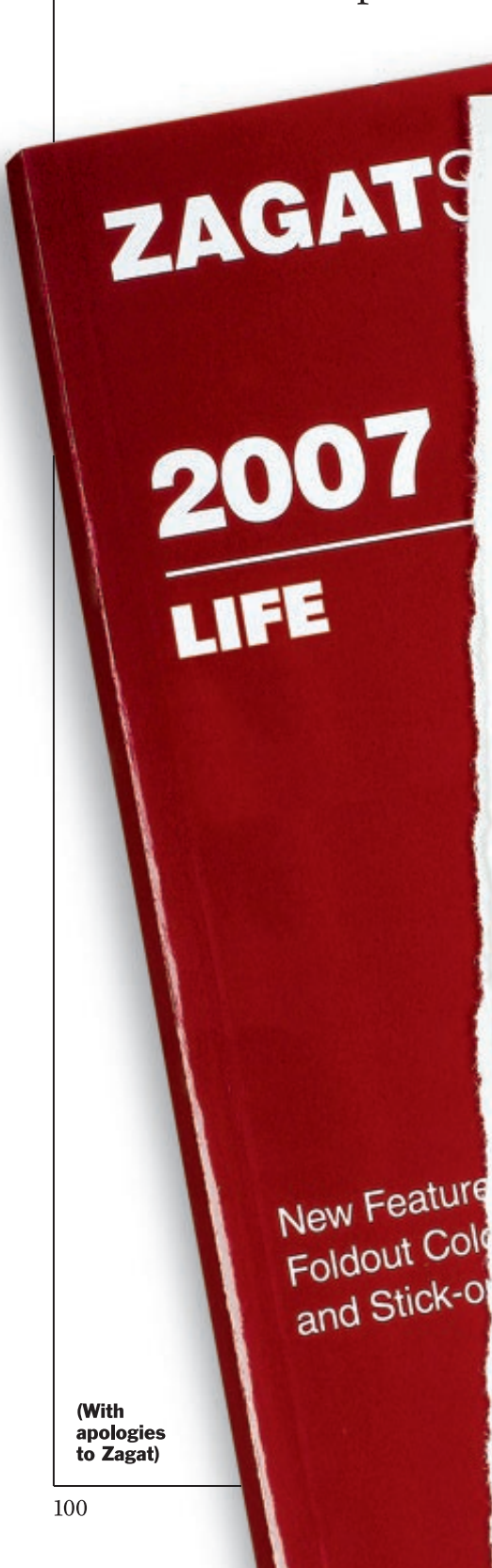


Evan Eisenberg

Zagat's Guide to Life

What the top restaurant review might say about what really matters



(With apologies to Zagat)

F | D | S | C

Love 23 | 24 | 15 | \$\$\$

"Book far in advance" for this "once-in-a-lifetime experience"—and even then the hostess may "conveniently lose" your reservation if she "doesn't like your looks." Opinions are violently divided, with some calling the fare and ambiance "sublime," while others find them "horribly disappointing" and "as pleasant as a kick in the kishkes." Most agree that repeat visits "bring diminishing returns" and that customers are unlikely to recover the "thrill" of "that first fine, careless pig-out," a euphoria that tends to "evaporate when the check arrives."

Work 12 | 15 | — | —

The "food is awful" and "the portions too big" at this "ubiquitous," "impossible-to-avoid" self-service chain. The "gimmicky," "dim-witted" shackle-and-salad-bar setup manages to combine "maximum effort" with "minimum choice." You can "spend the day there" and "be hungry two minutes later"—and "in desperate need of a drink."

Religion 19 | 20 | 22 | \$\$

If you can "suspend disbelief" and buy into the "somewhat far-fetched premise," you'll love the "old-fashioned," "mind-etherizing," "stick-to-your-arteries comfort food" at this "uptown stalwart." Fans praise the place as "friendly" and "great for kids," while critics complain that it "sells the sizzle, not the steak." "Watch your back," in any case: brawls break out "as regular as clockwork," as they have "since Julia Child was an altar boy."

Death 14 | 25 | 12 | \$

Though it's been around "seemingly forever," surprisingly few firsthand reports have come in on this "downtown (way downtown) institution." Some of those who have sampled it rave about the "ethereal décor" and "warm, subtly diffuse lighting" that greet those who pass through the "dramatically dark," "tunnel-like" entrance. The staff "welcomes you like an old friend," and it's a great place for reunions with "folks you haven't seen in years." Critics, though, find the place "stuffy and overheated" and warn that service is so "excruciatingly slow" that you "may start to wonder whether you're ever getting out of there."

Taxes 12 | 13 | 9 | \$\$\$\$

The "hokey" Wild West theme—waiters in "Jesse James getup" take your money at gunpoint—"gets old pretty quickly," especially when they "don't bother taking your order." Some, however, find the predictability of the routine as "comforting as a hot bath" and point out that those who can "read the fine print" on the menu may find that "yes, Virginia, there is a free lunch."

Sex 17 | 12 | 19 | \$\$

"If you can't get into Love," check out its "downscale sib," where the fare is "sometimes subpar" but the "service is way faster." Devotees say the "cheap but addictive" menu really "hits the spot," while dissenters warn that "satisfaction is not guaranteed." The establishment's cleanliness is "several blocks from godliness," they say, and wonder if "a call to the board of health may not be in order." But even the most skeptical admit that "as empty calories go, these totally rock."

F = Food D = Décor S = Service C = Cost