Audrey

THR reviews the new restaurant at L.A.’s Hammer Museum that strives to be a destination in its own right By Gary Baum

Today’s museum restaurants no longer are content merely to serve gallery visitors. Their goal is to burnish the institutions’ brands, often by catering to customers with zero plans to visit the collection. Danny Meyer has made a specialty of this at the Whitney and MoMA in New York, while Patina’s Joachim Splichal did the same with Ray’s at LACMA.

Now comes Audrey at the Hammer (named after a major benefactor, Audrey Irmas), which debuted two months ago steps away from its Billy Wilder Theater. The indoor-outdoor restaurant sprawls across the contemporary art institution’s midcentury plaza — the one used for its star-studded annual gala.

At Audrey’s helm is Lisa Giffen. Her résumé includes some of the most acclaimed kitchens in Manhattan (Blue Hill New York, Daniel, Prune). Most recently, she was the executive chef at Soho House’s Malibu outpost. Running the show is restaurateur Soa Davies Forrest, who handled dining operations for Eric Ripert at Le Bernardin and André Balazs’ hotel group, including Chateau Marmont.

Audrey shows glimmers of being the place that Westwood so sorely needs: refined, clever, original. There’s an unassuming, reliably well-executed cocktail program. Each alfresco seat thoughtfully features wool throw blankets for chilly nights. As for the food itself, there are a few hits — a hand-cut tagliatelle with a mushroom Bolognese; a bright, briny citrus salad hits — a hand-cut tagliatelle with a mush- room Bolognese; a bright, briny citrus salad, meaning that there can be an overwhelming pileup all at once.

Audrey is supposed to be the signature new offering of an on-the-rise institution that sees itself as one of the most rigorous, idiosyncratic museums in the world. Giffen and Forrest were clearly brought in to stand out. Unfortunately, the service doesn’t make up for it: The waitstaff is often disinterested, doesn’t make up for it: The food, which serves a wide spectrum of patrons. But that’s being optimistic.

This review is based on multiple visits. Reservations are made under another name. Meals are covered by THR.