

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Inside the Grand Opening of the New 'Hell's Kitchen' Restaurant With Gordon Ramsay



Hell's Kitchen is the reality-show restaurant of your dreams.

ERIN RYAN

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“Jesus Christ almighty. Get me a toothbrush!” Gordon Ramsay yells. The celebrity chef isn’t behaving like he just flew straight from Australia to Las Vegas to open a \$10-million restaurant in perhaps the most primo spot on the Strip. He’s dancing in his black sneakers, giddy at the abysmal palates on display in the dining room being prepped for the party.

One blindfolded journalist guesses egg white is cheese. Another swears carrot is broccoli. “Wow, interesting,” Ramsay chirps.

And that's when you understand the crippling self-doubt that has undone contestants on 17 seasons of the show that inspired this restaurant: “Hell’s Kitchen.”

“He’ll just stand there and look at you. You’re doing everything right — literally everything. He’ll just look at you, and you’re like, who am I and what is my life worth right now? Then you start making these silly mistakes,” says Christina Wilson, Season 10 winner and executive chef over Gordon Ramsay Group’s U.S. division. This is the fifth Las Vegas outlet bearing his name, and the newest jewel at Caesars Palace.

With the January 26 grand opening hours away, the energy here is charged (and the Caesar statue towering above Las Vegas Boulevard equipped with a chef coat and pitchfork). Tourists are already swarming, snapping selfies with the iconic HK sign. Heads are bound to explode later when the imposing bronze bursts into flames.



The spectacle fits. Destiny led Ramsay to this exact spot at this moment, to kick the doors on a dream he shares with countless fans and the city itself. Because this is what Las Vegas does. Mad fantasy. Why just eat a fancy steak when you could have a perfect Wellington inside the reality show of an absurdly famous chef? Ramsay gets Vegas, the impressive machinery and the magic.

“In 2001, we’d just won our third Michelin star. So for a treat I came to Vegas with (my wife) Tana, and we had dinner at Mix — (Alain) Ducasse. It was phenomenal,” he says, over coffee in his new dining room, floor-to-ceiling windows catching the street’s daytime glitter. “I was sat upstairs over this beautiful Strip, and Ducasse then was one of the most prolific chefs in the world. Three stars in Paris, three stars in Monaco. To see him convert that into this incredible entertainment on top of the hotel ... that’s what planted the seed.”

The seed of an empire. Gordon Ramsay Group has 33 restaurants worldwide, and the chef is an Emmy-nominated TV star and producer. His brand is especially potent on the Strip, as he strikes a balance (maybe better than anyone) between culinary boss and clever showman. His sticky toffee pudding is rich enough to be considered a thrill ride, but Hell’s Kitchen is no theme park. It’s an excellent restaurant wrapped in a novelty.



Ramsay is peaking along with Las Vegas' reputation for true bucket-list dining.

“It’s now one of the most competitive foodie cities anywhere in the world. And because of the entertainment side, it never gets the respect it deserves ... The tools are here, the product’s here, the talent’s here,” Ramsay says, ever unequivocal. “Only the

best survive.”

He feels “a bit naughty” for cherrypicking clutch industry people for Hell’s Kitchen. “But I suppose it’s our moment right now.”

He says “our” pointedly. Those who imagine Ramsay to be an egomaniacal prick would be surprised to hear him go on about his team, and to hear them say he’s humble and grounded. He knows fans will seek dishes pulled from the show — lobster risotto, pan-seared scallops and the infamous “Wellie” — so he’s showcasing them alongside an original by Jennifer Murphy, the executive chef running Hell’s Kitchen.

Smoked golden beets, frisée, and paper-thin kumquat wheels are layered on tart yogurt accented with dill, mint, chives, pistachio granola and a velvety white balsamic vinaigrette. Murphy’s fine textures and flavors stand up to Ramsay’s decadent Wellington, pillowy filet mignon baked inside prosciutto, mushroom duxelles and pastry. Lucky for the Hell’s Kitchen crew they have this impossible dish dialed, because Ramsay has thrown hundreds of underdone specimens on camera. (He thinks his record is about 243 feet.)

Caesars Palace

They execute Wagyu meatballs and crispy-skin salmon in the uniforms of the red and blue teams, calling out orders and “Yes, chef”’s next to a portrait of Ramsay sternly checking plates. He welcomes guests on a video wall in the lobby, where cheeky T-shirts hang near a gallery of “Hell’s

Kitchen” winners. Two Chefs Tables just off the kitchen offer front-row seats at no additional cost, though general manager Louie Maione says they’re in high demand. Theatrics can be brought to any table with the scampi flambé, or maybe pineapple carpaccio served in a billowing cloud courtesy of dry ice. And servers help transport guests to the set by flagging elements of the show winking throughout the space.

→ The Strip isn’t known for subtle references, but the Jeffrey Beers International design team nailed it. The open kitchen’s mosaic walls split blue and red infernos. Digital panels echo that fire, and pitchforks abound, whether in fixtures, laser-cut partitions or branded citrus peels. But these details hit like spices in a dish, noticeable mostly when you’re trying to notice them. Even studio lights melt into a whole that feels timeless and quite cool.

While food is the star, Las Vegas loves its booze, and HK’s 25-foot bar crafted from walnut, marble, and backlit onyx honors that. From rare English bubbly to an exclusive Stone IPA, the menu has range, and flourishes are stacked in Pete Gomez’s specialty cocktails. Rum Donkey (a nod to a beloved Ramsay barb) mixes Cruzan single-barrel with spicy falernum, brown sugar and ginger beer, and the Nobu veteran tops it with passion fruit—on fire, obvi. Notes from Gordon marries a gin drink and a fortune cookie, only the fortune is an insult on a Union Jack, like: *My grandma can do better than that and she’s dead.*

Ramsay takes his many jobs very seriously, but not himself. The man has an actual twinkle in his eye, especially when he’s talking about his kids and his crew. He and Wilson have a bond that makes it easy for her to be his voice on the ground, to know he’ll want to demo a certain steak before he asks.

“He took a really big chance on me. He put me in a position I wasn’t ready for; I knew it and he knew it. I operate better that way. If my expectation is a little above my head, I’ll go hard the whole time ... We have a strong trust. He knows I’m more loyal to him than my own family. My family knows that, too,” Wilson says, grinning.

She studies his movements in the hope of delivering perfection, but Chef has an “obnoxious” way of improving on it.

“He doesn’t cook often,” Wilson says, “but when he does he’s every bit as good as everybody thinks he is.”

His talent and work ethic led to a partnership with Caesars Entertainment spanning six years and eight restaurants: five in Las Vegas and soon to be three on the East Coast, with Gordon Ramsay Steak opening this summer at Harrah’s in Atlantic City. “Gordon Ramsay is one of the biggest talents in culinary,” Bob Morse, Caesars Entertainment president of hospitality, said in an email. “Gordon’s attention to detail, passion and pursuit of perfection speak to his character and professionalism. Gordon and his team are incredible partners.”

Hence the fireworks and acrobatic roller-skaters mustered for the grand opening night. In the thick of it, Ramsay stands on the red carpet with arms crossed. Classic. He celebrates with fans and hugs Season 17’s final four competing for a job as Murphy’s head chef.

Inside the packed dining room, Ramsay takes the mic for a thank-you tour and a vow: “Having given us the best real estate, the best position anywhere in the country, I promise you now I will deliver one of the best fucking restaurants on the planet.”

His unvarnished charm is key to his accessibility, in person and on the plate across his Strip collection. Wilson says the Hell’s Kitchen team is looking to add more premium options, such as caviar service and A5-grade beef, the menu aims squarely at everyone. You could walk in off the sidewalk and get truffle arancini for \$12 with oak-aged Innis & Gunn for \$8.50. Or you could sip on Gomez’s concoctions (\$14-\$16) with a \$125 dry-aged porterhouse for two.

This city is special for him, Ramsay says, and he has masterfully tapped into its joy-for-all model.

Murphy has worked for other heavyweights, including Michael Mina, Joël Robuchon and Jean-Georges Vongerichten. Still, she’s dazzled. “I’ve never seen anything like the Gordon Ramsay experience or effect or whatever you want to call it ... He’s on a level of his own.”



Ramsay pulls no punches about how he got there. The 51-year-old recalls being on the line for Guy Savoy in Paris, just 22 with tickets flying in French. He took his lumps from the best, and he saw them turn Las Vegas into a culinary playground. So he built his own castle in the sand and filled it with people working “bloody hard” for him. It’s important to pay that back, he says.

“I’ve been like an old magpie. I’ve stolen all of the little glittery bits from Guy, from Alain, from Joël, from Thomas, from Jean-Georges and — my god — put my head down,” Ramsay says. “I was so happy to be tucked under their wing. You know, sat there waiting to burst. And now I’m bursting.”