

THE ELITE 5

FROM THE EDITORS OF ELITE MEETINGS

E & B

PHENOMENAL

The editors of *Elite Meetings* magazine give you the dish on 5 Elite Platinum properties that constitute the crème de la crème in group dining.



ARIA • THE BROADMOOR • MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH • PALACE HOTEL • THE ST. REGIS DEER CREST



One of Aria Resort & Casino's stellar scenes for dining: Chef Masa Takayama's Bar Masa.

Seasoned meeting planners know that a key ingredient in the success of any event is the food & beverage (f&b) experience. Tasty fare, creatively presented, adds a wow factor that's sure to result in favorable reviews come survey time. In recent years more and more hotels and resorts have come to realize the value of fantastic f&b, and have beefed up their culinary offerings with the introduction of superstar chefs, sophisticated menus, and creatively themed events.

For this Elite 5, we rounded up five favorites who really know how to tantalize a crowd: Aria Resort & Casino, The Broadmoor, Montage Laguna Beach, Palace Hotel, and The St. Regis Deer Crest Resort. All of them demonstrate finesse with group culinary experiences, transforming meals into memories and more. *Bon appétit!*

Aria Resort & Casino

Las Vegas, Nevada

Rack Rate: \$159-\$179

Rooms: 4,004

Total Meeting Space: 300,000 sq. ft.

Not to Miss: A side of the oh-so-tasty Black Truffle and Comté Fritters at Jean-Georges Steakhouse

Sales: 877.333.9481

Web: www.arialasvegas.com

Aria Resort & Casino, Las Vegas's bright new hospitality star, made an entrance that even Elvis would envy when it opened for business in spectacular style in December 2009, followed quickly with a Black Eyed Peas concert broadcast as part of Dick Clark's *New Year's Rockin' Eve*. The new *wunderkind* in the capital of wow continues to shake things up by breaking from the outdated chicken-or-fish convention mentality to provide groups with access to the same cutting-edge, world-class cuisine on which the high rollers dine.

As an incentive reward, culinary aficionados will find nirvana. A carefully chosen mix of white-hot star chefs and proven veterans offer diners on a gastronomic world tour. Celebrated young gun Masayoshi Takayama brings his Michelin 3-Star Japanese cuisine to Las Vegas for the first time with Bar Masa. Shaboo, the adjacent 54-seat private dining room, showcases the chef's mastery of *omakase* table cooking. Julian Serrano's eponymous restaurant emphasizes such

Spanish favorites as tapas and paella. Michael Mina gets back to basics at American Fish with salt baking, wood grilling, cast-iron griddling, and ocean-water poaching. Meanwhile, Frank Sinatra's Rat Pack would feel right at home at Sirio Ristorante, a taste of Italy from Le Cirque owner Sirio Maccioni, and Jean-Georges Steakhouse from the father of American nouvelle cuisine.

Aria's assets for groups include event space (300,000 square feet, four ballrooms, three theatrical stages), incentives (three pools, 80,000-square-foot spa, 1,800-seat theater featuring Cirque du Soleil's *Viva ELVIS*) and prime location in the CityCenter uber-development. But what sets Aria apart is its commitment to design customized private, semi-private, or buy-out group dining experiences at its royal flush of fine dining restaurants. For planners determined to give their group a taste of the fantastic, they'll find all the right ingredients here.

The Broadmoor

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Rack Rate: from \$340; \$245 group

Rooms: 744

Total Meeting Space: 185,000 sq. ft.

Not to Miss: A lakeside breakfast on the Charles Court terrace, as swans and deer look on.

Sales: 888.203.7236

Web: www.broadmoor.com



When Spencer and Julie Penrose opened The Broadmoor in 1918, they set the bar for their new employees high—Rocky Mountain high—combining European elegance with Western hospitality. In the decades that followed, The Broadmoor’s reputation for excellent service became legend and garnered record numbers of AAA Five Diamond and Mobil/Forbes Five Star awards. But there has been no resting on laurels for The Broadmoor, which continues to produce the most creative, crowd-pleasing themed events west of Broadway.

Take the cowboy cookout, a staple of Western resorts. While some establishments may be content to issue a holster and handkerchief and call it a costume, The Broadmoor recreates its own 1918 opening day garden party, from the original menu (Broadmoor Trout au Bleu, Braised Sweetbreads aux Perles du Perigord, Boneless Royal Squab Roti, and Souffle Glacé) to actors and models in period costumes accompanied by Afghan hounds and even pet monkeys.

For one conference that had seen it all, The Broadmoor converted its remote Cheyenne Lodge into a Texas roadhouse, to which it ferried the 150 participants on Harley-Davidson motorcycles. Guests sporting press-on tattoos dined on Whole Hog Rotisserie with Ancho Chile Barbeque Sauce, Colorado Game Chili with Lavosh Twist, and Roasted Loin of Veal with Morel Cream, then two-stepped into the night with a country band.

Chef Bertrand Bouquin, who oversees the award-winning Penrose Room and Summit, The Broadmoor’s new urban brasserie, creates a customized feast for the senses at his Chef’s Table, available for groups from 12-16. Selections include everything from locally-sourced Colorado elk, lamb, or buffalo with chanterelle, blue oyster, and lobster mushrooms to sweet potato and pear soup.

Whether it’s a vintage garden party for 2,000 or a snow-time banquet in clear climate-controlled tents, The Broadmoor entertains with good food and fun in ways that groups will never forget.

Montage Laguna Beach

Laguna Beach, California

Rack Rate: from \$595

Rooms: 250

Total Meeting Space: 14,500 sq. ft.

Not to Miss: Local Shellfish Cioppino at The Loft

Sales: 888.250.3042

Web: www.montagelagunabeach.com

They say geography is destiny—and that’s certainly the case at Montage Laguna Beach. First the obvious: the ever-agreeable SoCal climate, infinite Pacific views, and convenience to Los Angeles and San Diego. Less apparent but equally vital is its proximity to a wonderland of specialty farms, ranches,

Top: Turning dessert into something to Tweet about at The Broadmoor.
Bottom: A view-filled venue for private gatherings at Montage Laguna Beach.



The Palace Hotel's famous Pied Piper Bar, an iconic venue for drawing groups together.

orchards, and vineyards whose seasonal and artisanal ingredients feed this culinary team's farm-to-table obsession.

Montage employs a professional forager to suggest and procure the best fresh local foodstuffs daily. Small quantities of wild pea tendrils, spring garlic, heirloom tomatoes, and speckled lettuce plucked at first light will complete the Moroccan spiced salmon with hamachi sashimi and Colorouge, red wine, and apple compote that evening. The law of just-picked rules the menu.

You can't help but appreciate the culinary mastery at Studio, the elegant craftsman-cottage restaurant where Executive Chef Craig Strong holds court nightly. In addition to overseeing the main dining room, Strong personally attends to the Chef's Table just off the kitchen, a cozy private dining room with fireplace and ocean views that opens onto the kitchen for a front-row seat on the action. Here, Strong prepares and presents six to eight robust courses *à la minute*. Some groups request a menu; the more adventurous leave it up to the chef. A sommelier, one of eight on staff, selects from the resort's voluminous wine cellar, which includes 45,000 bottles and 2,200 labels that represent three centuries of winemaking. Groups can reserve both the 80-seat Studio and the 12-seat Chef's Table.

Equal care goes into preparing the accoutrements for the 150 selections on the Montage cheese menu, which include 80 rare honeys, brioche, sautéed Marcona almonds, brandy-soaked grape compote, and gluten-free caramel

crackers, to name but a few.

Montage Laguna Beach welcomes corporate groups with the same meticulous attention to small details that makes it one of our favorite beach destinations.

Palace Hotel

San Francisco, California

Rack Rate: from \$199-\$499

Rooms: 553

Total Meeting Space: 53,000 sq. ft.

Not to Miss: The magical Sunday brunch in the Garden Court

Sales: 888.291.0336

Web: www.sfpalace.com

San Francisco's stately Palace Hotel has rightly garnered great bucketfuls of stars, diamonds, and other accolades during its first century of superior service, but its crowning achievement may be the special place it holds in the hearts of its guests. There's something magical here, conjured up by unforgettable meals and perfectly pitched aperitifs that makes total strangers feel instantly at home and yearn to return, as locals do, to celebrate life's milestones.

We love the timeless elegance of Garden Court, a picture-perfect indoor courtyard with lush tropical foliage, Italian marble columns, and Austrian crystal chandeliers beneath a



The St. Regis Deer Crest Resort's Wine Vault, an after-hours spot that racks up rave reviews.

four-story stained-glass dome. Dungeness Crab Salad with Green Goddess dressing (invented here in 1923) remains its signature dish, although executive chef Jesse Llapatin's all-seafood Jumbo Lump Crab Cakes with micro greens vinaigrette has developed a cult following all its own. The Garden Court can be reserved for groups to 800; for larger groups, two adjoining ballrooms expand its capacity to 5,000-plus.

Chef Llapatin's passion for interactive dining stations transforms buffets from a forced march to a movable feast. Groups love to partake in preparing their meal, whether by selecting a sauce for their entree or sharing the fun of such ingenious desserts as bruleed cherries in Pop Rocks candy.

The Pied Piper Bar, watering hole to the financial district, lures a merry band of regulars and visitors with its Cheers-style bonhomie. Named for the Maxfield Parrish mural above the bar, the Pied Piper is renowned for its martinis, extolled by longtime newspaper columnist Herb Caen. Historic themed cocktails include the Lady in Red (Belvedere, cranberry, Chambord), in honor of the sociable house ghost. Groups can reserve the adjoining Maxwell's restaurant for a convivial corporate event. Had we left our heart in San Francisco, the Palace Hotel is the first place we would look for it.

The St. Regis Deer Crest Resort

Park City, Utah

Rack Rate: from \$189 summer; \$499 winter

Rooms: 181

Total Meeting Space: 7,658 sq. ft.

Not to Miss: The Mountain Terrace's Garden of Fire illuminated by fire pits at night

Sales: 866.779.4564

Web: www.stregis.com/deercrest

Mountaintops tend to tease the taste buds, especially after an exhilarating day spent carving pristine Utah powder or hiking fields of wildflowers in pursuit of the perfect photo. Fortunately, The St. Regis Deer Crest Resort in the exclusive gated community above Park City greets every return with a warming hearth and a tantalizing menu of victuals, rituals, and spirits guaranteed to elevate the senses. The stylish contemporary take on a mountain retreat leaves you daydreaming about being snowed in.

The St. Regis Bar commemorates the invention of the Bloody Mary at the St. Regis New York in 1934 with its own variation and daily ritual. Deer Crest builds its version, the 7452 Mary (named after the local elevation), with locally-distilled Vodka 7000, black lava salt, cayenne pepper, and wasabi-celery foam garnish. Other signature spirited rituals include the Cognac Ritual (flights of cognac and chocolate truffles) in the Wine Vault, the Champagne Ritual (a history walk that concludes with a sunset champagne savoring) at the Fire Garden on the Mountain Terrace, and afternoon tea in the Library. Groups may arrange private rituals or partake individually.

We love the Western Slope twist on American nouvelle cuisine at the J&G Grill, where chef de cuisine Matthew Harris practices his "slow food" philosophy in a lively exhibition kitchen. The stacked quartz stone walls and double-sided, wood-burning fireplace create the perfect atmosphere in which to savor Pork Chops with Pistachio Pesto, Rice Cracker Crusted Tuna with Citrus-Chili Emulsion, and Glazed Short Ribs with Apple-Jalapeno Puree. The cozy Chef's Table and outdoor terrace overlooking the ski slopes affords groups of ten a chef's-eye view of the culinary arts.

For larger groups, the Wine Vault features two 20-capacity connected dining rooms lined with the hotel's 4,000-bottle collection, the perfect intimate setting for a Winemaker's Dinner from the J&G kitchen.