

THE RADAR FOOD

BY LESLEY BALLA

POWER HUNGRY

Leaders? Try Feeders! It's Villaraigosa vs. Riordan in the city's biggest foodie face-off

Whether holding court at power tables or simply stomaching endless donuts, burritos and slices of apple pie at campaign stops, politicians have a notoriously unrestrained relationship with food. Fittingly, L.A.'s mayors—one current and one former—are deeply immersed in the city's dining culture. In one corner banquette, there's Antonio Villaraigosa, the man-of-the-people Democrat born into the blue-collar Latino enclave of City Terrace. And in the other, there's Richard Riordan, the multimillionaire Republican venture capitalist now ensconced in a Brentwood mansion. So who's most likely to be seen hobnobbing with the city's top toques? The answer might surprise you...

ANTONIO VILLARAIGOSA

FOODIE CRED: The haute-cuisine gastronome has been spotted wining and dining potential donors at Sona and working the room at Katsuya Hollywood's opening party. TMZ cameras recently caught him outside Beso. And just a few days after Craft opened in 2007, his security detail swooped in and scoped out the Century City newcomer (as they do every place he visits) before the mayor swaggered in, smiling and shaking hands along the way and stopping to swap business cards with chef/owner Tom Colicchio.

TOP RESTAURANTS: Villaraigosa nominates Nobu, Grace, Providence and Craft—all high-profile, Michelin-starred foodie meccas. **FAVE ORDER:** "Oysters from Water Grill, ceviche from Ciudad, filets from Mastro's, Wolfgang [Puck]'s coconut sorbet," says the mayor. He still has a penchant, though, for good, old-fashioned, homey tres leches cake. Even if it is at Frida... in Beverly Hills. **DRINK OF CHOICE:** Red wine, preferably a quality Syrah.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITY: Presiding over dining-world weddings. In May, Villaraigosa officiated the wedding of All' Angelo owner Stefano Ungaro and Rosanna Marino (sister of Il Grano chef Sal Marino). **STANDARD SEAT:** Always the power booth. At Grace, it's table 31, right in the middle of the room. When he's stopping in at Il Grano, it's booth number 16. **PARTING SHOT:** "He can work a dining room better than anyone in this business," says Ungaro.

RICHARD RIORDAN

FOODIE CRED: He owns two of the highest-grossing restaurants in the city: The hearty Original Pantry downtown and tourist lodestar Gladstone's overlooking the ocean on PCH. Then there are the recent openings: the Oak Room and the Village Pantry in the Pacific Palisades, as well as Riordan's Tavern near the Staples Center. All are, unsurprisingly, very much like him: ebullient, value-minded crowd-pleasers. "We cook the great food and serve the great wine," he says. "And Mayor Villaraigosa eats the great food and drinks the great wine." Zing!

TOP RESTAURANTS: Riordan also loves some of the city's finest: Rustic Canyon, Spago, Josie, The Foundry. **FAVE ORDER:** A good "hamburger steak," green beans and mashed potatoes will trump foie gras any day. **DRINK OF CHOICE:** He may indulge in a single-malt scotch on the rocks, but mostly sticks with water, or a glass of wine if the table orders a bottle.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITY: A potential cooperative marketing push with fellow landmark restos the Apple Pan and Pacific Dining Car **QUESTIONABLE DINING ETIQUETTE:** "The one special treatment I give myself at the Pantry is cutting in front of the line," he says. "But before I do, I talk to the people and make friends with them, and then go ahead of them. Nobody's gotten mad at me yet." **PARTING SHOT:** "It does help, being mayor, to get a reservation." ▣



RED-AND-BLUE PLATE SPECIAL:
Riordan and Villaraigosa at the
Original Pantry downtown.
Above: Ciudad's ceviche dish.



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