

# PÉTER'S PICKS & PANS



Péter Jacsó  
University of Hawaii

*Editor's Note: With this issue, PÉTER'S PICKS AND PANS column moves from EContent to ONLINE. In his column, award-winning reviewer Péter Jacsó highlights the best and the worst of online information resources he has recently encountered. His aim is to call attention to good sources and warn you away from inferior ones.*

**M**arch's Picks include the new, fourth edition of the American Heritage Dictionary, enhanced with audio and color images, and published by Bartleby.com free of charge on the Web. It is the latest gem in this growing collection of famous literary works and high-quality, ready-reference databases. The other pick is the DVD-ROM edition of the Encarta Reference Suite 2001, a collection of top-notch reference works. Each of them could be a pick, but the integration of the works and the media into a single unit makes the DVD-ROM edition the best choice. The pan is the Restaurant Row Dining Guide, a directory database of restaurants that bites off much more than it can chew. It is absurdly redundant, with thousands of duplicate and triplicate entries, very inconsistent and incomplete. It misguides you.

American Heritage  
Dictionary,  
Fourth Edition

Encarta DVD Reference  
Suite 2001

Restaurant Row  
Dining Guide



## the picks

### AMERICAN HERITAGE DICTIONARY, FOURTH EDITION

It tells you something about the power of Web publishing that a relative newcomer, Bartleby.com, managed—in March 2000, several months before the print edition was released—to get the rights to publish the latest edition of the well-respected Columbia Encyclopedia. Next, Bartleby.com published the brand-new fourth edition of the American Heritage Dictionary free of charge on the Web in September 2000, the same time the print edition shipped to stores. Formally launched in 1994, Bartleby.com really blossomed in 2000 with a series of classic literary works in digital format—courtesy of the low-profile founder and publisher, Steven H. van Leeuwen, a 21st century patron of literacy. The American Heritage Dictionary is one of the many gems in the collection.

The new edition has 90,000 entries, with nearly 10% of the textual content being new since the previous, 1996 edition. New

The screenshot shows the Bartleby.com website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Reference', 'Verse', 'Fiction', and 'Nonfiction'. Below that is a search bar with 'Dictionary' selected. The main content area shows the entry for 'digerati' from the American Heritage Dictionary, Fourth Edition (2000). The entry includes the word 'digerati', its syllabication 'dij-er-ati', and a definition: 'PLURAL NOUN: People who are knowledgeable about digital technologies such as computer programming and design. "the chasm between the high claims of the digerati and the misadventures of the novice Net user" (Publisher's Weekly) Publisher's Weekly, July 17, 1995.' The etymology is listed as 'dig(it)al + (it)erati'.

*New entries at Bartleby.com's American Heritage Dictionary have illustrative quotations with more specific source data.*



*Ill-defined content choice in the short entry result list from American Heritage Dictionary*

content means totally new entries as well as revised entries. Many of the words on the test list that I use to check the coverage of dictionaries were found in the fourth edition, but not in the third, such as “dis” (as in dissing someone), “chill out,” “ethnic cleansing,” “DVD,” “go postal,” “netizen,” and a dozen others. Many entries have revised definitions reflecting new knowledge and developments.

There are more usage and regional notes to amplify the dictionary’s well-done definitions. I am glad to see that new entries, such as “digerati,” have literary examples with precise citations to illustrate the use of a word in context. The citation format with the exact date of the source quoted lends credibility.

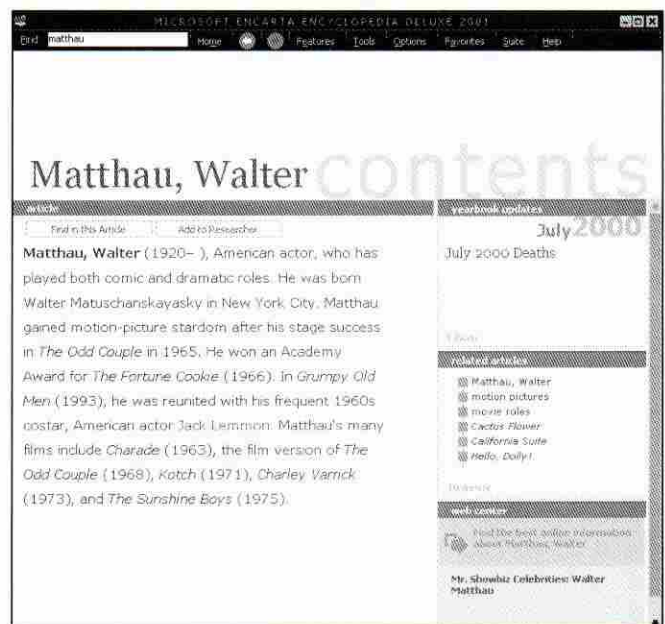
Browsing the entry words is an excellent new feature and unusual in free digital dictionaries. It gives you back some of the feeling of thumbing through a dictionary. You may select a range of words (for example, those between “portfolio” and “potter”), then browse the list of 300 words within the selected range. You may also browse the list of words that have regional, synonym, usage, or illustrative images.

Images and audio pronunciations are the latest additions to the digital edition of the dictionary. The images have been licensed from various sources, with a preference for country maps. Oddly, it also contains images for a large variety of knots. There are

about 900 images. This is much less than the 4,000 images in the latest print edition, but their quality is excellent once you enlarge the thumbnails. The only exceptions are the candy-colored images and the country maps—not the best in the genre. Deep links to superb digital map collections would have been more useful. The 70,000 audio pronunciations are excellent enhancements.

It is a pleasure to search the full text, but it is also important to be able to restrict the search to specific segments of the entries through a pull-down window. These include

*Walter Matthau Content Page with internal and external links from Encarta DVD Reference Suite 2001*



the definition, the entry word, or the etymology segment to find, say, all the words of Hawaiian origin, not just any article that has the word “Hawaiian” in it.

The excellent Taxis/Webinator software from Thunderstone allows the user to specify various default options for searching (proximity, pluralization) and relevance ranking of results by the combined weighting of several criteria.

The only significant weakness of the dictionary is the summary list of search results. Instead of taking the first (and often only) sentence from the definition, a confusing excerpt from the navigation area of the hit page is shown. To add to the confusion, several entries may have almost identical excerpts. This is a rude oversight that I have criticized in my earlier reviews of the Columbia Encyclopedia and the Simpson’s Quotations Dictionary to no avail. In spite of this irritating oversight, and minor reservations, Bartleby.com deserves to get accolades.

#### ENCARTA DVD REFERENCE SUITE 2001

The Encarta DVD-ROM Reference Suite 2001 database is the outstanding example for using the capacity of DVD to integrate reference sources that, in and of themselves, are outstanding. The 2001 edition of the Reference Suite adds a new

component—the third edition of the beautiful Encarta Africana. Along with the Encyclopedia Deluxe, the Interactive World Atlas, and the World English Dictionary, the Reference Suite packs a knockout punch. It has far more than meets the eye. The dictionary itself is not merely the digital version of the print edition, but has numerous extra Encarta components, such as the Thesaurus (the Americanized version of Roget's original), Quotations Dictionary, Style Guide, Computer Dictionary, and Almanac.

All the components are impressively up-to-date. News that could not be incorporated into the DVD-ROM edition appears in the collection of entries in the downloadable Encarta Yearbook. In turn, the reference to the Yearbook article downloaded to your hard drive is prominently displayed on the Content Page of the encyclopedia article. This Content Page also provides links to related Web sites. For example, the Content Page about Walter Matthau lists the links a) within the encyclopedia, b) to the Yearbook entry about his death, and c) to the sumptuous entry in the first-class Internet Movie Database.

The components of the Reference Suite are available as separate CD-ROMs or you can buy the suite on seven CD-ROMs at a price (about \$50 street price) that is far less than the

sum of the cost for the individual CDs. The big advantage of the DVD-ROM edition over the CD-ROM edition (same bargain price) is that it stores all seven disks that make up the Reference Suite, and makes the best use of integrating the content of the individual works, bringing out their synergy.

For example, the substantial article about American Literature offers one suite link to the World Atlas, and two suite links to Encarta Africana, one an African-American Literature article, the other an excerpt from Uncle Tom's Cabin in the Encarta Archive. In turn, the entry in Africana offers a link to the Encarta Quotations Dictionary. In other cases, the links are even more intertwined, but still remain easy to navigate due to the highly intuitive interface.

There are, of course, more articles, more word definitions, more quotations, more multimedia elements than in the previous year's edition, but this is true for any of the respectable encyclopedias. The supremacy of the Encarta Reference Suite is achieved by bringing together a variety of distinct high-quality resources to form a real suite by featuring similar interfaces and sharing the same search engine that allows searching all components in one fell swoop. This integration is so well done that often users don't realize that they are jumping from one

database to another and back. This transparency is also due to the fact that Microsoft now has control over both the content and the software of the whole Encarta product family instead of merely branding the product of another company with the Microsoft logo.

There is one more extra bonus for the customer. Purchasing the Reference Suite (or even the Deluxe Encyclopedia) grants access to the password-protected online Encarta Deluxe Encyclopedia on the Web from anywhere.



the pan

#### RESTAURANT ROW DINING GUIDE

Restaurant Row (<http://www.restaurantrow.com>) claims to be the world's largest dining guide. Its home page asserts that the database has 110,000 restaurants in 7,200 cities. Even at that, it would certainly not qualify as the largest dining guide. Another, much better directory, the DineSite guide, is definitely larger, covering 12,000 cities. Restaurant Row may become the largest if it fulfills

**Bistro Le Montrachet**  
3000 Paradise Rd  
Las Vegas Hilton  
Las Vegas, NV 89109  
Tel: 702-5111

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Bistro Le Montrachet Formerly Le Montrachet at The Las Vegas Hilton, Mobil 4 Stars winner the past 2 years running, the Only Restaurant in Nevada to achieve 4 Stars for '96' and '97'

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Whether you're in the mood for "haute cuisine" or are looking for a more casual repast, Bistro Le Montrachet offers both for the discriminating diner. Located in the Las Vegas Hilton, Bistro Le Montrachet blends massive, walnut columns with beveled mirrors, French art and fragrant flowers. In this setting, you may enjoy strudel-wrapped lobster, roasted breast of duck served with black and white beans in a cassis sauce, or thick creme brulee served with seasonal fruits. Over 400 selections grace the Bistro's wine list.

<b>CUISINE</b>
Seafood Steaks
<b>AMBIANCE</b>
Casual

*Is the restaurant elegant, formal, quiet and romantic, or is it just casual, but serving steaks, that places it among the 10 best in town?*

its dream to reach its goal of 300,000 listings by the end of 2000, but as it stood in late December, it is unlikely to achieve that volume. Not that it doesn't have an innovative plan to do so—it promises \$100 each month to the recruiter who sends in the most new listings.

There are always applicants for such offers, but it is obvious that the software is not intelligent enough to identify duplicates and triplicates submitted by the same or different contributors. The form of the entries suggests that many were taken from Yellow Pages directories where restaurants are classified by cuisine. The chance of winning \$100 is indeed inspirational.

Neither is Restaurant Row capable of delivering what it promises. On my own Web site (<http://www2.Hawaii.edu/~jacso/extra>), I have included a dozen screen shots to illustrate the serious deficiencies of this database.

Restaurant Row focuses so much on quantity that it neglects quality. It allows duplicate entries, sometimes with the same name and location, sometimes with inconsistently or erroneously spelled names, but with the same location. There were dozens of duplicates in the cities that I checked, and I even found triplicates, all with contradictory information. [Editor's note: Following P eter's example, I checked my own ZIP code and not only found duplication, but entries

for restaurants that are defunct or have changed names, making me wonder whether any maintenance is being done on the database.] The telling symptoms of the rushed implementation of this database are everywhere. The two entries about a French restaurant in the Las Vegas Hilton epitomize the problems. One says the atmosphere is "casual," the other "elegant." The only cuisine they agree on is "seafood." One entry even has the telephone number wrong.

In certain cases, there is no need for duplicates to sense that there is something wrong with the information. It is hard to believe, for instance, that a restaurant called Asian Express has only American cuisine.

When you click for the details on the descriptions, more oddities surface. Some records have a picture of the establishment, ostensibly to give you an impression of the d cor and ambiance, but the picture may turn out to be nothing but the logo of the chain, as is the case with the California Pizza Kitchen chain. All of these are classified under Californian and Pizza as cuisine style—that must not have been too hard to figure out. What would have required some personal knowledge for the cuisine classification is that this chain also serves Dakota Smashed Pea and Barley Soup, Southwestern fare like Sedona White Corn Tortilla Soup, as well as Italian and

Mediterranean delicacies like Tuscan Hummus. For some establishments, such as Los Angeles' California Country Caf /Dog & Duck Pub, the list of features is so long that it seems to fit all tastes not only in terms of food (22), but also of ambiance (11) and special features (24).

Under "more details" for the restaurant called 3660 on the Rise, the only adjective used for the restaurant's ambiance is "loud" and its special features include "seniors." Why would a loud place be attractive to seniors, even if its Polynesian Cuisine is irresistible? Then again, these seniors may be so excited by the food that they rave about it with high voices, especially to their hearing-impaired peers who are busy consuming their meals.

It is nice that there are many options to search by in the advanced mode, but you had better proceed carefully—many of the search criteria are either absent from the records themselves or just don't work. There are problems even with the simple search. If you type in a town name that appears in multiple states or counties, the system offers you a list to choose from. For example, it claims to recognize the difference between Kailua on Oahu and Kailua-Kona on the Big Island of Hawaii. I should say, it seems to be a nice touch. It would be better if it worked. I chose the former town, yet my result list included many establishments from Kailua-Kona (kailua-kona).

You can make a search by ZIP code to overcome this weakness of the software, but that's no panacea either. While searching for restaurants in ZIP code 96734, which happens to be the Oahu Kailua where I live, I got results from areas of the town that are at least 20 miles away, in a different ZIP code area.

There are so many far better dining guides on the Web that there is no reason to use this unprofessionally compiled directory. It just spoils your appetite.

*P eter Jacs * ([jacso@hawaii.edu](mailto:jacso@hawaii.edu)) is Associate Professor of Library & Information Science at the University of Hawaii's Department of Information and Computer Sciences.

Comments? Email Letters to the editor to [Marydee@mission.com](mailto:Marydee@mission.com).

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**more details**

**3660 on the Rise**  
 3660 Waiialae Ave.  
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 Polynesian

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