



Eat With Your Eyes

Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group makes a masterpiece of Café NOMA

How about a glass of chilled rosé while gazing at a trio of ancient Roman drinking cups? Or a *Ham and Gruyère Panini* as you contemplate a West African wine vessel? Blurring the lines between refreshment venue and gallery space, the new and enlarged **Café NOMA** at the **New Orleans Museum of Art** brings treasured objects from the museum's permanent collection into view for visitors enjoying the hospitality of the popular Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group concession. The longtime partnership with one of New Orleans' most notable restaurateurs extends the museum's mission of enlightenment, engagement, and inspiration, especially as it emerges from a major renovation this spring – one that thoughtfully presents works of visual art in a setting of culinary artistry.

Featuring a dramatic installation of colorful and distinctly shaped objects for food and beverage, designed in collaboration with NOMA's curatorial team, the display of 90 works spans the vast range of the museum's extraordinary collection of world art and graces the entire wall behind a 24-foot-long upholstered banquette. The visual feast is a celebration of dining cultures - from a striking blue mid-century glass decanter to a Japanese porcelain picnic box to an ornate late 1700s French soup tureen to a centuries-old earthenware tripod jar from Panama to a 2007 set of curvy stainless-steel flatware by architect Zaha Hadid - these disparate objects speak to the rich variety of design and artistry devoted to global culinary traditions over time. The installation marries the ongoing importance of such gastronomic traditions in the city of New Orleans.

The forward-looking renovation will also open sight lines between the museum's completely renovated and expanded Lapis Center for the Arts and Café NOMA, allowing the stylish food service venue to function as a more integrated partner in museum programming. Extensive expanses of glass will give guests in the café a clear view of a portion of the monumental bas-relief mural by the late New Orleans artist Enrique Alférez that has been rescued from now demolished The Times-Picayune building and installed in the NOMA auditorium. Commissioned fifty years ago to embellish the lobby of the newspaper's headquarters, the plaster panels, entitled *Symbols of Communication*, feature letterforms and symbols from throughout human history, creating a rhythmic surface pattern of delicate highlights and shadows.

The café, named 'One of America's Best Museum Restaurants' by *Travel + Leisure*, will enjoy increased seating in the Dathel and Tommy Coleman Courtyard looking out over historic City Park and a portion of the museum's lush Sydney and Walda Besthoff Sculpture Garden.

Meanwhile, the Café NOMA menu, in the masterful hands of "culinary curator" **Chris Montero**, has also undergone a thoughtful evolution that links its offerings to the museum's art collections and the city's culinary traditions. Seasonal, artisanal, and local as ever, its Big Salads, savory Flatbreads, colorful Market Bowls, Paninis, Sandwiches, and specialty Fries are focused on the flavors of New Orleans' extensive culture, while premium hot beverages, beers and wines, and cocktails like the *Café NOMA Lemonade* offer museumgoers refreshing sustenance to suit every mood and time of day.

The Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group is known for its commitment to its New Orleans community, and Ralph Brennan and his wife, Susan, a former NOMA trustee, are longtime supporters of the city's arts, in particular. Says Brennan, "We've always been especially proud of this partnership, and see this expansion as a further investment in the rituals and community of our beloved city. As our food service becomes even more integrated with the programming of the museum, it will continue to support the future of the arts in our city by engaging artists, students, locals, and tourists via more senses than one."

[For more information:](#)

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