

The New York Times

## Diner's Journal

The New York Times Blog on Dining Out

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### So Many Recession Specials, So Little Space

By FRANK BRUNI

Taking a reservation at a restaurant in Los Angeles. (Photo: Stephanie Diani for The New York Times)  
Fact checking is usually a pretty straightforward process, but as I called restaurants over recent days to make sure I'd accurately reported certain of the details in [today's story about restaurants reacting to the recession](#), fact checking was more complicated than usual.

I'd ask a restaurant representative about the terms and parameters of a special deal mentioned in the story and the representative would want to tell me about other special deals, some just hatched. It underscored how much thought and energy restaurants are putting into the challenge of attracting customers while still making a profit in these very tough times.

When I asked someone in Danny Meyer's restaurant group about the "Wines for our Times" list of bottles under \$50 available in the [Modern's Bar Room](#), I was reminded that at another Meyer restaurant, [Eleven Madison Park](#), there's a \$28 lunch deal. For \$28, a diner can order a two-course lunch menu. Separately, Eleven Madison Park has a list of wines of varying distinction that can be ordered at lunchtime for \$28. That price buys either a sip of a very expensive wine, a glass of a less expensive one or a half bottle or full bottle of wines even less expensive than that.

A manager at the Modern, meanwhile, e-mailed me to make sure I knew that the restaurant's full wine list, which had a section in the back called "hidden gems," has moved that section up to the front of the list and renamed it, simply, "gems."

The adjustments restaurants are making are too many and too varied for any one newspaper story to mention. What's in Wednesday's paper is a taste of what's going on out there, and of what will continue to go on until the economy improves.

The story quotes a few chefs and restaurateurs talking in broad terms about the dip in restaurant business. For the sake of concision, it omits a much more particular example of consumer cost-saving that [Drew Nieporent](#), restaurant king of TriBeCa, mentioned to me.

"I watch people saving money in very strange ways," he said, going on to relate that more and more often, diners in restaurants with coat checks are holding on to their coats to save the \$1 or \$2 or \$3 they'd tip a coat-check person.

He says they claim to be cold, but then take off their coats and keep them with them at the table.

While Mr. Nieporent had me on the phone, he also filled me in on a development that's not recession-related but that he finds troubling. He said that no-show reservations are

on the rise, a trend he attributes to reservation scalpers of a sort: services that make dummy reservations to be sold to diners trying to land hard-to-get tables.

My colleague Kim Severson wrote a [story about these services](#) a while back, and Mr. Nieporent said this situation is becoming more pronounced.

At the restaurant [Corton](#) on a recent night, he said, he had 23 no-show reservations. At Nobu on some nights, he's had about 40, he said. At neither restaurant does walk-in business reliably pick up all of that slack.

What he's deduced, from researching the names and phone numbers affiliated with those reservations, is that they were made by someone or some service that intended to give them to someone else but didn't find takers and then neglected to cancel the reservations.