

LAWEEKLY

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SUMMER
Dine LA Restaurant Week
IS BACK

By Michele Stueven

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CULTURE

COMEDY Q&A: TAMARA YAJIA'S PARENTS STARTED AN EL POLLO LOCO KNOCKOFF CALLED 'SEXY CHICKEN'

BY MARK STEFANOS



Tamara Yajia and Mark Duplass at Skylight Books in Los Feliz, July, 2.

COURTESY EZEQUIEL AIZENBERG @EZEAIZEN

With a sparkle in her eye, and biting honesty that cuts to your core, **Tamara Yajia** is as magnetic a real-life showwoman as she is a hilarious writer.

We first saw her perform at her bizarre yet endearing one-woman show "Cumming of Age" back in 2015, and got better acquainted through the IRL-LOLs her relentless **Twitter feed** would summon. She's written for Funny or Die, *Clickhole*, and on some of your favorite shows, like "Acapulco" and "This Fool."

Her new book "**Cry for Me, Argentina: My Life As a Failed Child Star**," available now, chronicles how she was born for the stage. Her earliest performances were in Argentina, where as a nine-year-old, she performed "Just Like a Prayer" at her Jewish community center and stripped down to near-nudity in front of a bunch of old rabbis, then was cast in the Argentine version of the Mickey Mouse Club only to have to decline, as

her parents decided to emigrate to the U.S. (then shuttled her and her sister Nat back and forth between the two countries).

"Cry for Me, Argentina" is the perfect summer read — you'll cry and laugh and crylaugh. At a recent conversation about it at Skylight Books with Mark Duplass, who also blurbbed her 2022 bathroom tome "**Poems I Wrote While Taking a Shit**," she talked about how her zany family ("psychotic Jews, inheriting trauma and being depraved people") made her the woman she is today — her poppers-selling gramps, her grandmas salami farts, and the El Pollo Loco knockoff her parents launched at mall food court when they came to America, Sexy Chicken.

"Last night, Dad called me and he was scared that Child Protective Services would come and deport them because of their treatment of me as a child," she said about the release of her memoir. Dad should be proud — the book makes the case that if you have a deliriously

deranged family you might turn out the better for it.

Tamara brims with life, and her superpower is that she's unflinchingly, maybe compulsively, real when talking about it, almost like she was born with her embarrassment gene in reverse. "I made a New Year's resolution to stop oversharing. It lasted half a conversation," she overshared.

To get a sense of her simultaneously mischievous and confessional nature, just as they were about to start the Q&A portion of the reading, Tamara claimed she had questions planted in the audience like "Does your butt smell?"

We never got the answer, so let's find out:

LA WEEKLY: Does your butt smell?
Tamara Yajia: Not right this moment.

You've said "nostalgia is a drug" — what bits of nostalgia are your go-to drugs?



Tamara Yajia

Music from certain eras of my life, especially my childhood. If I put on something like 'Rain' by Madonna, I'm doing it to torture myself with nostalgia. Also smells — car exhaust, wet cement, bad perfume and cigarettes take me back to Buenos Aires.

What do you think would have happened if you never left Argentina?

I would have been famous at age 11. At that age I was cast in the Argentine version of the Mickey Mouse Club. It was a group of kids that wore primary colors and sang songs about how one must take care of the Earth. I had to turn the job down because we were about to immigrate to the U.S, but the show went on to become huge. Had I stayed on that path, I'd like to think that by age 20 I would have had a nervous breakdown because fame at a young age sucks ass. Or maybe I would have adjusted perfectly and become the Argentine Lady Gaga.

Why'd you decide to write a book about your family?

Because they are the most insane people I've ever met. The world needs to know that I had a grandfather who sold poppers and got kicked out of the Argentine army for putting pubic lice on his lieutenant's food. Or that my [67-year-old mom sells pictures of her inflamed bunions on OnlyFans](#).

How did your family react when they found out you were writing a book about them?

They fucking loved it because they're a bunch of narcissists lol.

What was the writing process like?

I can't sit down to write for long periods of time. So I'd sit down for like 30 minutes every morning and slowly chip away at it. It took me two years. I'm like the slow and steady tortoise from that old fable or whatever.

COURTESY OF TAMARA YAJIA

What was your childhood like?

It was unstable as hell. My parents couldn't decide where to live so we moved from Argentina to the United States, back to Argentina, and then back to the United States all in the span of eight years. I'd go from feeling safe and surrounded by family to feeling completely alone. When I was six we were poor and lived in a motel in West Hollywood where most of the other occupants were sex workers. I was a child but can still remember my mom having a breakdown after she found a blond pubic hair on the sheets.

Where'd you grow up?

Buenos Aires, Argentina. My great grandparents, grandparents and parents all lived in a neighborhood called Villa Crespo, which was founded in the late 1880s after a big shoe factory opened up, causing the town to become populated. It wasn't the chicest neighborhood. It was predominantly Jewish. The buildings had chipped paint from weather damage and there were lots of clothes drying on racks on people's balconies. The streets were cobblestone and didn't get paved until I was like four. I loved it. I still love it. Once I took a super white boyfriend there on vacation and he told me it made him depressed. We broke up.

What was your first job?

Tagging baseball caps at the Quicksilver factory in Orange County. I was 15 and I was fired after a manager overheard me asking a coworker if she'd ever had anal sex. She was like 50 and she in fact had had anal sex. She told me "Lube was key." I lasted five days at most.

What kind of person were you in high school?

I was incredibly depressed, especially the first few years. I had just returned to the U.S and was incredibly lonely and insecure. I thought I had to be slutty to fit



in. I had cystic acne and bleached blond hair that was dry as hell.

What's the craziest thing that's happened to you?

I became friends with Brad Pitt for a while. I farted in front of him at a concert. It stunk and made his eyes water. He ran and hid behind a tree.

What's your most niche interest?

I like to print out Wikipedia pages and collect them in a binder.

If you could play someone in a movie or show, who would you play?

Rodney Dangerfield

If someone could play you, who would it be?

Rodney Dangerfield

Favorite drama movie:

All About My Mother by Pedro Almodovar

Favorite Book:

"Tampa" by Alissa Nutting

Favorite cigarette brand:

Parliament Lights

Favorite swear word:

Cunt 🇺🇸

WHAT'S UP POPPING UP

Summer Dine LA Restaurant Week Is Back

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

The **Dine LA Restaurant Week** of summer meal deals returns from Friday, July 25, through Friday, August 8, with an entire city of restaurants from A to Z participating in lunch and dinner prix fixe specials.

Maison Kasai at Level 8 will have a \$75 prix fixe dinner menu that blends French and Japanese techniques with a touch of performance art. The three-course menu highlights include large iron grills, preparing a choice of the cauliflower katsu curry, king salmon, organic chicken breast, or the A5 Wagyu teppanyaki burger finished off with the calamansi sorbet. Book via [OpenTable](#). Start the meal with a choice of guacamole or guacasabi, followed by a three-course selection that includes dessert. For dinner, each meal begins with a glass of sparkling cava and an amuse-bouche, followed by a choice of appetizers and entrée options like branzino frito, carnitas, and vegan mushroom fiesta. Additionally, The Hideaway will donate 10% of every DineLA purchase to Palisades Charter Elementary, which burned down in the fires and was attended by the sons of co-owner Sylvain Bitton.

Amour in West Hollywood is offering a \$85 dineLA dinner menu, featuring a choice of appetizer, entrée, and dessert. French classics like escargots, filet mignon Béarnaise, blanquette de volaille, and pasta carbonara are on the menu.

Firefly, in Studio City, will feature a special \$65 per person dinner during Dine LA, with 10% of the proceeds benefiting a charity (to be announced) supporting those affected by the LA fires. The prix fixe menu includes a glass of champagne and offers vegetarian-friendly options. Menu highlights include big eye tuna tartare, duck confit, steak frites, and mushroom pappardelle. Dessert choices include sticky toffee cake and white chocolate crème brûlée.

The recently opened **WeVINO** in Westlake Village is offering a \$45 dinner menu with fresh, handmade pastas like paccheri ai tre pomodori and their signature caviar

tagliarini (a \$12 add-on), plus a house-made Tira-Cotta to finish. With the kitchen led by Chef Edward Brik, WeVINO pairs modern Italian cooking with an extensive wine list, a distinctive cocktail program in a warm, stylish setting.

At the **Fairmont Breakers in Long Beach**, every Thursday from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., there will be a Pearl Affair at Alter Ego with \$2 oysters and handpicked drink pairings, which include Del Maguey Vide Mezcal, Bartolomiol Organic Prosecco, and Lost Coast or Ball Stout for smoky, bubbly, or creamy pairings. All food and drinks are available for purchase at Alter Ego, and seating is first-come, first-served. More information can be found on [Eventbrite](#).

Taking place from July 25 through August 5, at the historic hotel's Nettuno, the menu of traditional Italian flavors includes tagliatelle Bolognese and chicken paillard, creamy burrata with caramelized pear and prosciutto, and bucatini al Contadino. Nettuno's full menus for Dine LA can be found [online](#).

Available from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. and priced \$55 per person for dinner, the Uchi West Hollywood's menu includes hama chili with yellowtail, ponzu, chili, and orange supreme, zero sen temaki with yellowtail, avocado, and shallot, nigiri with hirame, korean flounder, madai and Japanese sea bream. There's also crispy pork belly with market vegetables, chashu sauce and fried vermicelli, grilled cobia with candied citrus and ponzo as well as a seasonal candy bar.

Cara Cara, the rooftop restaurant perched atop **Downtown LA Proper Hotel** with sweeping views of the downtown skyline will be participating with both lunch and dinner menus available daily. Cara Cara's \$65 three-course dinner menu includes white trumpet mushroom focaccia, hanger steak, and seasonal paletas. Lunch offerings feature seasonal selections like avocado bruschetta, chipotle cauliflower tacos, and vanilla bean flan. Reservations can be made on [OpenTable](#). 📱



Millefeuille at Amour WeHo

COURTESY AMOUR WEHO



Salmon with Pistachio Crust, Bulgur, & Moringa Sauce



Smoked White Asparagus Tartare with Tonburi



New Caledonia Blue Prawn Carpaccio



Chawanmushi



Cara Cara

COURTESY CARA CARA



COURTESY CARA CARA



Roasted Carrot Tacos



Heirloom Tomato Salad



Ceviche



Courtesy Cara Cara



WeVINO

COURTESY CRTE AGENCY



Somm Andrei Garcia Starshaya



Carpaccio Di Filetto



Paccheri Al Tre Pomodori



Interior

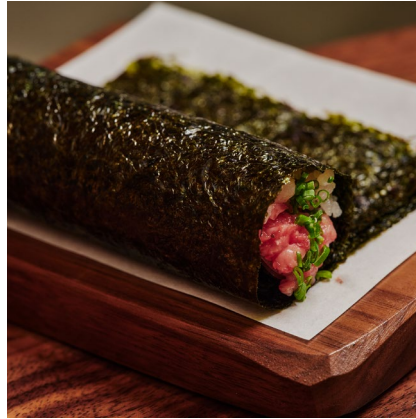


Lobster Corn Dogs



Uchi WeHo

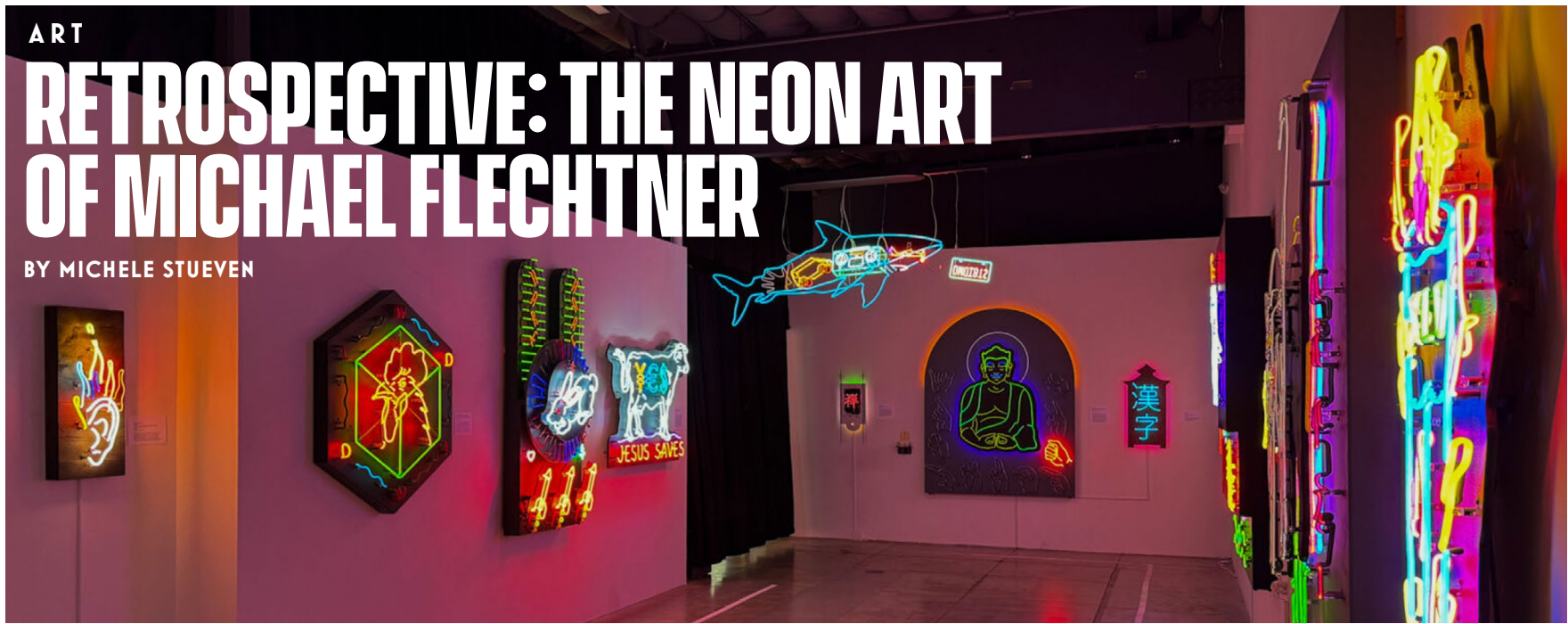
COURTESY UCHI WEHO



ART

RETROSPECTIVE: THE NEON ART OF MICHAEL FLECHTNER

BY MICHELE STUEVEN



Michael Flechtner Exhibition

COURTESY DEMI SEDRAKYAN

The opening retrospective of artist Michael Flechtner: *Ecce Artifex* took place on Friday, July 11, at the [Museum of Neon Art](#). Flechtner has made a lasting mark on the art form of neon through his mastery of three-dimensional sculpture, his employment of visual puns, and his role in mentoring future generations of neon benders.

Born in Tiffin, Ohio, Flechtner had an early interest in colored light and electronics. He incorporated some of these elements into his first artworks while a Bachelor of Fine Arts student at Columbus College of Art and Design and during his Master of Fine Arts studies at Wichita State University.

After a trip to MONA, the artist decided he would learn how to bend neon so that he could move to Los Angeles and participate in the popular new media scene. He enrolled in a six-week neon fabricating class with Freddy Elliott in Salina, Kansas. This taught Flechtner enough hands-on skills to work in a neon sign shop after relocating to Los Angeles.

He pursued commercial neon by day and his own sculptural neon by night at his studio in Van Nuys. “Considering my first visit to MONA in the late ‘80s and discovering this world of ‘Neon Art,’ my having an exhibit at MONA is coming full circle,” Flechtner said in a press release.

In 1991, Flechtner presented his first solo exhibition at the Museum of Neon Art. The exhibition was titled *Ecce Signum*, Latin for “Behold the Sign.” The title was emblematic of the artist’s play with a medium often associated with



Michael Flechtner Installs “Sea Goat” in MONA Galleries

COURTESY CORRIE SIEGEL

signage as well as his interest in symbols. Flechtner’s work transcends the category of signage, bringing it into the context of sculpture and conceptual art. Now, thirty-four years later, the title for his follow-up exhibition at MONA translates to “Behold the Craftsman.” The title serves as a testament to the simultaneous humility and skill that neon craftspeople cultivate in order to create their works.

Flechtner’s best-known public work in Los Angeles is the Neon Aquarium at Olympic and Sawtelle, completed in 1998. In 1999, he became a J. Paul Getty Trust Fund Fellow. He was commissioned by the USPS in 2011 to design a postage stamp for the Forever series: the Neon Celebrate! Stamp. The original artwork is held in the Smithsonian National



“A-mazed doing our level best”

COURTESY MONA

Postal Museum. Flechtner also received the Botticelli Award and the Ford Foundation Award. In addition to his own work, he fabricates neon for other artists, including Bruce Nauman, Frank Romero, Stephen Antonakos, Doug Aitken, Alexandra Grant, and Betye Saar.

Established in 1981, MONA in Glendale exhibits cutting-edge electric, kinetic, and light-based artworks and historic signage to illuminate the past, present, and future through permanent and rotating exhibitions. MONA is one of the oldest continually artist-led and founded museums in the country; the first museum dedicated to preserving electric, kinetic, and neon art; and one of the few museums in the world co-founded by a high school student.

The Museum’s collection includes

contemporary neon art, vernacular signage, and electrical and technical equipment. Throughout its 40+ year history, MONA has fostered an awareness of historic neon signage through its LUMENS project with the City of L.A., which restored and relit many signs across the city skyline, and its popular bus tour, the “Neon Cruise.” MONA has witnessed the rise and fall of neon used by the sign industry and the current resurgence of neon used by creative artists and commercial designers today. Throughout its history, MONA has sustained and celebrated a community of artists and preserved specialized skills and knowledge in order to carry neon, plasma, kinetic, electric, and glass arts into another generation.

The exhibit runs through June 2026. 📍

REVIEW: 'EDDINGTON' UNMASKS THE CONTROVERSIES OF THE MASK ERA

BY ASHER LUBERTO

There aren't many universal good things to come out of COVID, perhaps except for an increased appreciation for nature, a newfound love of sourdough bread, and Ari Aster's new movie *Eddington*, which tackles our collective anxieties and political paranoia during COVID with a bracingly nasty and bombastically amusing satire.

A cinematic version of doom scrolling, *Eddington* unmaskes the controversies of the mask era. With many people looking back on COVID, wondering what the heck happened, Aster (*Hereditary*) conducts a diabolically sinister, distinctly wonderful and deliriously over-the-top checkup on the zeitgeist in 2020, searching for answers to an almost unanswerable question: where did it all go wrong? There isn't a clear diagnosis to that question, other than it did indeed all go to hell.

It's been nearly five years of citizens holding grudges over the way businesses and schools were shut down during COVID. Parents blame their kids' social awkwardness on government lockdowns, many individuals blame their crippling debt on not being able to clock-in, divorce rates skyrocketed and social cues plummeted due to people not being able to gather in public places. (I personally was irked by such strict regulations — as a social person who enjoys gathering with friends, going out with my girlfriend and traveling around the globe, I found the laws to be stringently unfair — while seeing other sides as well, especially when my mother's best friend died of COVID, a devastating, unfathomable loss that helped me understand the severity of the disease.)

Everyone has their own bouts with COVID, including the fictional characters in *Eddington*. A small town in New Mexico, Eddington becomes a microcosm of 2020 America, as talking points like political divide, racial disharmony, protest movements and mask debates are thrown into a blender to form a seedy smoothie of hysteria. When Sheriff Joe Cross (Joaquin Phoenix) is pulled over by an Indigenous sheriff for entering another jurisdiction without a face mask, he claims to be an asthmatic who can't breathe with the mask on. His hatred



Joaquin Phoenix and Pedro Pascal in "Eddington"

COURTESY A24

of mask mandates pins him against the town's mask-endorsing mayor, Ted Garcia (Pedro Pascal), who is up for re-election and who is pushing a new artificial intelligence data center in town, which would gobble up resources of the people who actually want to live there.

Joe has other conflicts as well, including his uncommunicative wife Louise (Emma Stone), who creates dolls that look like they're straight out of Aster's breakout film, *Hereditary*, and his mother-in-law Dawn (Deirdre O'Connell), who has moved into their home and blabs about conspiracy theories to no end. To say Joe's life is a mess is an understatement. He's swayed by a delirious activist (Austin Butler) into committing crimes, runs for mayor at the behest of others and eventually spirals into Travis Bickle-levels of insanity.

At points, the film bites off more than it can chew as Joe is thrown into a whirlwind of George Floyd protests, secrets

involving government mandates, vaccines and coverups, throwing so many cultural talking points into the mix that it becomes overbearing instead of eye-opening. In this bleak film, there are no good guys, and everyone is reprehensible — all conspiracy theories come to fruition and all sides are hypocritical. When Black Lives Matter takes to the streets, brandishing signs over their heads, an egregious white liberal interrogates a black policeman for not joining their protest. "I have experienced racism, but you haven't," she declares, digging her pointer finger into his chest. You can practically hear the eye rolls from audience members around you.

All these characters are clearly recognizable, and Aster reluctantly understands them all, regardless of their political beliefs. He's a keen conveyor of how humans can be pushed to madness, particularly when grappling with grief, a recurring theme he pairs with nightmarish

visuals and almost unmatched mood pieces (see: *Hereditary*, *Midsommar*) and for the first movie in his career, he throws in humor, crafting a visceral, funny, absurd, annoying and frightening broken mirror to our shattered society.

After spinning through a constantly revolving door of crazed characters, Aster doesn't so much arrive at a conclusion so much as he evokes more questions. Its lack of answers can be infuriating, offering few epiphanies and fewer resolutions along the way, but it very much does for COVID what paranoia films did for the 70s. It captures a feeling, not so much a story, and watching Joe lose his mind due to the tumultuous climate around him may very well make him the modern answer to Travis Bickle — just change his catchphrase from "you talking to me?" to "you Tweeting at me?" and you got a deranged activist for the COVID era. [E]