

Smoke House Restaurant history

The Smoke House was founded in 1946 at the corner of Pass & Riverside in Burbank by Lockheed employees Jack Monroe & Jim Stockton and silent partner Bill Storey. The original restaurant seated 46 people, and was enjoyed by local luminaries Bob Hope and Bing Crosby (among others) on its opening night. With Jim as the promoter & front man, and Jack as the cook, the restaurateurs enjoyed much success and were soon looking for a larger building with more seating capacity.

The Red Coach Inn at 4420 Lakeside Dr., originally built in 1947 by Danny Kaye, never opened as a restaurant because he couldn't build a big enough dance floor in the 6,000 sq. ft. building. In 1948, The Smoke House moved into the building at 4420 Lakeside Dr. (its current address), and the restaurant's success continued to grow under its slogan "Fine Food at a Fair Price".

World famous garlic bread beginnings

By 1950, Stan Stockton (Jim's son) had graduated from UCLA and spent his first week at the restaurant as a dish washer. By 1952, he was working in management (was president of the Smoke House Corp. from 1967-1983), and Chef John L. Sullivan's unique recipe for garlic bread made the Smoke House the largest purveyor of French bread west of the Mississippi. (Sullivan was a member of the Olympic Culinary Team in the mid-70's, and eventually left the Smoke House in 1959 to head the kitchen at the Disneyland Hotel.)

McAllister's unique style

In 1955, the Smoke House contracted now famous southern California architect Wayne McAllister to renovate the restaurant, increasing its size from 6,000 to 18,000 sq. ft. (At that time, McAllister was also working on the original design of the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas. Amazingly, his first commission, when he was only 17-years-old, was to design the Agua Caliente Resort in Mexico from hotel to restaurants to racetrack.)

McAllister brought an unusual flair to every project he touched (Lawry's, the Cinegrill, and Bob's Big Boy in Toluca Lake, to name just a few), and brought innovations to the Smoke House that were unheard of at that time. He built them their own butcher shop in the kitchen, and incorporated employee dining and dressing rooms

into the design. Interestingly enough, the restaurant that really began as a barbeque house quickly dropped the concept because they could never get the type of smoke pit they wanted.

Celebrities & Entertainment

Anybody who was “anybody” at Warner Bros. (the Studio across the street) and in the entertainment industry frequented the venerable eatery. It wasn’t unusual to see Errol Flynn, Judy Garland, Milton Berle or Robert Redford walk through the Smoke House doors and into the restaurant known for respecting their privacy. The Laugh-In show used to rent the restaurant for their parties, and Jack Parr even hosted the Tonight Show from the Smoke House in 1956.

Entertainment shows in the lounge became a big evening draws for the restaurant in the 70’s & 80’s, featuring such groups as the Ink Spots, The Drifters, and Star Search winners. An interesting twist of fate brought the Captain & Tennille to the Smoke House lounge where Wink Martindale (then at KMPC radio) “discovered” them singing their soon-to-be 1975 Grammy Award winning song, “Love Will Keep Us Together”.

On May 29, 2003, a USO Benefit show was produced honoring neighbor Bob Hope’s 100th birthday. Performers included Mickey & Jan Rooney, comedian Tom Dreesen, Chico Vega and The Drifters, Jimmy Spencer, and the Earth Angels trio. The evening benefited the Bob Hope Hollywood USO at LAX, with many celebrities on hand to congratulate Bob Hope, who was unable to attend because of illness.

Ownership Changes Hands

In 1978, Mabek Corporation bought 80% of the ownership of the Smoke House Corp. and land holdings from the original owners, with Stan Stockton retaining 20% of the Smoke House Corp. stock. In 1983, Lee Spencer and Pat Hainey became the owners of the restaurant, with Mabek Corp. maintaining ownership of the land. In 1993, the Smoke House was sold to Jim Lucero. In May, 2003, Lee Spencer and his wife, Marti, bought the Smoke House. Lee Spencer died in 2016, and Marti Spencer became the sole and current owner.

A Landmark in the Making

From a restaurant that seated 46 people in 1946 to the current structure on Lakeside Dr. that seats over 500 people, the Smoke House has grown to be a venerable

eatery and long time Hollywood watering hole that locals, entertainers and dignitaries still enjoy into the 21st century – the restaurant where every diner is treated like a star!

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