

# Checking in: NOBU HOTEL

By ANDY WANG

**J**UST like TriBeCa has changed drastically since Nobu Matsuhisa and Robert De Niro opened up their Hudson Street Nobu restaurant in 1994, Vegas has seen a stunning makeover since Nobu and De Niro appeared in "Casino" in 1995. (Remember Nobu in "Casino," as Japanese high roller K.K. Ichikawa? Good casting choice.)

And luxury has changed since then too, of course. And so has food. And hotels.

In an era when everyone from well-funded competing chains to low-budget neighborhood joints make knock-offs of Nobu classics like the miso black cod (the dish that made De Niro want to go into business with Nobu) or the yellowtail sashimi with jalapeño, it can be easy to forget how these still satisfying flavors once felt so new and over-the-top. It might be hard to recall how the "informal luxury" of Nobu, as architect and designer David Rockwell calls it, felt so cool and different. This was fine dining

## The world's first Nobu Hotel and largest Nobu restaurant opens at Caesars Palace



**BIG BET:** The restaurant/lounge is 12,775 square feet.

without white tablecloths but with celebrities galore. And nearly two decades after the first Nobu opened, Kanye West still understood that a truly boss life might indeed involve going to Nobu barefoot.

On Saturday, chef Nobu and De Niro were in Las Vegas for the ribbon-cutting of their new 181-room boutique

Nobu Hotel at Caesars Palace ([nobucaesarspalace.com](http://nobucaesarspalace.com)). The world's first Nobu Hotel is the renovation of Caesars' Centurion Tower, which has been updated sharply by Rockwell, who also designed the original Nobu restaurant. The rooms (from \$269) offer soothing palettes with lots of natural materials in neutral tones. There's Japanese art-

work and grass-cloth wall coverings. There's a pillow menu to go with the supremely comfortable bed.

But this is Nobu, so let's talk food. The 12,775-square-foot restaurant and lounge, bigger than any other Nobu restaurant (but not gargantuan by Vegas standards), serves all the Nobu greatest hits. On the days when you don't want rock shrimp tempura or squid "pasta," there are three teppanyaki tables.

The in-room dining menu is impressive: fantastic green tea waffles and silken tofu hot pots for breakfast. Plus, the chef who fused Asian and Latin flavors in a revolutionary way is now serving ramen with jalapeño and cilantro atop the chicken and pork broth.

And one last thing that's changed since 1994: technology. You can order room service with the hotel's iPhone or Android app, and rooms have iDocks, which is how the Girl Talk playlist on our iPad is blasting on the TV speakers as we type. We'll probably listen to Kanye next.



David Becker/Getty Images

## ★ DOWN SHIFT

Downtown Vegas will be a big ongoing story for years to come, largely thanks to Zappos boss Tony Hsieh's Downtown Project and its \$350 million redevelopment commitment. Here are just a few examples of how this area has more in common with the East Village or Brooklyn than the Vegas Strip: The new and buzzworthy Commonwealth speakeasy has a secret PDT-like bar with a separate entrance that requires you to text-message for admission. Michael Morton is opening La Comida, a restaurant/cocktail bar that's going for a La Esquina vibe and will feature stools outside an open win-

dow, next to Commonwealth. There is a BBQ stand inside the site of a future shipping-container park. That site is also where dozens of locals showed up at 11 a.m. on Saturday to hear a speaker talk about social media. That happened the morning after the monthly First Friday street party, complete with live bands, an art-filled kids' zone, food trucks and gallery hopping at the DUMBO-like Arts Factory. A pre-party, with free beer and ping-pong, was held at the still under-development Work in Progress building, a shared workspace project for the community. The party bus to First Friday was full of happy kids too young to understand that they're hipsters. A guy charged

his iPhone and played David Guetta and Psy through the speakers. Hsieh stood near the front, as did a bottle of Fernet Branca. There was a bar in the back. There were fedoras and velvet jackets and cool sneakers and a fella with a 12-pack of batteries for his camera. There were indie-minded 21-year-olds who had moved to Vegas right after college for this moment, feeling lucky to be part of a true ground-shifting that's only beginning.

## ★ EATING AROUND

The Light Group's transformation of multiple Mandalay Bay spaces is underway, and the latest arrival is chef Brian Massie's Citizens, which serves addictive queso fundido made

with Velveeta (we asked for more chips to dip), a cheese-heavy “fatty melt” (right)

that lives up to its grease-bomb name and a chocolate cake for two that could easily feed four. This is going to be some kind of after-hours spot for famished party people when the Light Group opens its nightclub just down the corridor in the coming months. . . . “Top Chef” firecracker Carla Pellegrino has resurfaced at Town Square’s Meatball Spot, where crowd-pleasers include her spicy tomato sauce and garlicky macaroni and cheese. Like lots of Town Square, Meatball Spot is a big, inexpensive joint popular with in-the-know locals: Holly Madison had her baby shower there Saturday with her fiancé, Electric Daisy Carnival mastermind Pasquale Rotella, and Vegas scenemakers including



Tao Group’s Mike Snedegar, the Palms’ Alex Acuna and Wynn’s Zee Zandi. . . . On Thursday, an outrageous \$75 meal for two at Miko’s Izakaya on East Windmill Lane included Japanese snapper and Scottish salmon sashimi before perfect uni, sweet shrimp and Hokkaido scallop sushi. Oh, and two bowls of ramen including a crave-worthy vegetable option that brings in healthy-eating regulars. This is in a strip mall that’s closer to the airport than it is to all the Asian restaurants on Spring Mountain Road. Thanks for keeping the surprises coming, Vegas. . . . Of course, there’s nothing wrong with sticking to the Strip’s most consistent restaurants. The langoustine we had at Bartolotta and the maccheroni with meatballs we ate at the bar of Scott Conant’s D.O.C.G. fortified us like nothing else on a typically stacked Vegas weekend.