



LINDA OKAMURA

## LANCE & JED OJEDA

*"Lawdy, Lawdy, I Was All Alone on Pico . . ."*

Wedge between a Chinese laundry and a French dry-cleaners on a nondescript stretch of Pico Boulevard near Crescent Heights, you can find live blues blasting six nights a week from the likes of Padlock, Bonnie Raitt's former backup band; the late Stevie Ray Vaughan's brass section, the Texacali Horns; and even a surprise or two, such as Gary Busey on the six-string or a singing Dennis Quaid. But despite the high-powered talent at the very hot Mint Lounge, which the brothers Ojeda opened less than a year ago, the place remains refreshingly down to earth.

"I got tired of waiting outside clubs, hoping to be cool enough to get in," says Jed (*right*), a blues guitarist himself who handles booking and ensures that, unlike most of L.A.'s hipper-than-thou nightspots, the only thing between you

and the blues is a five spot (\$7 on weekends).

Despite promising beginnings as a speakeasy in the '30s, the Mint had become just another neighborhood joint with a jukebox until Jed and Lance came along and restored its original funkiness—down to the burgundy velvet drapes, gilt mirrors and dark, wood-paneled walls. Now, on any given night, you can spot music-industry heavies and blues-purist celebs who've come by to jam or power down a bowl of Howlin' Wolf turkey chili. (This is a family affair—brother-in-law Gary Stansbury runs the kitchen.)

"This place isn't about drinks per se; it's about the blues and how important it is to preserve that part of American culture," Jed says. "We'd rather have a great band with 20 people watching than a bad band with 100." —**Ruta Fox**