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BRENNAN'S BIG COMEBACK

The venerable New Orleans restaurant reopens after weathering two years of drama—bankruptcy, foreclosure, family infighting—and a \$20 million overhaul. **BY STEVE GARBARINO**

Two years ago, a pall fell upon New Orleans when Brennan's, a treasured temple of French Creole cuisine and boozy breakfasts, abruptly closed its doors. Founded in 1956, the restaurant held indelible memories of milk punches, sherried turtle soup, and rum-soaked bananas Foster (a dish that Brennan's invented) for generations of diners. But the founders' sons, Ted and Owen "Pip" Brennan, had driven the family flagship into bankruptcy.

Truth be told, Brennan's had lost some of its luster in the past decade, a casualty of mispending, family feuding, and self-cannibalism. (With nine Brennan family-owned restaurants in the French Quarter alone, the name had been diluted.) "Prior to the closing, Brennan's was more or less a tourist trap for brunch," says Brobson Lutz, a former Orleans Parish medical director, a French Quarter dining fixture, and a custodian of local color.

The building was nabbed in a sheriff's auction by third-generation restaurateur Ralph Brennan. When Brennan's reopened in November, it was front-page news. "It's the biggest story in this town since Hurricane Katrina," says James Carville, the political analyst and New Orleans local, adding that the building "is the best single piece of real estate in the city."

Along with his business partner, Terry White, Ralph Brennan invested \$20 million into renovating the pink stucco landmark, a sprawling late-1700s town house in the heart



MY PERFECT BREAKFAST		
WAITER	PERSONS	
465	2	36946942
1	Brandy Milk Punch	\$9
2	Hibiscus Pimm's Cup	\$10
3	Turtle Soup	\$9
4	New Orleans BBQ Lobster	\$19
5	Eggs Sardou	\$19
6	Artisanal Eggs Benedict	\$18
7	Georgia Cheddar Grits	\$6
8	Bananas Foster for Two	\$16
TOTAL		\$106

The Chanteclair Room, the main dining space, underwent the most renovations.

of the Quarter. (It's said to be the costliest restaurant project in the history of New Orleans.) The ultimate mission for the revival, according to Ralph Brennan, is "to bring back the locals and the visitors will follow."

Most critically, the owners installed in the kitchen a Mississippi-born 40-year-old chef, Slade Rushing, formerly of New Orleans's highly regarded MiLa and New York's Jack's Luxury Oyster Bar, to tweak the classics and create what Rushing characterizes as a "lighter, just-decadent-enough menu."

The reaction has so far been overwhelm-

ingly positive. "The food is off the charts," raves Julia Reed, a local writer who has been eating at Brennan's with her family since she was five. "We went recently, and there wasn't one person at our eight-person table who wasn't literally licking the plates."

"A restaurant can never sit still," says Ralph Brennan. "I want Brennan's to return to its name meaning something, to endure at least another generation or two." ♦

Brennan's is at 417 Rue Royal; 504-525-9711; brennansneworleans.com.

The hotel is in the Otemachi Tower, on floors 33 to 38.



The rooms and suites are designed so the bedrooms blend into the lounge areas.

CHECKING IN

AMAN DOES TOKYO

The resort group finally debuts its first Japanese outpost, the most urban of its 27 properties.

Camphor wood, washi paper, and stone: The fundamentals of traditional Japanese architecture are the building blocks of Aman Tokyo, which just opened in the Otemachi Tower, adjacent to the Imperial Palace, the Ginza shopping mecca, and Tokyo Station. It's a calming oasis high above Japan's densely populated, bustling capital.

The entrance is discreet: A hushed elevator opens up into the lobby, by Kerry Hill Architects, which resembles the interior of a 100-foot-high Japanese paper lantern. The 84 guestrooms, including suites, offer

the city's most spacious entry-level units at 764 square feet. Favorite room amenities include the heated stone bathroom floor and a deep Japanese bathtub, or furo.

Pre-Olympic construction is booming below as Tokyo revives its futuristic, Blade Runner vibe. But up here, executive chef Ei Ohata's Mediterranean-Japanese cuisine, a 150-minute spa treatment, and views of Mount Fuji are guaranteed to restore your soul to atavistic bliss. Rooms, from \$640; 1-5-6 Otemachi; 81-3/5224-3333; amantokyo.com. — R.K.