

HAWAII'S FAVORITE RESTAURANTS OUR SECOND ANNUAL

HALE 'AINA

AWARDS

By John Heckathorn

Last year when we held the first annual Hale 'Aina awards, we tallied the results on large sheets of paper thumbtacked to the wall. It was a cumbersome system at best.

This year many more of you returned the ballots we included in our August *Restaurant Guide*. But we profited from last year's experience. As the postcards arrived listing your favorite Hawaii restaurants, we entered the votes on a computer. The final printout was 25 feet long—we have a lot of readers and they eat at a lot of Hawaii restaurants. But the computer gave us fast and accurate information about which restaurants stood head and shoulders above the rest. And they became the winners of our second annual Hale 'Aina awards. (Hale 'Aina is Hawaiian for 'eating place.')

Most of the ballots, about 80 percent, came from Oahu, with a healthy sprinkling from the Neighbor Islands. The rest came from our Mainland readers, who obviously had fond memories of great meals they'd eaten here. We also received a few international entries, from Australia, the Philippines, Switzerland and West Indies.

Ours was not a simple ballot to fill out. We asked not only for your favorite restaurant but also for your favorites in 14 categories, from fast food to French cuisine. And even those weren't enough for some people who made up their own categories: worst restaurant, most fun, best service and most missed.

Not everyone, we realized, knew the names of his or her favorite places to eat. We got votes for "can't remember—in the Chinese Cultural Plaza" and for "you know—the one in

Kaneohe." One reader told us the best Italian food in town was at his mother's. (We're waiting for an invitation.) And a number of you insisted the best place for Sunday brunch was at home. A few were more specific: "on my deck" and "in bed." A less stay-at-home type said he was willing to eat brunch at "any golf course."

Fast food elicited the most vehement replies. We got one or two mini-essays condemning the whole notion, but our favorite response was from the fellow who wrote, "Pizza's about as fast as I can stand."

Last year many of the ballots came back covered with exclamation points. This year the trend was toward little happy faces in the margins. We were smiling too, when we realized how many of you took the time to share your experiences with us. Here then is the accumulated wisdom of our readers on where to eat in Hawaii—the 1986 Hale 'Aina Awards.

RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

Last year's winner, The Third Floor, made a strong bid to repeat. Chez Michel's, Hy's, John Dominis, Bagwells, the Maile Room and La Mer all had their supporters. But when the dust settled, it was **Michel's at the Colony Surf Hotel** which carried away the honors as this year's favorite restaurant.

Michel's has garnered more than its share of honors. For 20 consecutive years it has won the prestigious *Travel/Holiday* award. Along its entryway hangs a gold plate from Cartier's for elegance in dining. And the television show "Lifestyles of the

Rich and Famous" named Michel's "the most romantic restaurant in the world."

But David Brodis, the restaurant's director, says, "It's just super to get an award from people who live in the Islands."

Michel's may have the most appealing restaurant location in the world, with one window wall opening directly onto Outrigger Canoe Club beach. "It's wonderful to watch the day go by here," says Brodis, who spends long hours at the restaurant. "It's prettiest and most peaceful early in the morning. The beach is empty and you can watch the big cruise ships sail around Diamond Head, all lit up with the sunrise against the dark water. In the middle of the day, the beach gets crowded and there's plenty of activity. Then the beach empties again and you have the sunset and, after that, the Waikiki skyline begins to light."

Because Michel's is a hotel restaurant, it serves three meals a day, six days a week, with brunch and dinner on Sunday. "We do everything from receptions after sunrise weddings to sunset honeymoon suppers," says Brodis. At night, Michel's turns formal, with jackets required for men. At dinner, the food is continental from an extensive a la carte menu created by chef Gordon Hopkins, featuring his opakapaka and veal dishes, chicken and duck carved table-side, rack of lamb, sweetbreads, frog legs and shellfish. Entrees average about \$24-\$27.

It might be wise to save room for dessert. The current issue of *Chocolatier* magazine has nothing but raves

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