



An American Tour: 73



Los Angeles's *Brown Derby*

The Brown Derby was the name of a chain of restaurants in Los Angeles, California. The first and most famous of these was shaped like a man's derby hat, an iconic image that became synonymous with the Golden Age of Hollywood. A chain of Brown Derby restaurants in Ohio are still in business today.

The chain was started by Robert H. Cobb and Herbert Somborn (a former husband of Gloria Swanson). It is often incorrectly thought that the Brown Derby was a single restaurant, and the Wilshire Boulevard and Hollywood branches are frequently confused. Gus Girves started the Brown Derby chain in Ohio in 1941.

Opened in 1926, the original restaurant at 3427 Wilshire Boulevard remains the most famous due to its distinctive shape. Whimsical architecture was popular at the time, and the restaurant was designed to catch the eye of passing motorists. It is said that the shape of the hat worn by New York governor and 1928 Democratic Party presidential candidate Al Smith, a personal friend of Somborn's, was an inspiration. Another theory claims that Somborn was told a good restaurateur could serve food out of a hat and still make a success of it.

The small cafe, close to popular Hollywood hot spots such as Coconut Grove at the Ambassador Hotel, became successful enough to warrant building a second branch.



The original, derby-shaped building was moved in 1937 to 3377 Wilshire Boulevard at the northeast corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Alexandria Avenue, about a block from its previous location (just north of the Ambassador Hotel).

The Brown Derby began its licensing program in 1987 with Walt Disney Company for a replica of the original Hollywood Brown Derby at the new Disney's Hollywood Studios in Orlando, Florida. In 1996, a ten-year agreement was entered into with MGM Grand Las Vegas Las Vegas, Nevada; in 1998, the MGM Grand Detroit, Michigan temporary facility was added. <http://en.wikipedia.org>

The original Wilshire Boulevard Brown Derby

