



Diners - eat out on April 29th to help the people of Darfur!
 Restaurants - help out by signing up your restaurant now!
[Click now for details!](#)

the strong buzz { read it and eat }



[buzz](#) [articles](#) [reviews](#) [buzzards](#) [about](#) [contact](#)

Restaurant Classified Ads

Don't forget— search and post for chef and manager jobs, restaurant spaces, waiter openings and more!
[Click here to see what jobs are waiting for you!](#)

[the latest buzz](#) | [buzz archives](#)

This is my weekly diary of restaurant news and reviews. Check in to the strong buzz and you'll find out where to eat (and what to eat), learn about chefs on the move, restaurant openings and closings, the hottest cocktails (and bar chefs), and lots of other random but useful information about the ins and outs of the restaurant biz to clutter up your brain. The page is updated every Monday, so check back to see what's new, or sign up for The Strong Buzz (use the form box below) and have it delivered to your in box every Monday morning.

Got a hot tip? [Contact me!](#) Wanna be a sponsor of the Strong Buzz and reach thousands of foodies in the Metropolitan are, email me here. Are you really geeky? You can get an [RSS feed](#) of this page.

"The Strong Buzz April 30th: Dining for Darfur, The News (Prime Burger, FR.OG, P.ONG, Vestry Wines, Al Fresco at A Voce), Cinco de Mayo, My Dinne at Anthos"

April 30, 2007

Hello all and welcome to the April 30th edition of THE STRONG BUZZ: Dining for Darfur, The News (Prime Burger, FR.OG, P.ONG, Vestry Wines, Al Fresco at A Voce), Bookmark, Cinco de Mayo Events, My Dinner at Anthos.

Dining for Darfur

I'd like to begin this edition of THE STRONG BUZZ with an offering of sincere gratitude to every one of you who dined out last night and to every restaurant, coffee shop, and chef who joined me this year in helping the survivors of the genocide in Darfur. Every dollar you donated from last night's Dining for Darfur is going straight to the field in Dafur and Chad where the International Rescue Committee is running clinics, feeding families, schooling children, nursing the sick, and providing some sense of hope until the Janjaweed are disarmed and these refugees can return to their razed villages.

I don't consider myself naïve, but I am still surprised that year after

American Express

MARCUS SAMUELSSON ON SUSHI



"Go to Sushi Yasuda and you'll feel like you've gone to Tokyo and back in one night." [View](#)

This and other [insights from experts](#) like Jacques Torres, Ed Levine, and Jack Lamb make New York Dish from American Express a fun site to visit.

Plus, [The Dish](#) delivers incredible savings at some of the city's hottest restaurants.

[GO NOW...](#)

Advertise

on TheStrongBuzz site and emails.
[Contact me.](#)

Blogads

[Advertise here via Blogads](#)

Foodblog Network



Google Ads Ads by Google

[New York Boutique Hotel!](#)
 Pet Friendly Tribeca Hotel NYC New York Vacation & Weekend Getaway
www.tribecagrand.com

Free New York City Museum

New York City Pass Worth \$260. Act Now!
[Travel-RewardBlvd.com](#)

year, decade after decade, patterns repeat themselves, and promises that were made are broken. "Never again," tends to lose its sting when never becomes now. Bush's famous "Not on my watch" cry is reduced to rhetoric when a genocide in Darfur is allowed to follow on the heels of the massacre that was Rwanda. But the world we live in is also filled with people who want to honor those promises and who want to break that chain of repetition.

Dining for Darfur is a small but potent example of the way one group of people—all of us in the restaurant community—can make a difference. An event that started out as a New York City-based dine out grew this year to include restaurants in California, Utah, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Hawaii, and even Tokyo. I received at least a half-dozen emails a day from people across the country who wanted to organize an event in their town. Given the opportunity to make a difference, to do something to help, there was not a moment of hesitation. That's what I take from this—the surge of humanity in response to such brutality. I thank you all for making this event such a huge success. My wish for next year is that Dining for Darfur 2008 will never need to be planned.

THE NEWS

Prime Burger

This new outdoor burger joint comes to us from the owners of the Old Homestead. They've been doing steak for 140 years so it's understandable that they'd want to break into newish territory. Their brand new burger joint is actually a restaurant-outside-a-restaurant—a grassy green outdoor carpet lines their al fresco burger-all-the-time café decorated with cheery geraniums, white flower boxes, and vintage photographs of the Old Homesteads' famed cow by Julian Schnabel. Burgers, all \$15, are listed on blackboard menus, and are ground from USDA Prime and served with Rick's Picks Curried Green Tomato pickles. The menu includes a Classic Burger with lettuce tomato and Bermuda onions, an Artisanal Cheeseburger, topped with your choice of Vermont Cheddar, Hawthorne Valley Farm Garlic Edamer, or Blue Stilton, and the Peppered Bacon Burger, topped with a house-cured peppered slab bacon. There's also a grilled Bourbon-glazed Kurobuta pork burger, a Kobe beef hot dog with a trio of sauerkrauts, a Bigeye tuna burger topped with young ginger, scallions and wasabi mayo, and steakhouse sides (\$6) like creamed spinach, handcut fries, and Kobe beef chili. Prime Burger is open now at 56 Ninth Avenue, between 14th and 15th Streets, 212-242-9040.

FR.OG

Philip Kirsh and chef Didier Viot, who first teamed up to bring the Upper West Side a taste of Provence with Aix, are getting together again this time in Soho where they are tackling the cuisine of the French colonies with FR.OG. Their restaurant, which stands for France Origin—highlights the foods of countries influenced (read: ruled by) the French—Vietnam, Morocco, and Lebanon. At the opening party they other night, the duplex space looked absolutely lovely, with lots of white tiles, Venetian plaster, Lucite, and crystal-cool lighting. A twinkling wall that resembles a sort of floor to ceiling disco ball leads to a lower level dining room dressed in white accented with shades of rose and lit with imported hand-cut copper lanterns. Taken together the space feels very Miami-meets-Morocco.

As for the food, from what we sampled the other night at the party, Didier's having some fun in the kitchen. He sent out a ton of little appetizers including terrific Nem Ran (think more delicate egg rolls) filled up with pork or shrimp, and stuffed with cucumber, lettuce, carrot, and mint salad, with a garlic dipping sauce. There were also sautéed scallops with cardamom and cane sugar and a peanut dressing, and crab briouats—triangular phylo pies packed with Peekytoe crab and basmati rice, with a smashed avocado and lime for dipping. Main courses include a signature Monkfish in Tajine with mixed asparagus and zucchini, green olives, basil, lime and saffron (\$27), duck Pastilla (I tried this and it's great—not too sweet, just right) with a warm salad

of zucchini, Jerusalem artichoke and tomato confit (\$25), braised lamb shank with roasted duck breast with a cinnamon, chick pea and red onion Moroccan couscous (\$28), and seared natural beef sirloin marinated with lemongrass and pineapple, with baby bok choy, haricot vert, and soy tomato jus (\$36). FR.OG is located at 71 Spring Street, between Crosby and Lafayette, (212) 966-5050, www.frognyc.com.

P.ONG

Pastry Chef Pichet Ong, who brought wonder to the world of dessert with his Thai Jewels at Spice Market, has opened P.ONG, a showcase for his deliciously quirky culinary style. Since Ong trained as a chef (he was a line cook at Jean Georges and Tabla before turning to pastry—and before that studied architecture in San Francisco), his new restaurant is not only about the sweet side of life. At his 35-seat space, designed with the help of chef Iacapo Falai, he's serving savory dishes (burrata in lemon olive oil, bluefin tartare with black olive, and Meyer lemon sabayon), sweet and savory dishes (stilton soufflé with walnut crust, and basil arugula ice cream, and smoked pineapple with Himalayan pink salt and epoisses), and straight up sweets (chevre cheesecake croquette with pineapple, walnut and drunken chocolate sauce, miso and extra virgin olive oil ice cream sandwich with wasabi candy and strawberries, Vietnamese coffee-chocolate tart), along with a list of creative cocktails and wines. A 10-course tasting menu called P.ONG Suite (\$58) includes courses like chicory leaf “green goddess” salad with avocado and anchovy, black pepper scallop toast with Seville orange marmalade, a black forest pavlova with cherries and chocolate chantilly, and a hot chocolate pudding with roasted apples and whipped calvados. He'll also be the first restaurant in New York to start dessert delivery service. Nice. P.ONG is located at 150 West 10th Street, 212-929-0989, www.p-ong.com.

Al Fresco at A Voce

On Tuesday May 1st, Andrew Carmellini will unveil his latest project—Al Fresco at A Voce, an expansive patio dressed up with lemon trees, flowerpots and herbs serving prosecco, antipasti, and summertime cocktails like the A Voce Negroni (a classic Negroni given an Italian twist with the addition of Amaro). There will also be a cool selection of frosty Scropinos—think the Italian version of the Slurpee, but way more elegant (no Big Gulp cups here) that combines sorbetti, vodka and prosecco. I plan on reserving a regular table in the sun. A Voce is located at 41 Madison Avenue, corner of 26th Street, 212-545-8555, www.avocerestaurant.com.

Vestry Wines

This new 2,100 square foot Tribeca wine store and tasting bar focuses its attention on smaller producers from California, Italy and France. Owned by former software geeks Mark Armenante and Young Ae Sohn, the store features a user-friendly proprietary customer management program, allowing you to access personal profiles online or at the in-store kiosk. You can track orders, review personal tasting notes, and rate wines, and even access your friend's preferences so you can send them their favorite wine as a surprise birthday or anniversary gift, or just because.

The store also features a temperature- and humidity-controlled storage room to accommodate the nearly 400 selections hand-picked by wine consultant Shelley Lindgren and General Manager Jim Kuhner, formerly of Italian Wine Merchants. Lindgren was most recently the sommelier and owner of San Francisco's A16 restaurant, so she'll pay particular attention to those wines as well as focusing on lesser-known California producers.

The store will host weekly tastings on a variety of themes. Upcoming events include Quality Value and California, The Wines of Le Marche, and The Whites of Campania. Vestry Wines is located at 65 Vestry Street (corner of Washington), 212.810.2899 or visit www.vestrywines.com.

Celebrating Cinco de Mayo, written by Celine Valensi

El Maguey Y La Tuna

El Maguey Y La Tuna is getting things started at noon, with happy hour prices in effect until 6:00pm, and well drinks, selected beers and tequila shots for \$3. Other drink specials will start at 6:00pm and include volcano shots, flaming tequila shots, margaritas and more. Solid food will also be served, with brunch from 12:00-4:00pm and a special dinner menu from 4:00pm onwards. If you've still got your wits about you by the end of the day, this party's promising raffles, various games and prizes! I'm hoping for a piñata. El Maguey Y La Tuna is located at 321 E. Houston Street (between Attorney and Ridge), 212-473-3919 www.elmagueyylatuna.com.

Crema

On May 5th from 4-5:30pm, Crema's happy hour is featuring 2-for-1 Margarita Imperials at the bar and unlimited Agua Loca (Mexican Crazy Water) with any entrée. If you stick around for dinner you'll receive a complimentary drink voucher for a Margarita Imperial, redeemable at their next visit. And if you've still got your sombrero on the next morning, Crema's Sunday brunch will be served with a complimentary Mexican Mimosa or Vampiro cocktail (Mexican Bloody Mary) from 12-4:30 PM. Olé! Crema Restaurant is located at 111 West 17th Street, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, 212-691-4477 www.cremarestaurante.com

Maya

Maya restaurant is hosting their own special celebration with live mariachis and an extensive list of tequilas, margaritas specials and botanas (large sampler dishes). Margaritas Bandera (flag margaritas) will come in red, white and green made with herradura and frozen hibiscus; siembra azul reposado, citrus juices and spicy rum; and Don Julio blanco with green apple puree respectively. Maya is located at 1191 First Avenue, between 64th and 65th Streets, 212-585-1818, www.modernmexican.com

Dos Caminos

On Thursday, May 3rd at 5:30 PM, Dos Caminos Third Avenue will host a free guacamole demo, followed by a free tasting and chef meet & greet. A \$10 per person donation will be made to City Harvest on behalf of Haas Avocados (40 person limit). All Dos Caminos locations will be partying from Friday, May 4th through Sunday, May 6th with a special menu, cocktail specials, and live music during lunch. I think that means you won't be getting much work done on Friday. Dos Caminos Third Avenue is located at 825 Third Avenue (at 50th) 212-336-5400; Dos Caminos Soho 475 West Broadway (at Houston Street) 212-277-4300; Dos Caminos Park 373 Park Avenue South (between 26th & 27th Street) 212-294-1000.

BOOKMARK—The Devil in The Kitchen

If you've read *Heat*, then you know a little something about Marco Pierre White, the wild, fearsome chef that Mario Batali worked for in England for a brief stint. Similarly, if you've ever watched Gordon Ramsay chew out a cook on *Hell's Kitchen*, you've also got a little insight to Mr. White. But Ramsay is a purring kitten compared to his one-time mentor and teacher (the two no longer speak), Marco Pierre White. White, for those of you who have no idea who I am talking about, was the first and youngest British chef to earn three Michelin stars, and also the only one to give them all back.

His memoir starts out as the story of a young boy raised in working class Leeds who lost his mother at a tender age and spent decades working out his anger and grief with a raging spitfire temper and an unmatched passion for cooking and perfection. The book is terrific read for the insight you get into the way a cook becomes a chef (and how a boy becomes a man), and the bloody battles in the kitchen, and the tender humanity behind the chef-as-animal known Marco Pierre White. What I appreciated about this book, in addition to the great story itself, was the writing. With the help of James Steen, he writes straight from the gut—there's no frill, no overwriting, no fuss. It's very straight up and gritty and real. I also love the little secrets we learn

about the business and the drama behind it, including the various peaks and valleys of his relationship with Ramsay. There's also quite an interesting revelation about the New York Times' Florence Fabricant and how the Times lost a lawsuit when she misrepresented Marco's character. Lots of interesting stuff in there, people. Just like Marco, it's fierce. *The Devil in The Kitchen—Sex, Pain, Madness and the Making of a Great Chef*, comes out tomorrow and is being published by Bloomsbury (\$24.95).

STRONG BUZZ CLASSIFIEDS OF THE WEEK!

Cook New Orleans is looking for volunteers, Centro Vinoteca is hiring AM Sous Chefs and Line Cooks, and a new Cooking Competition TV Show on a major cable network is casting for sous chef contestants. Read more and post your own ad on [Buzzards!](#)

MY DINNER AT ANTHOS

In life, we are constantly bombarded by opportunities for comparison. You think, your last girlfriend was not as funny as this girlfriend; your hair doesn't look as good as it did yesterday, your new job is not as rewarding as your last job, your current weight is not as low as last year's. It's hard not to do spend a lifetime in pursuit of what was, or what could be better. While this is commonplace, it's is not the greatest habit to get into, because what it does is prevent you from looking at what you have now, where you are now, for what it is, regardless of what it was yesterday. In a sense, what happens is that everything you experience is seen as a function of something else, which really isn't ideal. In the restaurant business this is even more acute. Meals are often never judged for what they are but for how good or bad they are compared to others. And when you've been a chef for a while and have opened several restaurants (Onera, Dona, and Kefi, in this case), the danger of comparison is particularly acute.

When I walked into Anthos, Michael Psilakis and Donatella Arpaia's new modern Greek restaurant, my mind immediately went into comparison mode. It went to Dona, their sunny pan-Mediterranean jewel that closed earlier this year. Dona was one of my favorite restaurants to open last year. For midtown, it had a great sense of style—a lightness and elegance that made the room feel like it was bathed in sunlight even though it was in fact windowless. The room at Anthos, located in a dark corridor of 52nd Street, is also windowless, but this restaurant feels that way. While the bar area has a nice openness thanks to the glass façade facing the street, the dining room itself a drab fortress of gray and with its boxy shape and low ceiling it comes off lightless and rather uninspired. Bummer, man.

Luckily, the room's flat feel is countered by great acoustics—this is a spot you can go to and actually have a conversation without having to scream—and serious service with gracious attention to detail in every aspect of the meal.

For instance, while you are sipping on your cocktails or sparkling Greek wine, your waiter will present you with a complementary selection of that evening's complementary snacks. These are worth the price of admission alone. There were tender links of spicy meatball-like pork sausages from Cyprus doused in a cool yogurt sauce, crispy peppered rock shrimp, deep-fried nuggets of sweetbread dressed in avgolemono (a bright sauce of egg and lemon), and an interesting tartar made from lamb that's punched up with capers. With freebies like these, I'd be happy to sit there all night and just drink. In addition to the free snacks, you'll get a choice of three types of bread and two types of butter—cow or goat. I'd go with the goat. It's got a nice light tang.

The actual food on the menu also goes a long way to overcome the décor. Psilakis' menu at Anthos is an abbreviated Greek-only version of his pan-Mediterranean menu at Dona, and I appreciate the editing. There were times at Dona when I felt overwhelmed by choice.

Luckily he doesn't cut back on what has become his signature—raw

mezze—what essentially amount to Greek sushi or crudo. Look out Dave Pasternack. There's another fish whisperer in town. Psilakis was no doubt a sushi chef in another life because his selection of raw mezze (\$18 for a selection of four) are magnificent. If there weren't an issue of spoilage I'd say he should put them on display at MOMA or perhaps in the windows of Tiffany. Creamy diver scallops get played up with pungent pickled fennel and the light touch of coriander flower, a domino of silvery cobia fish was dressed with a gloss of olive oil, spring legumes and just a touch of green garlic. My favorite—the orange marlin, a stunning fish the color of a ripe peach—got topped off with rhubarb, sorrel, and a perfect crunch of sea salt. Other stars include the botan ebi prawns (those glistening pearly shrimp) tossed with bits of crumbled feta and spicy basil topped with tomato water, and a spectacular combination of sea urchin and delicately sweet Tasmanian crab topped with bright pops of trout roe and the soft zing of chives. Forget the bagel, cream cheese and smoked salmon—I'd happily eat this every Sunday morning.

While most of the raw fish was perfection, there were a few off notes. There was way too much ramp on the Taylor bays scallops—all I tasted was raw garlic; I felt ready to storm a Vampire's castle. The tuna with mastic oil and lemon confit was also, well, strange. While the tuna was beautiful, there was a rubbery texture to the garnish that was unpleasant. And an oyster topped with romaine jus and pink peppercorn was rendered bitter from the garnish.

In between fish courses, Kathy, Julie, Katherine and I got to chatting about this and that, catching up. Katherine relayed the story of her engagement to her longtime boyfriend Dave (he proposed on top of the Empire State Building) and Julie told us about a wedding she would be attending in Texas where the bride and groom are not only decidedly conservative in their views of the world (I am being polite here), but also in their taste in food. They decided to have the food catered by (are you sitting down here?) the local hospital. We decided that Julie should check her baggage so that she could bring a suitcase full of booze (with a flask to make it purse-portable) to survive the ordeal.

As we were marveling at the madness of our fellow countrymen, the hilopita (\$18) arrived. Now this is my kind of marvel. Psilakis takes handmade gnocchi made from sheep's milk manouri cheese that are lighter than air, they are closer to helium, and anchors them to the dish with braised rabbit, and a meaty ragout of snails all brightened up with gentle flash of dill. This was fabulous.

Olive-oil poached halibut (\$32) is pearly white and impossibly silky, set in a shallow pool of ramp broth with morels, American caviar and a trio of the manti—the tiniest pinky-nail sized ravioli filled with cheese. While the fish could not have been cooked more exquisitely, I didn't really get the concept of this dish. It didn't make much sense as a whole—each part seemed too separate and distinct—the morels floated around in the ramp broth with beads of caviar and the little ravioli, and there was nothing really to hold it all together.

The yiouvetsi (\$37)—a spicy shellfish stew served in a clay pot, was also hard to understand. While there was a fantastic aroma of the deep sea coming from the pot, it was pretty much just a pot of a few shellfish with little "stew" to speak of. There were two big scallops, a couple of mussels (which were overcooked), a couple of crayfish and a pair of razor clams, and this impossibly shallow pool of rich garnet-colored seafood broth with a few grains of orzo at the bottom of the bowl. For the life of me, I could barely get any of that broth from the pot and into my mouth. It was impossible to reach because the pot was too deep, and there was only about an eighth of an inch of broth in the pot. There just wasn't enough of it. (Perhaps a straw?) The few times I got a few drops on my spoon were magical—that broth is smoky, spicy, and luxuriously rich. So, I was perplexed. Why keep this goodness from us? Why fill a pot with mostly shells and so little stew? And while I liked the accompanying crostini with trout roe and goat milk crème fraîche, it did little for my need to sop up the broth on the bottom of

the bowl. It was comical. This dish could have been a star if there were a little more thought into it how it might be eaten.

Desserts, which are the creation of pastry chef Bill Corbett (he replaced Nancy Olson at Dona and previously worked at WD-50), are wonderful. One of them, simply entitled Sesame (\$12), was almost the end of me, as I could not stop myself from eating it, and it's quite rich. This is a dessert that should be shared but I was not doing a very good job of it. Corbett fills a scoop of sesame ice cream with a creamy center of caramel made from Metaxa (Greek brandy) and encases the ice cream in a frozen halva shell so it resembles a big hockey puck. He rests the puck on a mound of crumbled halva and a wave of chocolate sesame paste. When you crack through the halva coating, the ice cream oozes out with some of that creamy caramel center. Make sure to add a bit of the crumbly halva and chocolate sesame paste onto your spoon, and you've got the perfect blissful bite.

His baklava trio (\$12) is also terrific—a classic honey-soaked diamond of pistachio baklava is accompanied by riffs on the baklava's ingredients—honey custard with a brown sugar tuille, and a moist walnut cake with cinnamon ice cream. And just to make sure you're satisfied after all is said and done, he sends out a beautiful selection of chocolate petit fours. Yes, you will be sated.

As I write this review, I am torn, because I think there are wonderful things about Anthos—the service, for one, is flawless. The room, while desperate for a little jolt of life, does provide a quiet respite from the fray of the world outside. But I can't help but feel the pull of comparison taking over when it comes to the food. Michael's food at Dona was better, and if I remember correctly also less expensive. It wasn't cheap by any means, but the prices at Anthos seem outrageous. Most every entrée comes in comfortably over the \$30 mark—a sirloin is \$46, the rack of lamb is \$44, and several appetizers are \$18. It's a plain fact that Michael is a very talented chef, and he's also someone who's got so much passion for what he does, and so much genuine enthusiasm for the ingredients that he works with, that eating his food can be a true joy. That kind of love for what you do comes through in the cooking for sure. But there's also something about shelling out that kind of money for food that's not quite hitting the mark in a room lacking inspiration that doesn't quite sit well with me. I'd thought that it was the sting of comparison to Dona that had me disappointed, but now that I really think about it, I don't think that's it. More likely, it's that Anthos, in and of itself, is a work in progress, and one that still needs some time to grow into what it will eventually be.

Anthos is located at 36 West 52nd Street between 5th and 6th Avenues, 212-582-6900.

And that's THE STRONG BUZZ for this week! Thanks for reading and until next week, READ IT AND EAT!

-Andrea Strong