

# Inside Club 33 at Disneyland

*Photos and a tour of Disney's most exclusive dining experience*



There is a whimsical, almost indescribable feeling in Disneyland's New Orleans Square. This sensation comes from the narrow, detailed alleyways, the strings of Mardi Gras beads that hang overhead, and the smell of Creole spices steaming from restaurant windows. There are tiny shops, jazz singers, and even Disney Cast Members dressed in elegant, 1940s-style costumes. . . and—for those that know—New Orleans Square is also home to a secret club.

For most of my life, Disneyland's Club 33 was a mythic place that I could only dream of entering. I would stare at its door, waiting for the day I'd enter for a chance to experience Disney's best-kept secret. Visualized by



Walt Disney as a place to gather his investors, it's the only spot in the Disneyland Park with a full bar, an enormous selection of wine, and a 5-star restaurant. Disney is very secretive about Club 33's cost and access. A-list celebrities and Fortune 500 CEOs are rumored to be amongst

its members. I've heard that starting fees are \$25,000 with \$12,000 annual dues. There are many perks to becoming a member, including exclusive access to new attractions, private events, VIP tour guides, valet parking, hotel upgrades, and more. The wait list for the club can be extensive. At one point, it was rumored to be fourteen years long until Disney opened more slots in 2012.

The club's entrance is tucked away in one of the Big Easy alleys, only marked by its titular number (there's an older, now "false" entrance that many think is the real deal). To get inside, you'll need to ring the bell and wait. A Cast Member will ask the name of the reservation before allowing access.

The check-in room is small but wonderful nonetheless. There is regal wallpaper, breezy curtains, and striking décor like, a gorgeous bust of Marie Antoinette. Once you've checked in, you're escorted to an atrium-style outdoor area called the Court of Angels (due to the angelic statues). The opulence continues with a winding staircase, a water fountain, and even a glowing caged fairy.



**From left to right:** Bust of Marie Antoinette, Court of Angels atrium, Alfred the Audio-Animatronic Vulture, and the entrance to Le Salons

The restaurant and lounge portions of Club 33 are on the second floor. Those walking the streets of New Orleans Square don't see or hear the dining guests from the above VIP club. However, there is a balcony for diners of Club 33 to eat on—but, as we were told, not to drink.

On this brisk January evening, we elected to dine inside. As we waited for our table, a Cast Member reminded us that we weren't in the proper attire. Usually, we'd be embarrassed by this type of oversight, but this reservation was made thirty minutes before our arrival. We weren't prepared for the treat we'd find that day. Club 33 requires collared shirts for men, so we purchased their signature polos—which fit surprisingly well!

On our way into the Le Grande Salon restaurant, we saw a long hallway with wine and a lounge. In the central area was a large chandelier and a

vulture oddly placed on a grandfather clock. When we looked away, the bird spoke to us in a gruff tone. We quickly whipped our heads back to see that he was an audio-animatronic. The hostess told us that his name was Alfred. The Disney magic, as it seemed, was just beginning.

We saw dozens of dining guests filling the lavish yet intimate dining area. All were smiling—much different scene than at the other fine dining experiences we've had at exclusive clubs. Though Club 33 transports guests away from the hustle and bustle of Disneyland, this space was sprinkled with reminders of the thrills that exist outside its doors. There was a family-friendly vibe as parents fed their young children. A few diners were wearing Mickey ears with their gowns.

Being that the restaurant is 5-star, the wait staff was impeccable. If you needed to use the restroom, you'd find a newly refolded napkin waiting for you. Everyone was friendly, courteous, and not presumptuous in any way (unlike some of the other fine-dining establishments we've visited).

Speaking of the restroom, that was an entirely different experience. We weren't allowed to take photos (we wouldn't post restroom photos anyway), but the walls were covered in rich, dark wood. There was a bookshelf with a tissue box inside one of the books. Tiny bottles of mouthwash and other toiletries were in large mason jars and baskets. The best part, however, was the toilet stall. Though it was motion-activated, there was also an old-style hand pull and copper pipes that would flush the bowl. All of it was strangely amusing!

We were able to choose from a large selection of cocktails, or ask for our favorite drink from the full bar. We chose champagne, and I also ordered a mai tai (it just felt like something a Disney Imagineer might ask for—and the best mai tai that I've ever had). The idea of being served hard alcohol in Disneyland was thrilling. It was like being seventeen and receiving wine on

Christmas by one of our family members. We were breaking an age-old rule in the cleverest way.

If you're curious about the numbers, dinner was a five-course meal at \$130 per plate. There was also a five-course wine pairing starting at \$65 a plate. We began with osetra caviar served with potatoes, chives, and sour cream (not included in the five-course meal). The caviar was mildly salty, and the waiter was happy to bring us extra potatoes to try with it. For the appetizer, I chose the grilled winter white asparagus with black truffle aioli. The asparagus was thick and crunchy, which perfectly meshed with the creamy aioli. Second, I had the green oak salad with spiced walnuts and cranberry tangerine vinaigrette. This was a sweet and salty combination that flowed perfectly after the appetizer.



**From left to right:** Grilled winter white asparagus with black truffle aioli, Roasted duck with kale gnocchi, Braised beef short rib, Warm pineapple upside-down cake with pineapple sorbet

For the third plate and the entrée, I chose the roasted duck with kale gnocchi and braised beef short rib. I'm not much of a duck fan, but this was fantastic. The flavor was more buttery than gamey, and the gnocchi was perfectly pillowy. I believe that Disney has some of the best short rib, and Club 33 delivered the finest I've ever had. Each bite was crisply charred, yet it melted in my mouth. I concluded the meal with an order of warm pineapple upside-down cake. Dessert was served with a pineapple sorbet that tasted just like Disneyland's famed Dole Whip. The combination of tropical flavors was excitingly sweet and not too punchy.



At the end, we were stuffed from the food and warm from the cocktails and champagne. It was time to pay the bill and head back into the main park. Yet, I didn't want to leave. The walls were covered in artwork from original sketches of Sleeping Beauty Castle and the Mark Twain Riverboat. The rest of the décor was a hodgepodge of curios from around the globe. I had a hundred questions and not enough time to ask.

Shortly after, we blissfully thanked the hostess before walking down the steps into the atrium and exiting the doors. As the crisp winter hair brushed my face, I saw a family of four eagerly stare inside. A mother and father guided their young son's attention to the white bust in the corner. Their teenage daughter looked at me with wide eyes as I walked by. They absorbed as much as they could, smiling and shaking with joy before the door closed. I knew that feeling all too well. It's the thrill of knowing that there are more corners of Disneyland to explore. And, for me, I'm excited that I haven't seen them all.