



PENNY DE LOS SANTOS (2)



THE KING OF LA

Sure, he was the first superstar of the American food revolution that took off in the 1980s; yes, he defined California cuisine and then exported it to the rest of the country. But Wolfgang Puck isn't content to rest on his laurels. Not long ago, at his Santa Monica restaurant Chinois on Main—which pioneered Asian fusion cooking when it opened, in 1983—the Austrian-born chef took a bite of the roasted Cantonese duck and frowned. Could it be better? He decided that instead of cooking the duck for 80 minutes before service and 20 minutes when an order comes in, the kitchen should do more of the cooking *à la minute*. The result: an even more delicious duck. "I'm not sentimental," Puck says. "I only look ahead." On the immediate horizon are major restaurant openings in Singapore, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles, more midrange Wolfgang Puck Bistro outlets, and more Wolfgang Puck Express locations in airports and malls around the country. And then there are all the catering deals, the cookware line, the grocery products, and the TV appearances. Still, Puck is at his most impressive when he's delivering inspired takes on familiar flavor combinations, as in his signature pizza topped with smoked salmon and caviar or the beet and goat cheese napoleons (above; see page 86 for a recipe) at Spago, the restaurant that started it all. Behind the brand, he remains, first and foremost, a chef. "If a Spago customer gets a bad pizza at the airport," Puck says, "I'll hear about it." —Laurie Ochoa, cofounder of *Slake*, a quarterly journal about Los Angeles