

# BOSTON COMMON



## JOHN SLATTERY

**MAD MEN'S SILVER FOX HEADS TO THE BIG SCREEN**

**VA-VA-VROOM! Boston's Glamorous Garages**

**PLUS: LAUREN BECKHAM FALCONE EXPLORES  
OUR INFAMOUS ACCENT**

SO MANY DINNERS... SO LITTLE TIME



Boston's first boutique hotel has two elegant restaurants, two private dining rooms, and Harvard roots.

*"Clio is still my baby, still my outlet after 15 years."*—KEN ORINGER

Uni Sashimi Bar



## gastronomy, reinvented

CLIO, BACK BAY'S DINING MUSE, GETS A NEW LOOK FOR THE NEXT DECADE OF CELEBRITY SPOTTING AND AWARD-WINNING CUISINE.

BY MAT SCHAFFER

Boston's first boutique hotel, The Eliot Hotel, and its accompanying restaurant, have all the makings of a local legend: a storied history with Harvard University roots, a reputation as the go-to spot for celebrity diners, and one of the most significant deals in sports history celebrated on its premises. And what becomes a legend most? A perfectly executed face-lift. As quietly elegant as Catherine Deneuve, Clio, Ken Oringer's acclaimed contemporary French restaurant, appropriately named for the Greek muse of history, marks its 15th anniversary with an extensive renovation.

The place sparkles with freshly painted walls, olive and ivory leather banquettes and chairs, a new backlit, mirrored bar, and expanded bar seating. Don't worry—the unmistakable faux-leopard carpeting in the dining room remains the same. But you'll hardly recognize Uni Sashimi Bar, Oringer's Japanese eatery just down the stairs from the front door. Gone are the stools, granite counter, and leopard carpet. Now with beveled blond

wood walls, a slate floor, and black stone sushi bar, Uni's design suggests that of a bento box, promising an assortment of exotic eats and treats.

It's hard to believe this same downstairs space was once the Eliot Lounge, an enduringly popular, wood-paneled singles-turned-sports bar frequented by Boston marathoners. But by the mid-1990s, The Eliot Hotel's owners, Dora and Arthur Ullian, wanted a change. Arthur's father had purchased the building—built by Harvard University in 1927 as retirement lodging for Harvard professors and named for the college's 21st president, Charles William Eliot—in 1939 and ran it as a residential hotel into the 1980s. Dora and Arthur took over the operation in 1985, and over the next decade, influenced by the small, luxury hotels of Paris and San Francisco, transformed The Eliot into Boston's first boutique hostelry. The down-at-heel Eliot Lounge was no longer a good fit. "They didn't have enough money to keep it up; it was sort of at the end of its rope. And we needed a restaurant to be a counterpart to this new emerging hotel," Dora remembers.

The Ullians asked Michael Schlow, who was about to become executive chef and owner of Radius, if he'd be interested in creating that restaurant, but he was under contract to Café Louis at the time. Schlow introduced the couple to New Jersey native Oringer, who was working at Tosca in Hingham. Oringer had previously worked in Boston at Le Marquis de Lafayette under Jean-Georges Vongerichten, as well as at The River Café in New York, Al Forno in Providence, and Silks in the Mandarin Oriental in San Francisco. In his interview, Oringer went behind the stove at The Eliot and cooked the Ullians a meal that included glazed aromatic short ribs, sashimi-style marinated

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Black licorice roast duck





Pork belly steambun from Clio's new bar

Table 49, the most coveted seat in the house

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hamachi and tuna, and tomato-water martinis. "We literally hired him on the spot and became partners," Arthur recalls.

Clio opened in 1997 to rave reviews. In 2001 Oringer won a James Beard Foundation Award for Best New Chef in the Northeast. The following year Clio begat Uni. Since

2005 Oringer has established a culinary empire in Boston, including Toro tapas bar, La Verdad taqueria, KO Prime Steakhouse & Bar, and Coppa, as well as Earth at Hidden Pond, a seasonal, farm-to-table restaurant in Kennebunkport, Maine. His other restaurants notwithstanding, five nights a week you'll find Oringer in the kitchen at Clio. "It's still my baby, it's still my outlet, and after 15 years, it's hard to let go," he says. "I still get up for the challenge of being able to up our game, even after this much time."

Indeed, the cuisine at Clio remains as inventive as ever. Dishes like butter-basted lobster with chanterelles and sherry-like Vin Jaune d'Arbois, tender venison with espresso oil, persimmon, foie gras, and mugolio pine cone bud syrup, or black licorice roast duck with fennel and aromatic Buddha's hand citron not only tantalize with unusual ingredients but look just as good as they taste. It's fare that continues to attract a clientele of sophisticated foodies and celebrity visitors to Boston. Paul Newman, Barbra Streisand, Bill Murray, Kate Hudson, Cameron Diaz, and an impressive roster of famous chefs have all dined at Clio. When El Bulli's Ferran Adrià stopped in late last year, Oringer created a 40-course tasting. Among the courses: live mantis shrimp, live abalone, live king crab, curried tripe, and venison with rose hips.

Oringer has never been a complacent chef—or businessman. "I don't want Clio to become a dinosaur of a



Chef Ken Oringer

restaurant," he says. "I want to bring in the next generation of diners over the coming 10 years." That's why Oringer recently introduced a new bar menu of more casual eats to accompany bar director Todd Maul's artisanal, and occasionally molecular gastronomic, libations. Enjoy a Flaming Paco cocktail of handcrafted Illegal Mezcal, torched lime, and seared hot pepper with small plates like bone marrow garnished with pickled ramps, candied kumquats, and capers, a steamed pork belly bun slathered with chili aioli, or a bahn mi Vietnamese sandwich layered

with spicy ma po tofu and tart nuoc cham. "You can sit at the bar and have smoked duck drumettes with XO sauce and fried garlic, and it will have the same integrity as foie gras with bee pollen and honey in Clio," he says.

Within the restaurant, the sweetest spot is at Table 49—a banquette with side-by-side seating for two in the northwest corner of the dining room. In addition to its intimacy, there's no better vantage point to observe the well-heeled diners and Clio's latest incarnation. "I wanted the physical space to be symbiotic with what was happening in my head foodwise," Oringer explains. "Something a little cleaner, not so formal, a little more comfortable, and a little more open—to be a new forum for the next 10 years of Clio's life." The best cosmetic surgeries leave an observer feeling both wonderment and admiration. Clio is ready for another close-up. *370A Commonwealth Ave., 617-536-7200; cliorestaurant.com* **BC**

## THE CHARLES ELIOT ROOM

This private dining room is fit for a king—or at least a Red Sox owner.

Ming Tsai celebrated his 40th in this room, and John Henry popped the Champagne cork here after purchasing the Red Sox. The Charles Eliot Room in the subterranean space of the hotel has a gas fireplace, two oversize wing chairs, a portable bar, and the same faux-leopard carpeting as the upstairs dining room.

Redecorated three years ago, it seats up to 60. "That was quite a spectacular night," Oringer recalls of the night Henry bought the team. "You could sense that these guys were so committed to doing the right thing with the Red Sox. For somebody to have that kind of commitment to bringing a World Series here... Now everybody expects it, but back then we hadn't had a World Series ring in over 80 years."



Pop your own Champagne corks here.

Chef Ferran Adrià and Cameron Diaz are among Clio's clientele.