

TimeOut

New York

The obsessive guide to impulsive entertainment
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Fire houses

The first stop on any tour of cold-weather havens has to be Peter Hoffman's **Savoy** (70 Prince St at Crosby St, 212-219-8570). A smallish fireplace in the downstairs bar draws plenty of shoppers in from the cold, but it's the big-daddy fire in the upstairs dining room that really knocks the frost off. The gaping furnace is warm and inviting; reserve a table at one of Savoy's Sunday hearth dinners, featuring a three-course supper prepped *sobre el fuego*. My meal began with a smoky roasted-vegetable salad, followed by a piping-hot white-bean cassoulet (the main course will be replaced in March by an equally comforting Caribbean-inspired stew). The grand finale, an iron-branded crème brûlée, arrived bubbling on top, straight from the hearth.

I also felt the burn at the Upper East Side's new Portuguese churrascaria, **Carvao** (1477 Second Ave at 77th St, 212-879-4707). Here, everyone in

mushroom risotto topped with a single, delicate scallop, and a whole quail splayed over savory, pomegranate-laced polenta.

It's a tease just to mention the fireplace at Thomas Keller's new restaurant **Per Se** (10 Columbus Circle, fourth floor; 212-823-9335)—but if you manage to score a reservation before summer arrives, you'll appreciate the crackling, raging fire in the main dining room. Stare at it long enough and you'll forget that you're eating inside a mall inside a skyscraper.

Warm gestures

Of course, not every restaurant has room for a campfire. Some have to find more creative ways to take away the chill. I was eager to try the warm-up session at the Mexican restaurant **La Palapa** (77 St. Marks Pl between First and Second Aves, 212-777-2537). Here, citrus-scented *cabi* towels (typically a Japanese touch)

There are even more ways to get warm at **Kai** (822 Madison Ave between 68th and 69th Sts, 212-988-7277), an immaculate Japanese restaurant on the Upper East Side. The place takes its name and inspiration from the ultra-expensive Japanese culinary tradition of *kaiseki*, which involves tiny bites of meticulously prepared fish, pickled veggies and Kobe beef. My prix-fixe lunch at Kai began with the offering of a hot towel rolled inside a carved wooden curlicue. Ahhh. Then came a cup of fragrant jasmine tea. I quickly fell into a heat-induced trance.

Hot shots

Sometimes the only way to get really warm is to imbibe—and to that end, there's nothing like a spot of "gunpowder pearl pinhead" tea. It's just one of the many freshly steeped varieties at **Lady Mendl's Tearoom** inside the Inn at Irving Place (56 Irving Pl between 17th and 18th Sts, 212-533-4600). Just down the block from a different sort of hot spot—Mario Batali's restaurant/mosh pit Casa Mono—Lady Mendl is a world of dainty, crustless sandwiches, whispered conversations, and mountains and mountains of clotted cream. Lovely if you're a lady of immaculate breeding, even lovelier if you're a writer with crappy heating.

As much as I enjoy a cozy tea-and-crumpets session, however, sometimes I just want to chug some warm booze. Mixologist Vincent Attard has put together a menu of hot concoctions for the cocktail crowd at Sobo's **Cub Room** (131 Sullivan St at Prince St, 212-677-4100). A Sherman Billingsley, named after the former owner of the Stork Club, is a soothing combination of Kahlúa, Grand Marnier, crème de cacao and coffee, topped with whipped cream and grated orange zest. There's just enough citrus flavor, Attard says, "to coat the nose." I'm not sure what that means, but

it sounds impressive, and in the winter, any kind of coat is probably a good idea. Meanwhile, a Nathaniel Cook—bourbon, Berentzen apple liqueur and hot cider—just begs to be sipped at a ski resort on a snowy day, out of a Thermos. Or pretty much any night in New York.

Leave it to an Austrian, though, to come up with the city's best body-warming trifection. At Kurt Gutenbrunner's **Wallsé** (344 W 11th St at Washington St, 212-352-2300), diners select from a menu of culinary comforts like squash soup and pheasant strudel with sauerkraut. They can toss back flaming cocktails like the spark-producing Blue Hemingway, made with sweet vermouth, rum and bitters. And, if so inclined, they can borrow a double-sided cashmere cape from the maitre d' and sashay outside for a cigarette. So alluring are the capes—sold exclusively by local designer Han Feng—that guests don't want to come back in. "Some customers have asked if they can wear them, and they don't even smoke," says manager (and Gutenbrunner's wife) Yasmine Karrenberg. Thanks to Wallsé, there's never been a better reason to start. ■



IT'S A WRAP Wallsé drapes its patrons in cashmere capes when they head out to smoke.

the house stays warm: There's a glowing fireplace in the dining room and another rager in the kitchen, where spiced meats are barbecued over a 700-degree charcoal grill. Chef-owner Antonio Francesco sprinkles his meats with grains of gray salt, which pop and explode when exposed to extreme heat. "You have to be very careful," he says, "or you'll burn the shit out of everything." Diners, too, must exercise caution as they dive into Francesco's hot dishes. The juicy, peppery quail, for instance, is classic finger food—and tempting as it may be to warm your hands by tearing apart the little guy, you risk a scorching if you dive in too soon.

A rustic wood-burning oven keeps the dining room warm and the mood relaxed at **Riverdale Garden** (4574-4576 Manhattan College Plwy at 242nd St, Bronx; 718-884-5232). Located just beyond the last stop of the I and 9 trains in the Bronx, the restaurant represents chef-owner Michael Sherman's quest for simplicity. "I just grab what looks good and throw it on the plate," he says. That, of course, is an understatement. Warm-your-insides dishes include a melt-away

arrive on a terra-cotta dish as soon as diners take their seats. Seconds later, my hands were warm—and clean—but I was only beginning to feel the heat. A cavalcade of homemade sauces followed, some of them extra spicy (like the ancho-chile-spiked accompaniment to the *camarones a la diablo*, crisp prawns), some of them merely comforting (as in steaming chile verde spooned over delicious corn chips).

Chelsea's **Sette** (191 Seventh Ave between 21st and 22nd Sts, 212-675-5935) specializes in hot asses—but don't get the wrong idea. While there are plenty of toned butts in the house, we're talking about the restaurant's booty-warming furs. On one of the coldest nights this winter, I retreated to Sette's auxiliary dining room (which at night becomes the VIP enclave of the Viscaya nightclub), where a faux-mink blanket was waiting at my booth. I ordered a few Italian basics: warm bread, minestrone soup and a slow-stewed chicken *alla cacciatora* in a simmering tomato sauce. A couple of grappa shots later, and we (my butt and I) felt the warmest we had in weeks.