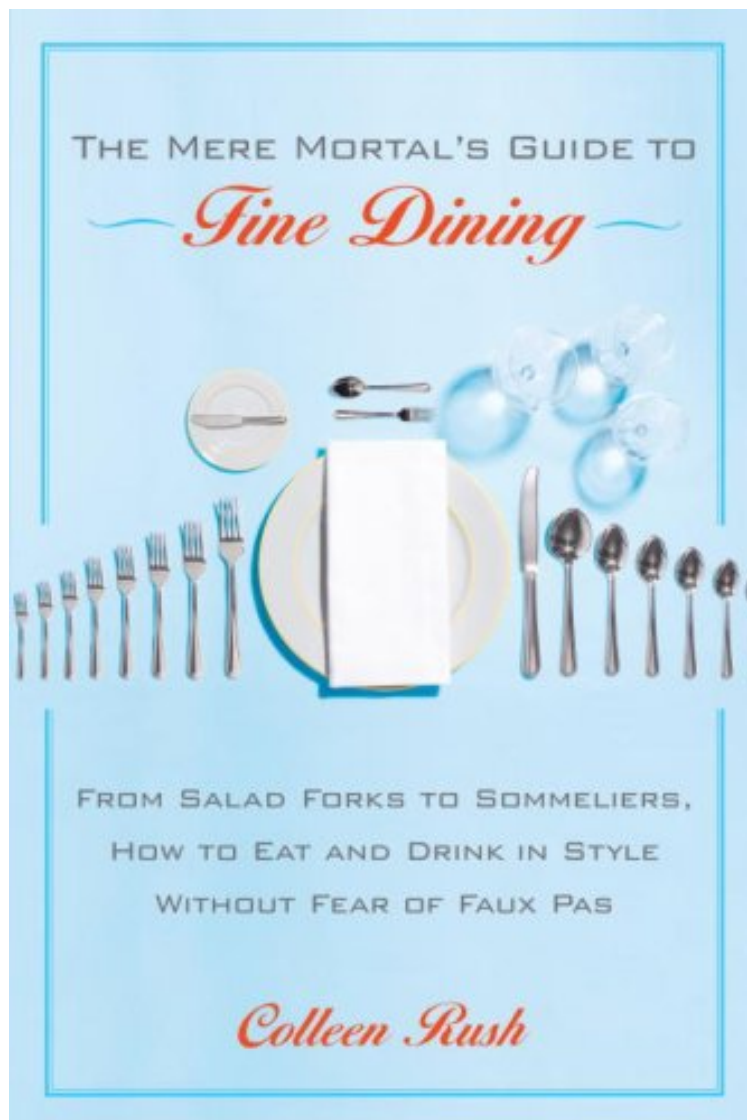


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The Mere Mortal's Guide to Fine Dining: From Salad Forks to Sommeliers, How to Eat and Drink in Style Without Fear of Faux Pas

Colleen Rush

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Colleen Rush : The Mere Mortal's Guide to Fine Dining: From Salad Forks to Sommeliers, How to Eat and Drink in Style Without Fear of Faux Pas before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Mere Mortal's Guide to Fine Dining: From Salad Forks to Sommeliers, How to Eat and Drink

in Style Without Fear of Faux Pas:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Dining Etiquette- How to get the best of your dining experience
By A. Williams
As a business skill trainer, I found this book an exceptional resource since it provided reservation to exit information on enjoying an elegant dining experience. Colleen Rush researched dining history and added in helpful facts about why we eat our bread in pieces, why the meal comes in several independent courses down to understanding the traditions of food preparation and wines across Europe as well as trendy questions about the quality or best catch when it comes to meats. I used this book to prepare for a Business Etiquette presentation yet Rush's writing was fun and exciting to follow and honestly, I will be enjoying this before any fine dinner to be on my best behavior and to keep refreshing what would make my dining experience more enriched. This book can help one establish a better relationships with their clients because this book teaches you how to create allies with the dining staff and better understand the menus and what it means to be a 'foody' without entering with a bib and smug complaints. Since my research and preparation visited the perspective written from the restaurant staff as well, I found this book very fair to both the guest and the restaurant. Again, better etiquette does not give one the right to be more judgmental but to show more class and appreciation when the service is done right and the food and wine is good. This book is one of my favorites and her book is a great gateway to the books she referenced to further study the history of fine dining. She truly made the topic accessible and useful for any audience. I highly recommend this book.
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Good but not great
By Loves to Cook
Very good information but some of it regarding the food is pretty basic if you have any knowledge of cooking. Overall not bad and I would recommend it. Good section on tipping and building a relationship with your favorite restaurant.
3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. This book is excellent - anyone who reads it can dine out with ...
By K. Miller
This book is excellent - anyone who reads it can dine out with confidence. It explains table etiquette, the jobs of different restaurant staff and what you can expect from them. And especially helpful were the details about food; how to order, menu tips, methods of preparation, cuts of meat, it's all in there.

From aperitif to digestif, approach every meal with savvy and grace. We've all experienced Fancy-Pants Restaurant Jitters at some point the fear that you will unknowingly commit some fine-dining crime, whether its using the wrong fork, picking an amateur wine, mispronouncing foie gras, or gasping when your fish entre arrives with its head still attached. Relax. The Mere Mortals Guide to Fine Dining is the ultimate antidote to restaurant anxiety. Where does your napkin go when you leave the table? Should you sniff the wine cork? And why, pray tell, are there so many forks? This comprehensive and accessible primer answers these and dozens of other questions and offers the basics on every aspect of fine dining, including:
* How to navigate a place setting
* Speaking menu-ese and the language of fine food
* A refresher on polite and polished table manners
* 911 for wine novices
* A carnivores guide to beef, pork, lamb, and veal
* What local, sustainable, and organic really mean
* Japanese dining dos and donts
* Whos who on a restaurants staff
* How to be a regular or get the perks like one
* Top restaurants across the country
* What the food snobs know (and you should, too)
* And much more
With a little help, any Mere Mortal can order wine with confidence, get great, attitude-free service, decipher menus, and finally, truly, savor any dining experience.

From Publishers Weekly
Diners who don't know concasse from confit will find a wealth of information in Cosmopolitan contributing writer Rush's breezy guide to restaurant etiquette. Rush (Swim Naked, Defy Gravity, 99 Other Essential Things to Do Before Turning 30) covers all aspects of dining, from how to land the best tables to navigating the place settings to choosing the best desserts in a straightforward manner. She demystifies restaurant customs such as ordering wine-and sending it back if it's afflicted with, say, "cork taint." Although tips on ordering caviar will only pertain to a small percentage of establishments, Rush's sage advice on basic manners and will enlighten just about anyone who ever sets foot in a restaurant: she provides guidelines for tipping, how to get treated like a regular at your favorite spots and even includes a handy reference guide for pairing fresh vegetables at their peak with main dishes and sides. The result is an extremely useful reference guide for anyone who wants to get serious about food, or wants to know how to eat couscous with a fork.
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About the Author
COLLEEN RUSH, a food-loving native of Louisiana, is a contributing writer to Cosmopolitan and author of Swim Naked, Defy Gravity, 99 Other Essential Things to Accomplish Before Turning 30. She lives in Chicago.
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1 RELAX HELP IS ON THE WAY
SCHMOOZING the STAFF like a SEASONED DINER
The first rule of mastering fine dining: Get over yourself. An overdeveloped or fragile ego does nothing but interfere with a fantastic meal. You're not alone if you feel intimidated or overwhelmed when you walk into those sumptuous dining rooms or divinely minimalist food meccas, but being cagey or aloof will only make you feel more out of place. The more open and honest you are about what you know or don't know, as the case may be the more you will learn, enjoy, and feel at ease in these restaurants. First and foremost, because the restaurants staff is trying to deliver this experience to you, you need to know who they are and how to work with them. Despite any fears you may have about stiff matre ds or

condescending waiters, generally, the higher the caliber of the restaurant, the better the service. Like all great artists and craftsmen, the culinary crews in fine dining establishments take a tremendous amount of pride in what they do and what they know. But the restaurant-diner relationship is a two-way street. If you have a bad attitude or skulk into a restaurant expecting loads of attitude from the staff, you may indeed get a free helping of attitude with your meal. Show your genuine appreciation and interest, or even cluelessness by asking questions, encouraging suggestions, and complimenting the staff's efforts and you will have an extraordinary experience. Restaurant staff love to strut their stuff, and they will go out of their way to dazzle inquisitive and polite diners. From the *matre d* and sommelier to the *garde-manger*, whether they're behind the scenes or flitting around your table, getting to know the players in a restaurant is as easy and as useful as chatting up the neighbors or your mailman. Yes, many of these people have official French job titles that are ripe for mispronouncing. They're still just people whose jobs happen to revolve around making you happy and helping you spend your money, some of which ends up in their pockets. All you need to know and do is right here: who they are, what they do, how to pronounce their tongue-twisting titles, and, of course, *Mere Mortal*, how to become that elite diner: *The Regular*. At Your Service: Who's Who in a Restaurant

FRONT-OF-THE-HOUSE STAFF

Reservationists not only take your reservation, they can make all of the little extras happen, like saving that special corner table for you or giving the kitchen advance notice that you're on a gluten-free diet. The person on the other end of the phone wields more power than you think. This is not a nameless, faceless automaton paid to do your bidding, so be calm, cool, and friendly when you call to make a reservation.

How to Suck Up to the Reservationist

Step 1: Know (and use) the reservationist's name. Asking for a name and inserting it when you greet and thank the reservationist is not only common courtesy, it gives you good mojo. If you're trying to get the best table in the house or weasel a reservation when the restaurant is booked, proper name-calling makes you seem more familiar and friendly to the person you're trying to schmooze. It says, Not only do you know me. You like me.

Step 2: Let the compliments fly. Don't hesitate to give a shout-out to a favorite waiter, say how much you love the restaurant, or mention that you picked the restaurant because you're celebrating a special occasion. A brief caution: Reservationists are well trained in sleazy human behavior, so faux flattery will get you nowhere. They've heard it all and know every sob story, ass-kissing compliment, and name-dropping trick in the book. Do say: I love your (insert restaurant's signature dish). My friends rave about the wine list. Is Ralph working on Friday? I'd love to sit at one of his tables. It's our tenth anniversary, and this is our favorite restaurant in the city. Don't say: I'm a friend of the general manager. I just love the chef's show on the Food Network! BAM! I've never been to the restaurant. Can't you squeeze me in? There's a three-month wait list? The food must be good, huh? I'll have to sell a kidney to pay for this. It better be good.

Step 3: Be informative. Don't wait until you arrive to tell the host or *matre d* that you want a table far away from the noisy bar or smoking section, or that your adherence to feng shui principles requires that you have a north-facing booth, or that you'll be dining with a lacto-ovo vegetarian. It's not only okay to spell out any special needs you have, it's a surefire way to get on a restaurant's good side. This information helps the restaurant map out a plan for assigning and turning over tables ahead of time, instead of scrambling to accommodate you when you stroll in. People think it's high maintenance to make special requests with the reservationist. If you're celebrating an anniversary or have a special dietary need, or even if it's I don't like sitting near sunlight, we love to know those things ahead of time. The more information you give us, the easier it is for us to make you happy.

Tracey Spillane, general manager, Spago, Los Angeles

LAGNIAPPEE

Even if they say they're booked, some restaurants reserve one or two tables for walk-ins, but they rarely advertise it. If you have good rapport, politely ask the reservationist about their policy or, better yet, when to show up for the best shot at a table. Hosts are the people who greet you at the door and usher you to your table, but they may do double duty as reservationists. They also coordinate the flow of diners and arrange seating in the restaurant as tables turn over. Your attitude toward them can score you a plum banquet by the window, or a wobbly table with a view of the bathrooms.

General managers (GMs) are the dons of the restaurant. They oversee the staff, solve problems, handle major complaints from diners, and generally make sure the restaurant is stocked, serving quality food, and running smoothly. Although they do most of their work behind the scenes, GMs often wander the dining room floor on busy nights. If you have good things to say about a meal or the staff, introduce yourself to the general manager and pay your compliments to the restaurant. If you're a regular or aspire to be one, this is how you'll get a GM (or *matre d*) to recognize you on the next visit.

LAGNIAPPEE GMs spend a lot of time with their staff, before and after hours. If you plan to lodge a serious complaint about the food or service, keep the exchange cordial and honest. Exaggerating your complaint or taking potshots at the staff will probably make the GM more sympathetic to the servers' plight of dealing with a surly diner like you.

The *matre d* (**MAY-truh doh-TELL**), or *matre d* (**may-truh DEE**), is like the host of the party or the VIP concierge in a restaurant. If the restaurant is on fire, it's their job to make you think it's part of the entertainment. In addition to taking reservations, juggling seating arrangements, glad-handing guests, and acting as a liaison between the kitchen and the waitstaff, the main job of the *matre d* is to cultivate relationships with customers and keep regulars happy. They also oversee front-of-the-house operations, like making sure table settings and other aesthetic details are up to snuff. Like GMs, *matre ds* are the people who handle problems, green-light freebies like appetizers, a glass of wine, or dessert, and can make you feel like an A-lister if they know your name. You want to know this person, and, more important, you want him or her to know you.

Sommeliers (**saw-muh-LYAYS**) are the

wine gurus who put together the wine list, maintain the cellar, and help diners select wines to pair with their meal. Think of the sommelier as your personal wine country tour guide. Ask for it, and you'll get a mini-lecture on wine regions, grapes, dirt, weather, vintage, flavors, and aromas. Or, you can get straightforward pairing suggestions sans lecture. But first you have to tell your waiter, I'd like to get some suggestions from the sommelier, then admit you don't know much about wine. Don't be afraid to say I like Chardonnay or I usually drink Merlot because it's familiar or even I'm looking for a bottle in the \$40 range. If you have a better grasp of wine styles, mention the basic characteristics of your favorite wines (red or white, name brands, grapes, etc.). It seems the higher up you go in dining, the more afraid people are to ask about wine. My favorite diners are the ones who say, I have no idea how to pick wine, but they're willing to try new things and they're curious about why I selected a particular wine.

Patricia Borgardt, sommelier, Commanders Palace, New Orleans

Bartenders are the restaurant yentas: collectors and if you play your cards right disseminators of some of the most useful insider information in a restaurant. Show up twenty minutes before your reservation to have a drink at the bar, pay as soon as your drink arrives, and leave a generous cash tip. If the bar isn't slammed and you can strike up an easy conversation while you sip your drink, plumb bartenders for details about the best servers, the house specialties, menu favorites, and other miscellaneous tidbits about the food and the restaurant.

LAGNIAPPE Want to be a bartender's friend? If your party has drinks at the bar before being seated, close the tab and tip the bartender separately (as opposed to carrying the tab over to your table). If you do transfer the tab, tip the bartender cash and remember to subtract those drinks from your final bill when figuring out how much to tip your waiter. Waiters in upscale restaurants are often career professionals who love what they do, and do it well. The chances of getting a terrible waiter in fine dining are slim, but keep in mind that the service you get can also be a reflection of your attitude. It's best to think of the relationship as though you're sitting at the waiter's table, not your table. You're on their turf, and serving you is how they pay rent and buy groceries. They don't have to love you, but it helps if they like you. And it's not a one-way relationship: You're paying not just for the food, but for the service they're providing you. Feel free to float questions and ask for suggestions. Waiters see what goes in and out of the kitchen on a regular basis, so they know the chef's specialties, the portion sizes, the ingredients, the complaints, and the compliments people have about everything on the menu. Treat them with respect, use them for everything they know, and tip them well when they do their job well.

As a waiter, you want to give the best service possible to please the customer and line your pockets. To do so, you need to understand the customer's expectations, and a good waiter can read a customer like a cop reads a perp. Then, you delve into the varying depths of your repertoire of serving skills to exceed those expectations.

Andrew Morrison, editor, Waiterblog.com

BACK-OF-THE-HOUSE STAFF These are the people who touch your food. They may seem grumpy, uninterested, or unapproachable (you would be too after twelve hours on your feet in a roasting-hot kitchen), but if you get a chance to talk shop or throw compliments their way, do. Kitchen staff members are a rare and fascinating breed.

Executive chefs are the head honchos in the kitchen. They oversee the staff, food preparation, menu planning, and administrative details, like training, budget, and payroll. In celebrity chef restaurants, they are the celebrity chefs, or they may run several kitchens for a hotel or restaurant group.

Sous-chefs (SOO shehfs), literally "under the chef," are second in command in the kitchen. They cook, order supplies, supervise the kitchen staff, and are responsible for the day-to-day running of a kitchen.

Tournant chefs (toor-NAH shehfs) are the jacks-of-all-trades: They float from job to job in the kitchen, depending on where help is needed.

Station Chefs Each morsel of food on your plate is prepared by a different chef who covers a specific station in the kitchen. **Chefs de partie** are the lead chefs on any of the food stations. **Garde-mangers (gahrd mahn-ZHAYS)** handle the cold food prep, including salads, dressings, appetizers, and sometimes desserts. **Rotisseurs (roh-TIHS-syurs)**, or grill or broiler chefs, are in charge of spit/oven-roasting, grilling, and frying meat, fish, poultry, game, and vegetables. **Sauciers (saw-SYAYS)**, or soup and sauce chefs, make stocks, sauces, soups, and garnishes. **Entremetiers (AHN-truh-meh-TYAYS)**, or vegetable chefs, prepare, cook, and plate all fruits, vegetables, cereals, grains, and beans. **Poissoniers (pwa-sohn-YAYS)**, or fish chefs, are responsible for cutting, preparing, and cooking fish. **Patissiers (pah-tees-SYAYS)**, or pastry chefs, create dessert menus and make all sweets and baked goods in the restaurant.

Money Talks: Tips and Bribes Whatever your policy on tipping, whatever your feelings about greasing palms, remember that service has a price. If you want a better table or a shot at skipping the wait in a crowded restaurant, slipping cash into the right hand might make it happen. If you want extra attention while you're entertaining clients or anyone else you need to impress, patting a few bills into your waiter's hand will probably help. Officially, most restaurants will say that money doesn't buy better service or preferential treatment. Unofficially, it's standard practice to take care of the diners who take care of the staff. VIP treatment is normally reserved for rock stars and celebrities who bring dollars and cachet to a restaurant, or those generous regulars who frequent the place. But if you require a little extra TLC, anyone with a few bills and the tact to do it gracefully can pay to play.

How much grease does it take? Front-end tips depend on the restaurant, what you want, and how badly you want it. A \$20 bill covers most scenarios, but the idea is to cough up enough to get the job done and appear to be generous. If you're prepared to spend \$500 on a meal, an extra \$40 to bypass the crowds or score a prime table might be worth it to you.

HOW TO PASS THE BUCK Don't: hand off money if you can't pull it off like a pro. offer the general manager cash. slap a twenty on the host's stand or into a waiter's pocket. follow the cash with a list of demands. attempt a bribe if the

restaurant is exclusive and packed you're more likely to get snubbed. Do: say please and thank you. Fat tips don't give you license to act like spoiled royalty. Tack on gracious phrases like "If there's anything you can do" or "We may need a little more of your time tonight" or "I see you're very busy" to your request. Be discreet with the handoff. Fold the bill in half at least twice so that you can pass it in a handshake or slip it under a hand.