

# Los Angeles Times

## Mid-Wilshire area kicks up heels with new night spots

The Roof on Wilshire, Wirtshaus and Rascal add new life to an L.A. locale not known for its night scene.

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By: August Brown

If Los Angeles is like America, only more so, then come nightfall, the Mid-Wilshire area is its flyover country. L.A.'s centers of gravity for bar-going — Hollywood, downtown, Santa Monica — all lie miles apart, leaving a cavernous, after-dark gap along the Miracle Mile. For residents in the media- and entertainment-saturated area, getting a drink meant getting in the car, or perhaps buckling down with the visor-bedecked bros at Busby's or washed-ashore rockers at Molly Malone's.

But in the last month, new local hangs have made quiet waves with worthwhile craft beers, detail-driven bar food and approachably urbane designs in one L.A.'s most fallow-per-capita areas for night spots.

Mid-Wilshire was underserved," said Eric Greenspan, founder of the Roof on Wilshire, a new hotel pool bar on Wilshire Boulevard near Fairfax Avenue.

"There's so many offices and it's as central a location as you can get."

The Roof on Wilshire is the most visually enticing of the new entries. The new

bar's base camp, the Hotel Wilshire, discretely pulls from the neighborhood's art deco legacy. But the rooftop bar is a clear signal of better things to come for local drinkers.

The wrap-around views are a stunning vantage point, from which downtown and the Hollywood sign and Westside are all splayed out in a light-dappled panorama. The décor is done up in cheerful minimalism, all white concrete and yellow furniture with a scintillant pool (that, naturally, no one actually swam in on a recent Thursday afternoon) accenting the magic-hour vibe.

Pool scenes at the Standard, Mondrian and other celebrated L.A. hotels are as cutthroat as any velvet rope (remember the days when even getting a room at the Roosevelt might not gain you entry into the Tropicana Bar?), but Greenspan, who also runs the Foundry on Melrose, deliberately set out to thwart that dynamic.

"We didn't want to be a traditional stuffy hotel bar, or a scene like Drai's or the Standard," he said.

Drinks are crafty but straightforward cocktails, and the food is a lighter take on Foundry's brusque Americana cuisine — a necessity for a bar you'll probably take to in a swimsuit.

Such caloric sensitivity does not drive Wirtshaus, a new contemporary German restaurant and beer garden at La Brea Avenue and Beverly Boulevard. It's the first venture from Bjoern Risse, a native of Cologne and business liaison who moved to L.A. in 2008 and quickly took to its genial surfer culture. Wirtshaus showcases a more modern take on the staples of alfresco communal tables and features 35 quality beers and hearty meat-and-potatoes bar food.

"There just wasn't a good German restaurant in L.A.," Risse said, ruefully. "I was craving German comfort food, and so many of the places in L.A. were all Black Forest, dark wood, very Bavarian and traditional. I wanted to show L.A. what

today's German beer gardens were really like."

At Wirtshaus, that means wry defacings of kitschy woodland paintings with shark fins and hippie insignias, a curated list of solely German mega- and micro-brews, and an attention to staples like sausage and schnitzel that can hold their own with the beloved Arts District staple Wurstkuche (And even some vegetarian options that make the idea of "meatless German food" seem like less of a cosmic joke).

Though it currently closes at midnight, the drinking scene on its outdoor patio is lively, with competitive ping-pong and a volley of Oktoberfest events to cement its reputation among Germanophiles and ex-pats.

"We get a mix from chefs and hipsters to grandmas," Risse said. "We want people to communicate, that's the heart of a beer garden."

About a mile south, the corner of 8th Street and La Brea Avenue was instantly transformed by the hype explosion of Umami Burger. It suggested that the once-uninspiring corner could support a gastropub node.

Enter Rascal, the first solo venture from Sandy Clark, who for decades helmed the wine lists at L.A.'s Chaya mini-chain. But Rascal is, in many ways, something that Chaya isn't — devoted to its tiny corner of a neighborhood, almost monastically focused on its slim menu, and a demonstration that the race for bars to have dozens of obscure microbrews can be more paralyzing than revealing.

"People don't have that anxiety that they don't know everything here, Clark said. "We like to focus on just a few simple, sophisticated things."

The sandwiches are as straightforward as they come — burger, Dijon chicken, portabello — but the point, for Clark, isn't to be a beacon to cross-towners. It's to take a quiet corner and make it his own.

"Eighty percent of people that have come here said, 'We live down the street, and finally there's a reasonable place,'" he said.