEAK.

I do this because it's Musso's, and at Musso's I can't imagine ordering anything else. Behind the grill is 63-year-old Rodriguez, who came when Schwab's Pharmacy closed in 1984 and has been searing beef and chops ever since. "Everybody likes a good steak," he says. "They come in on a Saturday night and wave to me. I know just what they want and how they want it."

My date this evening is Courtney Kemp, the gorgeous producer of the Starz network drama *Power*. I find (CONTINUED ON PAGE 156)



Musso & Frank's

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 135

some symbolism in bringing her here. Monique Martin, a writer who set part of her 2012 novel, *The Devil's Due*, at Musso's in 1933 (Lucifer barter souls in a back booth), told me, "It's not just a place to see and be seen—it's a place to make a deal. It's glamorous, but it's also powerful."

That power comes not from contracts being signed but from the sheer force of its aura, the ghosts who dine alongside you. As someone who has rotated through influential Hollywood for more than a decade, Kemp is relatively familiar with glittering L.A. dining; she's been to Nobu, Spago, Mr. Chow, and anywhere else the paparazzi find parking. But the look on her face as she walked into Musso's for the first time and slid into our booth, drinking in the ambience, was one of priceless astonishment. "This place," she whispered, "is *amazing*."

It is.

There is all of that sumptuous red leather everywhere—the booths and the chairs upholstered in a tarty shade of scarlet. The booths still have their brass hat racks; sturdy wood beams crisscross the ceiling of the "new room," opened in 1955. An old neon sign in the back declares COCKTAILS, with an arrow pointing to the right that leads you into the room, which boasts both glowy yellow lighting from two grand chandeliers in the center and the famous Musso bar. The piped-in soundtrack is Sinatra, Goulet, Doris Day, singing Porter or Gershwin.

Men in big, poufy toques like Chef Boyardee chop and stir and dice at the grill behind the long lunch counter that runs the length of the restaurant, for those who prefer the experience of eating in a refined Automat. That giant mural that wraps around the main dining room is said to show a hunt in progress, though it's so faded that no one can really tell anymore. "People say, 'Why don't you clean the mural?'" says assistant general manager Bobby Caravella. "And we say, 'Because it's painted with Humphrey Bogart's cigarette smoke.'"

A glance around shows a clear delin-

eation between the old guard, the men in plaid jackets and their wives in their best costume jewelry, and the new hipster class, happily attired in rumpled tops and jeans one suspects were not long ago resting on the bedroom floor. "I kind of miss the old times," growls bartender Ruben Rueda. "Everybody was dressed up. Today I don't look at what they're wearing."

Historically, where you sat in Musso's said something about who you were and what you wanted out of the place. Charlie Chaplin had his own booth in the joint, right by the front window. Tom Mix liked to sit in a booth facing the street so his fans could see him. But the dining room, cavernous and dark, also allowed for ample discretion and privacy if a star wished to retreat into its shadows. Raymond Burr unfailingly sat in the same booth, away from the windows, ordered a double vodka gimlet rocks, and left strict orders that he was not to be bothered by anyone, ever. "Orson Welles was famous for saying, 'All I want to do is have lunch,'" says Caravella. "I don't want anyone trying to sell me a script or anyone coming by to tell me how beautiful their girlfriend is and how she belongs in movies?"

THE KITCHEN

MUSO'S FOOD IS not simply old school but oldest school: heavy, voluminous, and antique, if such a word can be applied to cuisine. (The bread: To die for. Seriously.) Like much of the menu, the daily specials—sauerbraten on Wednesdays, bouillabaisse Marseillaise on Fridays—remain largely unchanged, dishes *The New York Times Magazine* once labeled "gustatory fossils." Everything is à la carte. People will tell you the food, despite some recent tinkering, is bland and overpriced, which is probably true.

No one cares.

Fanny Brice came each Saturday for years, sitting at the far end of the counter and snarfing down plates of all-you-can-eat braised short ribs. Bertolt Brecht, Thomas Mann, and John O'Hara, part of the literary cognoscenti that descended on Hollywood in the 1930s and '40s and remade Musso's in the process, were fond of the famous "flannel cakes" (read: pancakes) and the Thursday special, chicken potpie. Gary Cooper favored the tenderloin steak and baked potato; Valentino loved the spaghetti; Chaplin was a fan of the grilled lamb kidney and the Irish stew. Ginger Rogers was a steak girl who adored rum cake for dessert.

It seemed as if the restaurant were expecting Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn for dinner: Calf's liver, Welsh rarebit, sweetbreads, and lamb kidney with bacon were (and continue to be) mainstays. And there is that virtual ocean of beef—Flintstonian porterhouses and bone-in rib eyes, filet mignons in varying sizes, New York steaks and Manhattan steaks and ground beef steaks, all prepared in plain view on the seething Musso grill. From 1922 until 1976, the kitchen was the domain of Jean Rue Sr., a bantam Frenchman whose ego belied his size and who was the driving force behind the cumbersome cuisine. Status was conferred not only by having an assigned booth but bartenders who knew exactly how you liked your drink and chefs who would custom-make your dinner. Years after her husband's death, Barbara Sinatra would still come to Musso's to order "sand dabs à la Sinatra" (read: nice and crispy).

Even as Hollywood Boulevard turned seedy, Musso's kitchen nonetheless hummed along, its atavistic menu relentlessly unchanging. It wasn't until the Great Recession that the restaurant realized it needed some upgrades—and an infusion of cash—to see it through the tumult. In 2009, the Carissimi heirs sold their interest to the Mosso heirs, who lured a recalcitrant Mark Echeverria, then 29 and running a resort in Reno, to take over the day-to-day management. "Eight years ago the food really wasn't that good," Mark says. "They were cutting costs by cutting quality. There was nobody really looking at the business, no real ownership presence." Things had, he says, "started to go downhill."

He hired a new chef, who retooled some of the ancient recipes. A loyalty program was launched (though, astoundingly, the restaurant still does no advertising). The food improved, the economy improved, and Musso's came back from the brink. "I was bound and determined," John Echeverria says, "not to let it fail."

That meant preserving, down to the last napkin, the Musso's of old while fiddling with the formula just enough to make sure that a new generation would not dismiss the place as merely a theme park ride through the cuisine of yesteryear. "Some restaurants can be very successful at changing the concept," John says. "But I think a very old restaurant that tries to change its concept can run off its customer base. People get used to coming to a place, to a certain dish, to get liver and onions or lamb kabobs. After we took over, we did a demographic study of our customer base. And the thing we kept hearing over and over was, 'Don't change anything.'"



SHOPPING DIRECTORY

➔ **PAGE 33:** Montblanc pen at Montblanc Boutique, Beverly Center, 310-854-0049. **PAGE 34:** LFrank ring at LFrank Jewelry, Venice, 310-452-0771. Vhernier ring at Vhernier, Beverly Hills, 310-273-2444. Irene Neuwirth ring at Irene Neuwirth, Beverly Grove, 323-285-2000. Meira T ring at meiratdesigns.com. Roberto Coin ring at Roberto Coin, Manhattan Beach, 310-546-4900. Tiffany & Co. ring at Tiffany & Co., Beverly Hills, 310-273-8880. David Yurman ring at David Yurman, Beverly Hills, 310-888-8618. Sloane Street ring at sloanest.com. Dior Fine Jewelry ring at Christian Dior, Beverly Hills, 310-859-4700. **PAGE 36:** Eric Buterbaugh Eau de Parfum at Eric Buterbaugh Florals, Beverly Grove, 323-651-9844.

THE BAR

THE PIVOTAL SCENE in the 1994 film *Ed Wood* comes when the quixotic title character, played with trademark oddity by Johnny Depp, sits dressed in drag at the bar at Musso's and downs a shot of Imperial whiskey. He spies Orson Welles, played by Vincent D'Onofrio, sitting in a booth, and approaches. In their brief exchange Welles complains about the usual Hollywood tropes: interfering producers, lack of financing.

"Is it all worth it?" the eager Wood asks.

"It is when it works," Welles replies.

Which may be a metaphor for the bar at Musso's. A temple of burnished mahogany and cut crystal, lit so that anybody looks good in the mirrors behind it no matter what round they're on, it has long been its own destination, particularly for the literary set. (Writers boozing. Big surprise.) Originally located in the famed back room, it was moved when in '55 Musso's acquired the space next door and opened the new room. William Faulkner mixed his own mint juleps at the bar; the screenwriter C. Graham Baker is said to have introduced gin rummy to the masses here. Writer Charles Bukowski would come with a thirst and a thick wad of bills to help him quench it.

As impressive as it is, Musso's literary pedigree was accidental. In 1935, a Texas raconteur named Stanley Rose opened an eponymous bookshop a few doors down. Rose—whose main claim to fame was that he'd never read a book—had his own back room, which evolved into a clubhouse for the legion of high-tone novelists being lured to Hollywood in the 1930s to pen scripts for the major studios. (Conveniently the Screen Writers Guild was located across the street.) Rose routinely covered their tabs at Musso's,

which had just opened its own "back room," made possible by punching a hole through the wall to the adjoining Vogue Theater. The writers wasted little time running up big tabs, mainly of the liquid variety.

Faulkner, Saroyan, Fitzgerald, Hellman, Huxley, O'Hara, Hemingway: If they were noted authors of the 20th century, they were at the bar at Musso's, drinking—and drinking, and *drinking*—elbow to elbow with the likes of Gable and Bacall. "There was the fact that Raymond Chandler used to eat and drink here, or Dashiell Hammett ate here, Fitzgerald—that whole literary vibe," says Robert Crais, the L.A. crime writer who has used the restaurant as a setting in several of his popular Elvis Cole detective novels. "And that's still here. From time to time, when I'm working on a project, I'll go and make notes there, sitting at the lunch bar. Just because I like to imagine there is still that ongoing connection with those people. There is something that is still alive about Musso's."

"A visit to Musso's is more like a trip to F. Scott Fitzgerald territory—the right bonhomie, the right food, and the best martini in town," author David Wallace once wrote. That's true, especially about the martinis. More than 80 percent of the cocktails served at Musso & Frank's are vodka martinis. (The secret is anti-James Bond: Musso's martinis are stirred, not shaken.) "The martinis!" exclaims waiter Sergio Gonzalez. "Two of those..." He rolls his eyes back into his head. "Pow!"

Steve McQueen drank Löwenbräu—"He could put away eight or ten," according to bartender Rueda, who looks like Martin Landau, sounds like Boris Karloff, and has been pouring here since 1967. Marlon Brando's son Christian was here with his half-sister Cheyenne at Musso's the night

he shot her lover to death. During the filming of 1992's *Reservoir Dogs*, actor Michael Madsen took costar Lawrence Tierney—best known for playing tough guys in movies—to Musso's for a few vodka tonics. At some point Tierney went to the men's room and didn't come back. Madsen heard honking outside. He peered out to spy Tierney, standing in the middle of Hollywood Boulevard, pants down, wagging a finger at every passing car.

"The days when you could go into a bar and talk to your bartender like he's your therapist don't exist anymore," says James Pappas. "Today bartenders don't even make eye contact with you when they serve you—they don't *want* to talk to you. But at Musso's, he has your drink ready, he knows what you're drinking. I walk in there, and he knows exactly what I am going to have and how long I am going to be there."

THE WAITERS

THERE IS LITTLE that Angelinos love more than a crusty old waiter (see Canter's or the Pantry), and in this, Musso's is Oz. A new waiter at Musso's may be someone who has been working at the place for 18 years. Most have been here for decades, and their familiarity—with the restaurant, with the menu, with the fussy *Downton Abbey*-like rituals of grand dining—is as much a part of the Musso's experience as the food. "We don't hire the next George Clooney/aspiring actor who is just doing this to get by," says Mark Echeverria, who remembers waiters elegantly bringing him Shirley Temples in martini glasses when he was four years old. "These guys are professionals, from the back to the front."

Each time they come in, the Rolling Stones (Keith Richards orders the liver and onions) treat Sergio Gonzalez, who's been their server since 1972, as if he were the rock star. Gonzalez's habitués once included Frank Capra, Jack Webb, and Michael Landon. ("David Janssen and Angie Dickinson used to sit in this very booth," he remarks idly to me as we sit together in the new room one afternoon.) "Gore Vidal used to joke with me that I was a terrorist and that we were going to take over L.A.," Gonzalez recalls. "He'd say, 'You bring your army and take Cahuenga Pass. I'll bring my navy and take Silver Lake!'"

The waiters still sport their trademark red bolero jackets and bow ties; the busboys, in green, are a collection of bustling, rustling young men with pale, ruddy-cheeked faces. You have to be able to

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Breakfast chef Domingo Pule, a Musso's employee for 25 years, preps before customers arrive

deal with larger-than-life personalities and oddball characters to make it as a waiter at Musso's, which is perhaps why so many of the staff have become legends themselves. For years Musso's maître d' was Daniel Ilich, once described as an "undertaker walking tall," who guarded the back room like a bank vault. He once kept a group of diners waiting as the room sat empty, later explaining to Joseph Carissimi that he was holding it for those sot novelists, who were late coming back from the track.

Charlton Heston showed up one night with a party of eight, was told the wait was an hour, and asked the headwaiter, Jesse Chavez, if he knew who he was. Chavez replied yes, of course he knew who he was and that the wait was still an hour. Heston stormed out, never to return.

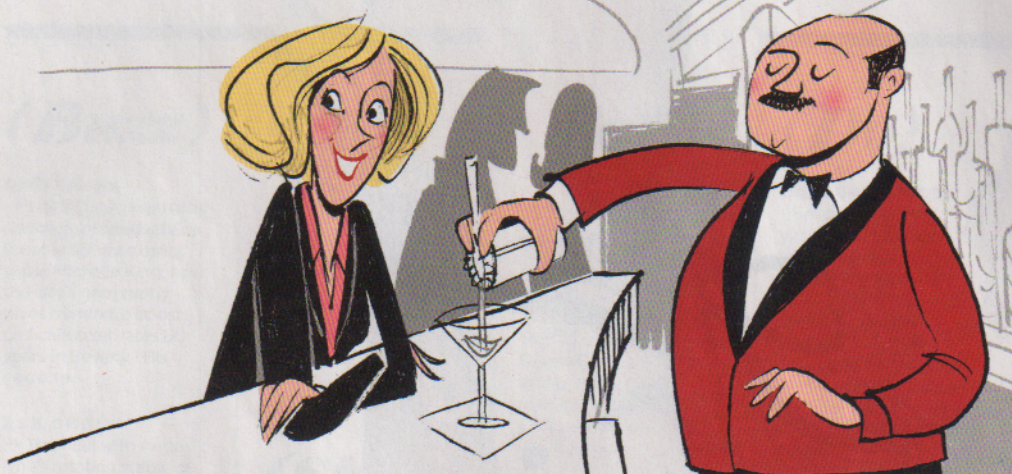
By the 1980s, Musso's waitstaff seemed a quaint anachronism, like the rotary phone. Audacious chefs such as Wolfgang Puck and Michael Roberts pioneered airy "California cuisine" and opened a string of buzzy upstarts like Spago, La Serre, Trumps, and Orlando-Orsini that drew in the boldface crowd with minimalist spaces and lighter, more adventurous dishes. (No one was eating turkey à la king anymore.) In *The Hollywood Reporter's* annual survey "Where the Stars Eat" in 1987, the only "celebrities" to name Musso & Frank's were David Naughton (best known as "the guy in the Dr. Pepper commercials") and the Amazing Kreskin. As if to put a fine point on all of this, at around the same time John Mosso's daughter, Rose Mosso Keegel, told the *Los Angeles Times*, "I am not going to say anything good about our waiters. I don't think they're good." The

writer asked her if she was kidding. She replied, "Well, they could be better. Every time you read an article about us, it always says, 'If you get yourself a good waiter, it's a good place to eat.' They're not bad. Oh no. I'm just thinking back to the way it used to be. We had French, Italian, Serbian waiters trained on huge ocean liners, and they were such wonderful waiters."

Rose's cranky answer notwithstanding, they still are, though they have steadily become mostly Latino, another interesting counterpoint, considering how Latinos tend to dominate the back-of-the-house trades in most other L.A. eateries. At Musso's these stolid stewards serve not just food but the enduring magic that is a meal in its dining room: the slight European bow, the sweep of the arm that leads you to your booth, the low, accented "Thank you, sir" and "Very good, sir," the practiced stroke of the bread crumb knife, as precise as a barber's razor. It's like being served by an army of Hercule Poirots.

In 2002, music journalist Paul Zollo published a book titled *Hollywood Remembered: An Oral History of Its Golden Age*. One of the people he interviewed was Manny Felix, a 65-year-old waiter at Musso's. "Times have changed. But Musso & Frank's is like a time capsule. You can close your eyes and pretend you're in the thirties or the forties or fifties. When people come to Hollywood, they're searching for something," Felix said, "and this is one place where they can find it."

Michael Callahan is a contributing editor at Vanity Fair.



Hitting Pause

EVERYTHING AROUND US—well, everything other than traffic—is galloping forward (or upward) at a startling pace. There's technology, of course. Try as we might, it's impossible to keep up with each gadget innovation and app update and podcast download, to say nothing of the onslaught of pinging e-mails and texts and social media posts that swarm around us like gnats. Then there's this city, where street corners once so familiar have been razed for new development and, in the process, rendered unrecognizable. Progress is good, but every now and then I need to make a pilgrimage to a place that hits the Pause button, despite time itself constantly jabbing Play. It might sound like a contradiction, but there is something fresh about being frozen in time; never evolving is more radical an idea these days than persistently revising.

Few places in L.A. have stopped the clock for as long as Musso & Frank's. When I asked my husband which cool new restaurant he wanted to eat at for his birthday last September, he suggested Musso's. It's not new, but it's never not been cool to us. On Hollywood Boulevard since 1919, the famed bar and grill with the red leather banquettes has long been our go-to spot. A couple of decades ago, friends threw us an engagement party there. We dined at Musso's one New Year's Eve, when I drank two vodka gimlets with dinner (as Musso's pours them, that's one too many) and did a lot of emoting later that evening when we saw *Titanic* at the Chinese Theatre. We've bro-

ken Yom Kippur fasts in one of the booths, where I downed a pile of sourdough bread, a tableside Caesar (extra anchovies, please), my usual entrée of sand dabs and potatoes, and some rum cake—after 24 hours of not eating or drinking at all. (Urp.) I don't limit my Musso's visits to milestone occasions, either; sometimes the only excuse I need is that it's Thursday, aka chicken potpie day at the restaurant, so let's make this happen.

In this issue writer Michael Callahan explores the allure of Musso's, from its stalwart waiters (Sergio is my favorite) to its place in Hollywood's film and literary history. There's a great line in his piece from one of the restaurant's owners, who says they've resisted cleaning the murals because they're "painted with Humphrey Bogart's cigarette smoke." Reading that quote reminded me of the first time I ate at Musso's. I'd known about it—I went to high school a few blocks away—but my middle-class family dined at Sizzler for dinner, not white-linen steak houses. Musso's was mysterious and therefore worthy of exploration, so at 19 I finally went inside with a friend. The wood paneling and the hat racks, the dim lighting and the phone booth in back enchanted me. As I sat before my avocado half and iced tea (seriously, that's what I ordered), I felt a connection to the many diners who had been in that booth before me. I knew I would become a regular. The walls talked, and I loved what I heard. I'm still listening.

Mary Melton
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

4 Things We're Not Supposed to Tell You About This Issue

75 dollars

→ The price editor-in-chief Mary Melton and City Scholar Chris Nichols paid for collectibles they purchased from the trunk of L.A. icon Angelyne's pink Corvette (Ask Chris, page 24) after she attended an exhibition Nichols curated. Apparently they got a bargain. Angelyne recently sold James Franco a shirt for \$120, according to the actor's Instagram.

6 years

→ Time that elapsed from when writer Michael Barrett pitched us his article—about the friendship his police officer dad, Gary, developed with hostage taker Franklin Hoffman—to its publication ("The Captor and the Cop," page 122). Hoffman, cousin of Dustin Hoffman, was concerned that the actor's family wouldn't want to be associated with him and asked that Barrett delay publication until after his death. He passed away in November.

7 muggles

→ Los Angeles editors who—in the name of thorough reporting—visited the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Studios Hollywood in advance of its April 7 opening ("Gone with the Wand," page 126). Coincidentally, that's also the number of players needed to field an L.A. mag Quidditch team.

1 drone

→ Flying object that smashed the window three feet below editor-at-large Amy Wallace's tenth-floor office. Nobody witnessed the collision, but staffers did see several magazine stories crash through as they worked on the April issue.