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Essential dishes, according to *Chronicle* staff



Eldorado Cafe

JOHN ANDERSON

STAY HUNGRY, GET CURIOUS!

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE INAUGURAL BEST OF AUSTIN: RESTAURANTS AWARDS

BY FOOD EDITOR MELANIE HAUPT

During the handful of years (2013-2021) that *The Austin Chronicle* Food team curated the First Plates awards, we took pride in our collective deep and broad knowledge of just about every corner of this growing city's dining scene. We were excited to send you, our dining-out readers, into our neighborhoods in search of new discoveries, hoping you would embrace our favorites and make them yours, too.

This year - the first year we've broken the Food & Drink category out of our annual Best of Austin awards for its own special issue - we asked y'all to tell us what your favorite restaurants are. What little nooks and crannies would y'all direct the rest of us to? I was surprised when I saw the long list of familiar names among both the finalists and the winners. Don't get me wrong: I'm not mad about it. These are all great restaurants, and all of them are worthy of your attention and your dining dollars.

There's a reason we all have our favorites, and there are heaps of excellent reasons why these restaurants are perennial favorites (and that the new ones will be future perennial favorites). We've also got to keep challenging ourselves to broaden our horizons. I know that

as private diners with particular, often divergent tastes, our family tends to fall back on a short list of favorites. Sometimes that's just to avoid fights over where we're going to eat. Sometimes it's because the adults are too tired or lazy to cook and it's easier to dial up our stand-by local pizza joint, order a pie, and call it Wednesday night dinner.

But there's something really thrilling about seeking out a new (or new to you) place, whether it's that new food truck you've been curious about that your friend posted on Instagram, or that place that is still hard to get reservations for even though it's been around a few years. Use this list of Best of Austin: Restaurants as a guidepost and a jumping off point, especially if there are places on this list that you haven't visited yet. But don't let it limit you, because you'll miss out on lots of hidden gems and lovely surprises if you do.

This was my first Best of Austin: Restaurants issue in my role as Food editor. This special issue truly is a team effort, with essential contributions from every corner of the *Chronicle's* operations: editorial, web, digital strategy, marketing, production, and probably others I'm not even aware of. This year's con-

MELANIE HAUPT'S 10 FAVORITE

AUSTIN RESTAURANTS

- 1) Eldorado Cafe
- 2) Canje
- 3) Julie's Noodles
- 4) Patrizi's
- 5) Komé
- 6) Nixta Taqueria
- 7) Micklethwait Craft Meats
- 8) Sway
- 9) Home Slice Pizza
- 10) Brentwood Social House

tributing writer team - Eric Puga, Evan Rodriguez, Yasmin Turk, Jessi Cape, A. Richmond, Haris Qureshi, and my right-hand human, Food Lieutenant Wayne Alan Brenner - bring a wealth of knowledge and strong opinions to the table. I'm grateful for the leadership and guidance of Editor-in-Chief Kimberley Jones and Publisher Nick Barbaro, Managing Editor James Renovitch's sly humor, and for Art Director Zeke Barbaro's zen amidst chaos. I can say with confidence and pride that I work with, truly, the best people in the world, and this package is evidence of that claim.

Thank you for reading and thank you for voting. I look forward to seeing where you've been this time next year. ■

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"OVERALL!"



JANA BIRCHUM

ESTABLISHED RESTAURANT

Odd Duck

FINALISTS: ABA, ELDORADO CAFE, LORO, SUERTE

The New American, farm-to-table brilliance of Odd Duck, begun as a food trailer on a barren South Lamar lot by brothers Dylan and Bryce Gilmore in 2010, has shone steadily in its posh, glass-walled digs since 2014, bringing an ever-changing menu of locally sourced viands cheffed up to lip-smacking perfection.

1201 S. LAMAR, ODDDUCKAUSTIN.COM

MOST MISSED / DEARLY DEPARTED

TEXAS FRENCH BREAD

FINALISTS: CHEZ NOUS, CONTIGO AUSTIN, LA MEXICANA BAKERY, SWEET RITUAL, WINEBELLY

Austin voted with their hearts and lifted up Texas French Bread as "most missed." The good news is, their knee-buckling baked goods, made with organic heirloom Texas wheat, pressed on the giant stone wheels at Barton Springs Mill, are not gone. Texas French Bread's treats can still be obtained at local farmers' markets, and will come soon to Farmhouse Delivery. The historic brick building may be lost to fire, but for now, we still have the bread.

WWW.TEXASFRENCHBREAD.COM

CHEF

FERMIN NÚÑEZ - SUERTE

FINALISTS: TAVEL BRISTOL-JOSEPH (CANJE), AMBRELY OUIMETTE (SUSHI BAR AUSTIN), EDGAR RICO (NIXTA TAQUERIA), AMANDA TURNER (OLAMAIE)

This affable, gregarious native of Torreón, Mexico, moved to Austin in 2009 and honed his prodigious skills at Launderette, La Condesa, and Uchiko before opening Suerte with Sam Hellman-Mass in 2018, drawing flavor-drunk raves from our critics - and the general public, *Eater Austin*, *Food & Wine*, and *The New York Times*.

1800 E. SIXTH, WWW.SUERTEATX.COM



JOHN ANDERSON



JANA BIRCHUM

NEW RESTAURANT

BIRDIE'S

FINALISTS: CANJE, LLAMA KID, MAIE DAY, TOSHOKAN

This little counter-service restaurant on the corner of 12th and Harvey has a gourmet menu of French- and Italian-influenced American food that hits the mark for quality. Family-run, Birdie's has a perfectly Austin combination of a luxe menu, a lovingly curated wine list, and a sleek space with a roomy patio perfect for relaxed upscale dining.

2944 E. 12TH STE. A, BIRDIESAUSTIN.COM

PASTRY CHEF

ARIANA QUANT - UCHI

FINALISTS: KRISTAL CRAIG (INTERO), JESSICA FORKNER TOMBERLIN (CREMA BAKERY), JULIE MYRTILLE (JULIE MYRTILLE BAKERY), SUSANA QUEREJAZU (LUTIE'S)

This Lubbock native and second-generation restaurant worker has been elevating her "perfect-bite" desserts at Uchi since 2015. Now Quant oversees the pastry programs at Uchiko and Uchi Denver, and serves as head pastry chef for Hai Hospitality (which includes Loro and Dallas outpost Uchiba), making her a state pastry champion, of sorts.

801 S. LAMAR, UCHIAUSTIN.COM

SOUS-CHEF

JAVIER NUÑEZ - ODD DUCK

FINALISTS: DREW LOTT (OVENBIRD ATX), OLIVIA MAREK (THE PEACHED TORTILLA), ZACH MCGRATH (BETTER HALF COFFEE & COCKTAILS), ALEXA MEJIA (BARLEY SWINE)

A true Cinderella story, Nuñez worked his way up through the ranks, over the course of 10 years, from dishwasher to server assistant to sous-chef at one of Austin's premier restaurants. As sous, Nuñez oversees the output of the multiple Best of Austin award-winning restaurant's gorgeously delicious seasonal fare. We have a feeling his ascendancy isn't over yet.

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JANA BIRCHUM

FOOD TRUCK

VERACRUZ *All Natural*

FINALISTS: CUANTOS TACOS, HUCKLEBERRY FOOD TRUCK, PATRIZI'S, SPICY BOYS FRIED CHICKEN, VALENTINA'S TEX-MEX BBQ

Veracruz All Natural started as two sisters selling snow cones and juices out of a trailer on East Cesar Chavez and has now expanded to six locations selling authentic Mexican dishes and drinks. Fresh and delicious tacos, queso, and guacamole could only be better with a cold cup of agua fresca or a refreshing smoothie.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, VERACRUZALLNATURAL.COM

BREAKFAST

KERBEY LANE CAFE

FINALISTS: BOULDIN CREEK CAFE, HUMPTY'S WALL OF BREAKFAST, PAPERBOY, WATERLOO ICE HOUSE

Oh, there may be used to be heavier competition for this category, but by now - with multiple locations in Austin and beyond (and that hella yummy pancake mix in Costco) - longtime fave Kerbey Lane, a champion of local sourcing, has pretty much cemented itself as Austin's icon of wake-up-and-eat excellence.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, KERBEYLANECAFE.COM

BAKERY

UPPER CRUST BAKERY

FINALISTS: CREMA BAKERY & CAFE, QUACK'S BAKERY, SWEDISH HILL, ZUCCHINI KILL BAKERY

From weekend breakfasts of pastries and quiches to a simple lunch of a bowl of soup and a half sandwich - maybe on a croissant, and chased with a cookie - Upper Crust nourishes both your sweet tooth and your soul. UC is there for special occasions too, including cakes and a steady supply of pies throughout the holidays for maximum good memories.

4508 BURNET RD., THEUPPERCRUSTBAKERY.COM



COURTESY OF MML HOSPITALITY

FINE DINING

JEFFREY'S

FINALISTS: COMEDOR, HESTIA, SUSHI BAR AUSTIN, TOSHOKAN

Jeffrey's continues to impress with caviar service, dry-aged prime beef, and the lightest souffles. Just west of Downtown, Jeffrey's is still top of the list for special occasions, celebrations, or simply memorable fine dining experiences. The attentive staff and complimentary valet service may seem over the top at other restaurants, but it's standard practice here.

1204 W. LYNN, JEFFREYSOFAUSTIN.COM



JOHN ANDERSON



JANA BIRCHUM

KIDS' MENU

HAT CREEK BURGER Co.

FINALISTS: CHUY'S, MANDOLA'S ITALIAN KITCHEN, SAWYER & CO, WATERLOO ICE HOUSE

Wherever you are, Austin, there's a Hat Creek nearby. That means convenient, fast-casual, made-to-order cheeseburgers and chicken nuggets for the kids while the grownups catch a round of craft beers on the indoor/outdoor patio. No matter your age, definitely save some room for a Dirt Worm: an Oreo-chocolate-and-gummy-worm milkshake.

5400 BURNET RD.; 3210 ESPERANZA CROSSING #100; 5902 BEE CAVES RD., WEST LAKE HILLS; HATCREEKBURGERS.COM

DRIVE-THROUGH

P. TERRY'S BURGER STAND

FINALISTS: EL TACORRIDO, FLYRITE CHICKEN, SANDY'S, TOP NOTCH HAMBURGERS

P. Terry's drive-through has saved our bacon on plenty of had-to-work-late nights and woke-up-hungover mornings. (Bacon! Also a good add-on to the 100% Black Angus beef burgers!) At P. Terry's, you're gonna get a smile from whoever's manning the window, you're gonna feel good because you know they're being paid a living wage, and if you bring Fido, he's getting a dog bone to boot. Everybody goes home happy.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, PTERRYS.COM

LATE-NIGHT DINING

KERBEY LANE CAFE

FINALISTS: CASINO EL CAMINO, FRAZIER'S LONG & LOW, THE LITTLE DARLIN', ROCKIN' ROLLS

Yes, because sometimes you want the best breakfast the night before tomorrow's hangover kicks in, and this clean, well-lit place - part of Austin's foodscape since 1980 - is gonna offer you that and an entire menu of other seasonal and often locally sourced deliciousness as you wind down toward the dawn's surly light.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, KERBEYLANECAFE.COM

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"CUISINE!"



JANA BIRCHUM

CARIBBEAN

CANJE

FINALISTS: **BIKLE JAMAICAN RESTAURANT, CHAGO'S CARIBBEAN CUISINE, HABANA RESTAURANT, TONY'S JAMAICAN FOOD**

After having initially wowed our city as executive pastry chef for Emmer & Rye and its cohort, the award-winning Tavel Bristol-Joseph triumphs again in this homage to his Guyanese culinary roots, helming an islands-inspired kitchen that excels in the savory as well as the sweet – and is well complemented by a cocktail-forward bar program.

1914 E. SIXTH STE. C, CANJEATX.COM

AFRICAN

TASTE OF ETHIOPIA

FINALISTS: **ASTER'S ETHIOPIAN RESTAURANT, DISTANT RELATIVES, ETHIOPIAN AND ERITREAN FOOD TRAILER, HABESHA ETHIOPIAN RESTAURANT & BAR**

Woinee Mariam, who emigrated from Ethiopia to the United States at age 16, offers Austinites (and Pflugervillians) two locations at which to savor the flavors of East Africa. Warm spices imported from Ethiopia, fresh injera bread made in house, and family-style platters served in woven baskets make Taste of Ethiopia a perfect destination for East African flavors and hospitality in Austin.

1100 GRAND AVENUE PKWY., PFLUGERVILLE; 3801 S. CONGRESS #107; TASTEOFETHIOPIAAUSTIN.COM

BARBECUE

TERRY BLACK'S BARBECUE

FINALISTS: **FRANKLIN BARBECUE, LA BARBECUE, MICKLETHWAIT CRAFT MEATS, STILES SWITCH BBQ & BREW**

Have you ever driven past Terry Black's and *not* seen a line to rival Franklin's? Since 2014, twin brothers/owners Mike and Mark Black have stayed busy, churning out *legendary* brisket, plump beef and pork ribs, and spicy sausage. Splurge on some mac & cheese and banana pudding and you've got a Central Texas hat trick.

1003 BARTON SPRINGS RD., TERRYBLACKSBBQ.COM

CHINESE

LIN ASIAN BAR + DIM SUM

FINALISTS: **CHINA FAMILY, OLD THOUSAND, TSO CHINESE DELIVERY, WU CHOW**

Chef, proprietor, and restaurateur Ling Wu presents a well-curated selection of dim sum with classic Cantonese flavors, a sprinkle of Sichuan fare, and of course those fantastic dumplings. All are constructed with local wholesome ingredients (when available). The dumplings are fire, delicate, but sturdy, and the Shanghai soup dumpling is the move.

1203 W. SIXTH, LINASIANBAR.COM

FRENCH

JUSTINE'S BRASSERIE

FINALISTS: **AUSTIN RÔTISSERIE, ÉPICERIE, HOPFIELDS, PÉCHÉ**

The heady combo of classy and saucy at this Eastside pleasure den is what makes Justine's so unequivocally *French*. Whether you're looking for a classic, traditional meal starting with a Kir Royale and escargots or want to do bumps of caviar and guzzle champagne, this is the place for you.

4710 E. FIFTH, JUSTINES1937.COM

INDIAN

CLAY PIT

FINALISTS: **ASIANA INDIAN CUISINE, NASHA, SAFFRON, TARKA INDIAN KITCHEN**

Located inside the supposedly haunted Bertram Building in Downtown Austin's historic Guy Town, Clay Pit has been around for more than 20 years. While you can find classics like butter chicken and chana masala, the real stars on the menu are fusion items like naan pizzas, curried mussels, jalapeño cream cheese naan, and chapati tacos with lamb rogan josh or fried cauliflower.

1601 GUADALUPE, CLAYPIT.COM



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INTERIOR MEXICAN

FONDA SAN MIGUEL

FINALISTS: **COMEDOR, EL ALMA, EL NARANJO, SUERTE**

Serving Austinites interior Mexican cuisine since 1975, Fonda is an institution, always good for a splurge-worthy meal. Start with queso fundido with rajas and chorizo verde and a Numero Uno Margarita. Finish with the Mixiote (slow-cooked seasoned lamb), but really anything you dive into will be delectable.

2330 W. NORTH LOOP, FONDASANMIGUEL.COM

SOUTHERN / SOUL

HOOVER'S COOKING

FINALISTS: **COUNTRY BOYZ FIXINS, FIXE SOUTHERN HOUSE, OLAMAIE, SAWYER & CO.**

This house of Southern-style cuisine from chef Hoover Alexander and his team continues to purvey the sort of down-home, stick-to-your-ribs dishes, so rich with flavor, that make your palate and stomach sure that there must be a heaven and Hoover's might just be an outpost of it. Soul food, indeed.

2002 MANOR RD., HOOVERSCOOKING.COM



JOHN ANDERSON

ITALIAN

RED ASH ITALIA

FINALISTS: **INTERO, JULIET ITALIAN KITCHEN, MANDOLA'S ITALIAN KITCHEN, PATRIZI'S**

Owner and chef John Carver conjures his knowledge of Northern and Southern Italian cuisine into gastronomic wizardry, abetted by house-made pastas, locally sourced meats, seasonal vegetables, and his elegant venue's custom-built, wood-burning grill, oven, and plancha. Do we even need to tell you about all the wines curated from Italy, Spain, France, Argentina, Chile, and more?

303 COLORADO #200, REDASHITALIA.COM

MEDITERRANEAN

ABA

FINALISTS: **ARPEGGIO GRILL, CAFE MALTA, DIMASSI'S MEDITERRANEAN BUFFET, PHOENICIA BAKERY & DELI**

One of the brightest dining stars on South Congress, ABA (which means "father" in Hebrew) is a Mediterranean restaurant that highlights the best culinary traditions of Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, and Greece under the talented hand of chef CJ Jacobson, with Liz Pearce's array of region-resonant wines and spirits shining like a sea of relaxation.

1011 S. CONGRESS, BLDG. 2 #180, ABARESTaurants.COM/AUSTIN

MIDDLE EASTERN / ARAB

HALAL BROS

FINALISTS: **MEZZEME, PEACE BAKERY & DELI, TLV, USTA KABABGY**

Halal Bros' status as a go-to spot for generous portions of delicious Middle Eastern fare is well-deserved. The menu is simple: Tender proteins like lamb and chicken (or falafel) rest atop flavorful, fluffy rice. Juicy gyro and shawarma wraps burst with flavor. Loaded fries serve as a white- and red-sauce delivery mechanism. You simply cannot miss (unless you skip the sauce).

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, THEHALALBROS.COM



JOHN ANDERSON



JANA BIRCHUM

JAPANESE

RAMEN TATSU-YA

FINALISTS: **KOMÉ, OTOKO, UCHI, UCHIKO**

What was once completely foreign to American palates is now ubiquitous thanks to Tatsu Aikawa and Takuya Matsumoto's growing empire. For the uninitiated, start with the chicken shoyu broth: Tatsu-Ya's is always on point, with just the right amount of soy sauce, never bland, never too salty. The noodles are cooked to perfection every time, and the chashu is handled with care.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, RAMEN-TATSUYA.COM

KOREAN

CHI'LANTRO BBQ

FINALISTS: **CHARM KOREAN BBQ, KOREA HOUSE, OSEYO, SEOULJU**

This fast-casual mini-chain offers a veritable choose-your-own-adventure of options. Bowl or burrito? Korean BBQ steak or spicy pork, fried egg and pickled veggies, and the sauce, maybe a little more traditional with Sriracha or lime juice, or more West Campus with spicy ranch? Hey, they were probably the first to serve Japchae noodles (and those iconic kimchi fries) in town.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, CHILANTROBBQ.COM

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JANA BIRCHUM

TEX-MEX

MATT'S EL RANCHO

FINALISTS: CHUY'S, ELDORADO CAFE, MAUDIE'S, POLVOS

Matt and Janie Martinez started their restaurant 70 years ago and their family still runs the beloved south-side institution on South Lamar. Come for the lunch specials and a chance to be around longtime Austinites and newcomers alike, enjoying margaritas and tacos, enchiladas, and chiles rellenos (don't forget the famous Bob Armstrong dip!).

2613 S. LAMAR, MATTSSELRANCHO.COM

NEW AMERICAN

ODD DUCK

FINALISTS: BETTER HALF COFFEE & COCKTAILS, BIRDIE'S, EMMER & RYE, FOREIGN & DOMESTIC

What's the definition of New American cuisine? You can find that answered exquisitely at several Austin venues, but especially at Odd Duck, where Bryce Gilmore and sous chefs Javier Nuñez, Matthew LaCaze, Daniel Rodriguez, and Jay Salvante work a fusion of global foodways and modern techniques into meticulous plates of culinary artistry. Starter case in point: peach salad with pork rinds, kimchi vinaigrette, and whipped chèvre. Yes, chef, yes!

1201 S. LAMAR, ODDDUCKAUSTIN.COM

SEAFOOD

QUALITY SEAFOOD MARKET

FINALISTS: CAFE BLUE, CLARK'S OYSTER BAR, GARBO'S FRESH MAINE LOBSTER, MONGERS MARKET + KITCHEN

When you've been in business for more than three quarters of a century, you must be doing something right. The seafood market provides fresh, seasonal seafood like salmon and lobster for your home cooking and grilling needs, while the restaurant side offers oysters, po'boys, generous plate dinners, and happy hour peel-and-eat shrimp with \$2 Modelos.

5621 AIRPORT, QUALITYSEAFOODMARKET.COM

SOUTH AMERICAN

BUENOS AIRES CAFE

FINALISTS: CASA COLOMBIA, CEVICHE7, ESTÂNCIA BRAZILIAN STEAKHOUSE, LLAMA KID

For pushing 20 years, this boutique favorite has been serving hearty Argentine fare, the family matriarchs' recipes, to the Austin masses. Much more interesting than just the beefy, bready dishes in most mind's eyes, the nuance of flavor is layered, sublime, and always pairs perfectly with their signature Malbec. For a nightcap, make a resy at the not-so-secret basement speakeasy, the Milonga Room.

13500 GALLERIA CIR., U-120, BEE CAVE; 1201 E. SIXTH; BUENOSAIRESCAFE.COM

THAI

TITAYA'S THAI CUISINE

FINALISTS: MADAM MAM'S, SAP'S VER FINE THAI CUISINE, SWAY, THAI FRESH

A perennial favorite, the classics keep us coming. Yes, the massaman curry, tom kha, and pad thai are tops, but you really need to try the Kao Soi 360. Titaya's offers the best version of this Northern Thai/Burmese dish in the capital city. Chewy ramen noodles, succulent braised chicken, a turmeric-based curry, and the pickled mustard greens really set it off.

5501 N. LAMAR STE. C-101, TITAYASTHAICUISINE.COM

VEGAN / VEGETARIAN

BOULDIN CREEK CAFE

FINALISTS: ARLO'S, THE BEER PLANT, CITIZEN EATERY, COUNTER CULTURE

Pro-worker, plant-based before it was cool, and forever South Austin weird, Bouldin Creek Cafe has our hearts and our stomachs on lock. The menu is sprawling, but we'll never say no to breakfast (served all day!). The tofu scramble zings in migas and the b'fast Scramwich, and *hot damn, that blueberry cornbread, y'all.*

1900 S. FIRST, BOULDINCREEKCAFE.COM

VIETNAMESE

ELIZABETH STREET CAFE

FINALISTS: 888 PAN ASIAN RESTAURANT, BUN BELLY, LE BLEU, PHO PLEASE

Dreaming of a perfectly made bánh mì dressed with as much fiery chili sauce as you can handle? How about pork, topped with braised brisket or crispy pork belly from Niman Ranch? Elizabeth Street Cafe tweaks the above already-perfect Vietnamese dishes by using the best local, organic produce they can get.

1501 S. FIRST, ELIZABETHSTREETCAFE.COM

WILD CARD

EVANGELINE CAFE - BEST CAJUN

FINALISTS: BENTO PICNIC (BEST BENTO BOX), CYPRESS GRILL (BEST CAJUN), LE MEALS (BEST GULLAH-GEECHEE & CREOLE), ASAHI IMPORTS (BEST ONIGIRI)

Like all great Cajun chefs, the people at Evangeline Cafe take their seasonings seriously. Bring a bottomless appetite to better enjoy the slow-cooked gumbo, or challenge yourself with alligator bites. The wild card on EC's menu is the bunless Cheeseburger Salad, which may be drizzled with the house rémoulade.

8106 BRODIE LN., EVANGELINECAFE.COM



JANA BIRCHUM



Cheers!
to all the
Best of Austin winners!
(But tequila loves you
even when you lose.)

HECHO EN TEJAS

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"DISHES!"



JANA BIRCHUM

TACO

VERACRUZ ALL NATURAL

FINALISTS: CUANTOS TACOS, NIXTA TAQUERIA, TACODELI, TORCHY'S

The Vazquez sisters' taco empire spans from Manchaca all the way to La Frontera. And it's a big-tent empire, from the veg-packed El Diferente and Furioso tacos to the more traditional Tex-Mex fare like barbacoa, al pastor, shrimp, and mole tacos. No matter your preferences, you'll happily bend the knee to Austin's queens of tacos.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, VERACRUZALLNATURAL.COM

BREAKFAST TACO

VERACRUZ ALL NATURAL

FINALISTS: GRANNY'S TACOS, JUAN IN A MILLION, TACODELI, TACO JOINT, VALENTINA'S TEX MEX BBQ

With their homemade corn tortillas and filling breakfast tacos including their staple El Tradicional or migas, Veracruz has become a local go-to for a quick breakfast around town. Pick up a juice, smoothie, or agua fresca to go with your La Reyna breakfast taco and kick-start your morning (or hungover afternoon).

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, VERACRUZALLNATURAL.COM

BURGER

JEWBOY BURGERS

FINALISTS: DAN'S HAMBURGERS, HOPDODDY BURGER BAR, MIGHTY FINE BURGERS, PHIL'S ICEHOUSE

Oy, that Mo Pittle! He's no mere culinary tumbler, *nu*, regardless of what he's named his neighborhood-nourishing house of hamburgers, this diner where his traditional Reform Jewish background intersects with delicious Tex-Mexery and results in burgers, burritos, latkes, and more that'll help even the hopelessly *far-blondjet* find themselves well-fed.

5111 AIRPORT, JEWBOYBURGERS.COM

CHICKEN-FRIED STEAK

JACK ALLEN'S KITCHEN

FINALISTS: CHERRY CREEK CATFISH, HOOVER'S COOKING, HYDE PARK BAR & GRILL, JACOBY'S RESTAURANT & MERCANTILE

JAK's fancified, deeply satisfying version of the Southern classic improves on the cheap cuts of meat you're used to with their massive slab of New York strip. The green chile gravy topper is the *pièce de résistance*. Looking for something marginally lighter? Chicken-fried chicken breast and pork chop are options, too.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, JACKALLENSKITCHEN.COM

DUMPLINGS

LIN ASIAN BAR + DIM SUM

FINALISTS: JULIE'S NOODLES, QI AUSTIN, SHANGHAI CHINESE RESTAURANT, WU CHOW

Begin with the siu mai: crispy, crispy pork, and shrimp or chicken shiitake. Hit the Shanghai jumbo seafood soup dumpling mid courses – it's a progression – then bookend your dumpling journey with the steamed spinach. Remember to bite the tops off the soup dumplings, insert vinegar and chili (or not), let cool slightly, and devour. Repeat as often as necessary.

1203 W. SIXTH, LINASIANBAR.COM



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JANA BIRCHUM

SUSHI

Uchi

FINALISTS: KOMÉ, NEIGHBORHOOD SUSHI, SUSHI, BAR ATX, TSUKE EDOMAE

It's no secret that Tyson Cole put our capital city on the international sushi map with this apotheosis of the itamae's art in 2003. Nowadays, Uchi is still smoothly defending its throne of freshness, taste, and style - even as talented newcomers continue adding to the Austin scene's fishy elevation.

801 S. LAMAR, UCHIAUSTIN.COM

ENCHILADA

Matt's El Rancho

FINALISTS: CHUY'S, ELDORADO CAFE, ENCHILADAS Y MAS, MAUDIE'S TEX-MEX

Matt's El Rancho keeps it classic: If it's not broken, no need to fix it, and their enchiladas are no exception. If you want that OG-Austin-style Tex-Mex, it's beef or cheese enchiladas with chili con carne all day. This is the enchilada order by which all Tex-Mex shall be judged.

2613 S. LAMAR, MATTSELRANCHO.COM

ICE CREAM / FROZEN TREAT

Amy's Ice Creams

FINALISTS: DOLCE NEVE, LICK HONEST ICE CREAMS, LUV FATS, MANOLIS

No need to scream, these local ice cream experts have shops set up in 13 locations across Austin, plus spots in Houston and San Antonio. Whether you prefer the real-deal full-dairy flavors (350 on rotation!) or the dairy-free frozen yogurts and fruit ice, sweet relief from endless summer is never far.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, AMYSICECREAMS.COM

NOODLES / RAMEN

Ramen Tatsu-Ya

FINALISTS: JULIE'S NOODLES, MICHU RAMEN, RAMEN512, SAZAN RAMEN

In no surprise, Austin chefs/DJs Tatsu Aikawa and Takuya Matsumoto got a lot of love from our readers. Revered for their tonkotsu broth, Ramen Tatsu-Ya includes vegan options as well as a take on traditional Tokyo-style chicken broth. Pro tip: Order extra noodles to sop up every last drop of leftover broth.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, RAMEN-TATSUYA.COM

STEAK

Jeffrey's

FINALISTS: ALC STEAKS, BARTLETT'S, FROG & THE BULL, RED ASH ITALIA

What could be a better indicator of Austin's soaring growth than the spendy steakhouse tucked into a converted Clarksville home, Jeffrey's? The iconic upscale restaurant, established in 1975 and bought by McGuire-Moorman (now MML) Hospitality in 2011, focuses on making steak memorable. Your recollections of that birthday with the fancy dessert will be dominated by thoughts of your first bite of mouthwatering, dry-aged rib-eye.

1204 W. LYNN, JEFFREYSOFAUSTIN.COM

SANDWICH

ThunderCloud Subs

FINALISTS: BIRD BIRD BISCUIT, FOODHEADS, HOME SLICE PIZZA, LITTLE DELI & PIZZERIA

It's no small feat for a sandwich to be at once no-nonsense and playful, but that's the abiding spirit of this Austin institution (est. 1975). Signature subs like the Office Favorite (egg salad and bacon) and the California Club (turkey, avocado, bacon) are reliably good, and made to your exact specifications by somebody who's probably in a band. Always get the ThunderSauce.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, THUNDERCLOUD.COM

VEGGIE BURGER

P. Terry's Burger Stand

FINALISTS: ARLO'S, BOULDIN CREEK CAFE, NOM BURGERS, PLOW BURGER

A veggie burger that, dare we say, sways public opinion on "meat-free" in the land of beef is surely a superstar. This housemade (baked, never frozen) patty features brown rice, crimini mushrooms simmered in cream, black beans, oats, onions, cheddar, and fresh-cut parsley. Perhaps most importantly, this budget-friendly wonder stays intact during the chomp sesh, so it's no wonder even carnivores are fans.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, PTERRYS.COM

PIZZA

Home Slice Pizza

FINALISTS: BUFALINA, CONANS PIZZA, SHOW ME PIZZA, VIA 313

Home Slice makes Austin's most consistently delicious pizza. Customize their New York-style chewy-crisp crust by topping it with either sweet marinara or fruity olive oil, perfect mozz or pillow ricotta. There may be no more perfect pairing than Home Slice's pepperoni-mushroom pie with a fluffy and lightly lemony slice of their N.Y. cheesecake.

1415 S. CONGRESS; 1421 S. CONGRESS; 501 E. 53RD; HOMESLICE.COM



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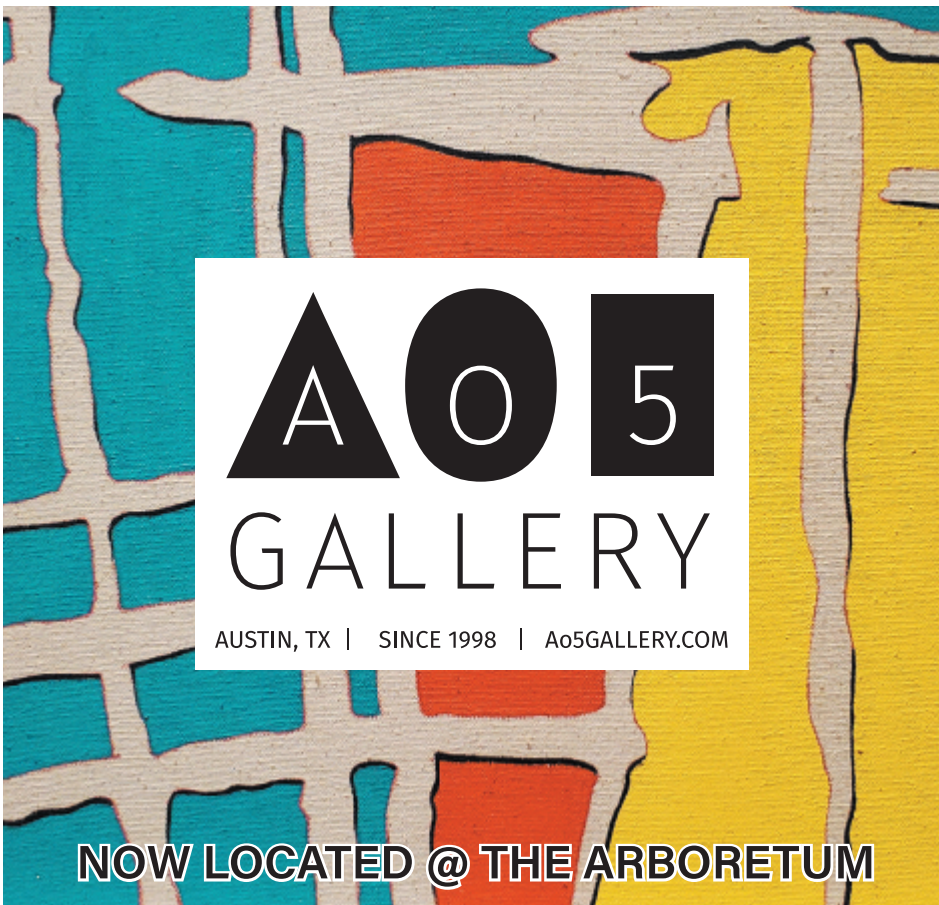
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"BEVERAGES!"



JANA BIRCHUM

JUICE/SMOOTHIES

JUICELAND FINALISTS: CHERRYWOOD COFFEEHOUSE, DAILY JUICE, PEOPLE'S RX, THE SOUP PEDDLER

What's bright green, tastes like peanut butter and bananas, and comes in a compostable cup? JuiceLand's Wundershowzen, which harnesses the aforementioned power of PB and B with spinach and hemp protein, and is discounted on Thursdays. Fall into a Wundershowzen rut, or challenge your tastebuds with a durian, strawberry-matcha, or blue majik-topped smoothie.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, JUICELAND.COM

BREWERY

TIE: JESTER KING BREWERY, MEANWHILE BREWING CO.

FINALISTS: AUSTIN BEERWORKS, HI SIGN BREWING, ST. ELMO BREWING CO.

We had to go to penalty shootouts (hand counting paper ballots!) to determine a winner after full time resulted in a Best Brewery in Austin draw. The fans decreed that a fair result was indeed a stalemate between the two beer giants: Jester King and Meanwhile Brewing. Each represents the current climate of Austin's beer scene, respectively: in Jester King, an old-world farmhouse brewery/playland devoted to mixed culture, spontaneous fermentation, and families; and in Meanwhile, a new-skool urban brewery/playland devoted to diverse IPAs, hoppy lagers, and, well, families.

JESTER KING BREWERY, 13187 FITZHUGH RD., WWW.JESTERKINGBREWERY.COM; MEANWHILE BREWING CO., 3901 PROMONTORY POINT, MEANWHILEBEER.COM



JOHN ANDERSON

BEER SELECTION

DRAUGHT HOUSE PUB & BREWERY

FINALISTS: BANGER'S SAUSAGE HOUSE & BEER GARDEN, COSMIC COFFEE + BEER GARDEN, WHICHCRAFT TAP ROOM & BOTTLE SHOP, WHIP IN

Logically, a place is going to have the best beer selection in town when they brew 21 different (delicious) in-house variations of it while also curating the most well-rounded guest beer wall in all 254 counties in Texas. If there's not something you can happily swig here, maybe take up doing taxes as a hobby instead. The Draught House isn't called The Draught House, after all.

4112 MEDICAL PKWY., WWW.DRAUGHTHOUSE.COM

CIDER SELECTION

AUSTIN EASTCIDERS

FINALISTS: CIDERCADE, FAIRWEATHER CIDER CO., HOPFIELDS, TEXAS KEEPER

With more than two dozen house ciders, cider-based cocktails, and guest ciders, Austin Eastciders Barton Springs has you covered on selection, while the Collaboratory offers a more pared-down selection of house ciders on tap and in cans/bombers to take home. If you're leaning crisp and dry, choose the Texas Brut. If you're feeling tropical, go for Pineapple.

979 SPRINGDALE RD. #130; 1530 BARTON SPRINGS RD.; AUSTINEASTCIDERS.COM

COFFEE SHOP

RADIO COFFEE & BEER

FINALISTS: BARRETT'S COFFEE, COSMIC COFFEE + BEER GARDEN, EPOCH COFFEE, MAHA COFFEE

Radio's coffee is excellent, as are the beers. The noms - Veracruz All Natural tacos, Dee Dee's Thai street food, those Briscuits - are their equal. As is the welcoming place itself, with that expansive outdoor patio and a superb lineup of live music and other events throughout the week. If we could, we'd probably live here.

4204 MENCHACA RD., RADIOCOFFEEANDBEER.COM

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The *Austin Chronicle* has commissioned the renowned, award-winning local artist, Billie Buck, to create merchandise in an effort to support Whole Woman's Health, an abortion clinic and virtual abortion care provider.

100% of the net proceeds from the sale of *Austin Chronicle* "Aid and Abet" merchandise will go towards helping Whole Woman's Health open their new clinic in New Mexico.



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JANA BIRCHUM

MARGARITA

MATT'S EL RANCHO

FINALISTS: CURRA'S GRILL, DE NADA CANTINA, EL ALMA CAFE Y CANTINA, POLVOS

Some might argue that Matt's El Rancho is the inception point of Austin-style Tex-Mex. Their most enduring contribution to the ubiquitous tippie in this part of Texas, the margarita, is an introduction of *freshly* squeezed lime juice. History is written by the victors. The House Frozen is the go-to, or if you want a complete attitude adjuster, Matt's Knockout Martini.

2613 S. LAMAR, MATTSSELRANCHO.COM

MILKSHAKES

P. TERRY'S BURGER STAND

FINALISTS: ALAMO DRAFTHOUSE, AMY'S ICE CREAMS, DIRTY MARTIN'S PLACE, MILKY WAY SHAKES

You crave a smooth, creamy milkshake. Luckily, there's a P. Terry's near you, so now all you have to do is choose. Do you go classic with double chocolate or vanilla? Or try the creative shake of the month? Either way, it's not going to break the bank, and you don't even have to get out of your car.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, PTERRYS.COM

MOCKTAILS

DRINKWELL

FINALISTS: ABA, BOBO'S SNACK BAR, THE CAVALIER, SANS BAR

No matter the "why," sometimes a craft cocktail sans booze is precisely the right move. The skill level of the mixologists at this small but mighty North Loop spot - which carries several variations of Seedlip, by the way - means you're guaranteed the full-bodied flavor you're hankering for without any risk of hangover or regret.

207 E. 53RD, DRINKWELLAUSTIN.COM

DISTILLERY

TITO'S HANDMADE VODKA

FINALISTS: DESERT DOOR, FIERCE WHISKERS, REVOLUTION SPIRITS, STILL AUSTIN, TREATY OAK DISTILLING

Tito Beveridge may have rocked the global alcohol industry when he totally pwned the San Francisco World Spirit Competition back in 2001, but these days the hometown hero's brand of vodka-flavored vodka is the established forerunner in a world of spirited contenders, a world where the more clueless bar tourists will request a "Tito's and vodka."

TITOSVODKA.COM

WHISKEY SELECTION

NICKEL CITY

FINALISTS: THE GRACKLE, SEVEN GRAND, SWIFT'S ATTIC, WATERTRADE

Sure, this Eastside hang is almost always packed to the gills with filthy beautiful people, but it's also a total dive (in the best way) that boasts an annual Coney dog eating contest. Which makes it a primo destination for a killer whiskey menu. Whether you fancy it neat, old-fashioned, or dolled up, these folks can quench any small-batch single-barrel whiskey craving you can imagine.

1133 E. 11TH, NICKELCITYBAR.COM

WINE SELECTION

AVIARY WINE & KITCHEN

FINALISTS: BIRDIE'S, HOUSE WINE, LENOIR, LOLO WINE

Who doesn't love a wine list organized thematically by figures from pop culture like Jayne Mansfield and the Notorious B.I.G.? Here are dozens of old-world, natural, and bubbly wines by the bottle, and almost a few dozen offerings (at any given service) by the glass. If you can't find something to suit your palate, you're just too picky. Salud.

2110-C S. LAMAR, AVIARYWINEKITCHEN.COM

WINERY

WANDERLUST WINE Co.

FINALISTS: AUSTIN WINERY, FALL CREEK VINEYARDS, SOUTHOLD FARM + CELLAR, WILLIAM CHRIS VINEYARDS

Informed by founder Sammy Lam's twin passions of wine and travel, both Wanderlust locations boast extensive, globally influenced self-pour, on-tap wine lists, including many Texas-made brands. Wanderlust also hosts community events involving champagne towers and cheese plates, so ... why are you still reading this?

702 SHADY LN., WANDERLUSTWINE.COM;
610 N. I-35, WANDERLUSTWINE.COM/DOWNTOWN

TEQUILA SELECTION

SUERTE

FINALISTS: DE NADA CANTINA, LA CONDESA, LAS PERLAS, TECO MEZCALERIA & AGAVE BAR

The team at this gorgeous Oaxacan-inspired wonderland created a uniquely inspired spirits menu to accompany incredible dishes like beet huarache, tlayuda de hongos, and ceviche de coco. Their four robust tequila styles (even *extra Anejo*) produced in five Mexican states using only Blue Weber Agave really make our hearts sing. The Don Dario - with reposado, tamarindo, lime, and sarsaparilla bitters - is good luck indeed.

1800 E. SIXTH, WWW.SUERTEATX.COM



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AMBIENCE

TIKI TATSU-YA

FINALISTS: EBERLY, HONEY MOON SPIRIT LOUNGE, LUTIE'S, TRATTORIA LISINA

What happens when you team the Tatsu-Ya culinary brand (Ramen, Kemuri, DipDipDip) with renowned designers at McCray & Co., "big" experts Blue Genie Art Industries, the lighting wizardry of Natalie George Productions, Thrown Light's video projectionists, Gl33k sound design gurus, and beverage director Cory Starr? A one-of-a-kind extravaganza brimming with unique, complex flavors. And, naturally, a color-changing dragon.

1300 S. LAMAR, TIKI-TATSUYA.COM

FOOD EVENT/FESTIVAL

AUSTIN FOOD + WINE FESTIVAL

FINALISTS: THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE HOT SAUCE FESTIVAL, FIELD GUIDE FESTIVAL, HOT LUCK, QUESOFF

It's common knowledge that November is prime time in River City, so naturally, the see-and-be-seen food fest happens the first weekend. The city's most star-studded chefs and makers flock to Auditorium Shores to test their latest greatest concoctions on 100% willing crowds and showcase the finest flavors of any season. Wine bellies, full hearts, can't lose.

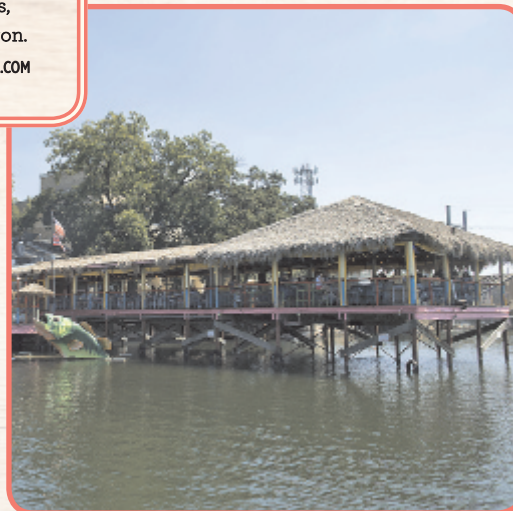
LAKESIDE DINING

HULA HUT

FINALISTS: THE COUNTY LINE, THE OASIS, SKI SHORES CAFE, STEINER RANCH STEAKHOUSE

These fine folks are unabashedly proud to share fishing stories and add grilled pineapple to just about everything. When your ideal vibe is "Tiki, but make it 1997-no-cranes-in-the-skyline," and you really want to be among the raucous, lei-draped happy hour crowd, get thee to the lake and order Mexinesian shrimp flautas.

3825 LAKE AUSTIN BLVD., HULAHUT.COM



JOHN ANDERSON

PATIO

MOZART'S COFFEE ROASTERS

FINALISTS: ANGELS ICEHOUSE, BEERBURG BREWING, CENTRAL MACHINE WORKS, COSMIC COFFEE + BEER GARDEN

Resting at the top of Tom Miller Dam, Mozart's Coffee Roasters' view - and vibe - is very relaxing, looking over a (relatively) tamed Colorado River. Grab a cortado or a tea, maybe a pastry, and drink it all in. And let's not forget that in November and December, that same expansive patio is lit up like, well, Christmas.

3825 LAKE AUSTIN BLVD., MOZARTSCOFFEE.COM

PLAYSCAPE

HAT CREEK BURGER CO.

FINALISTS: HOME SLICE PIZZA, MEANWHILE BREWING CO., PHIL'S ICEHOUSE, WATERLOO ICE HOUSE

Hat Creek boasts something they coined called "burger patios" - indoor/outdoor spaces where parents can grab a beer and the littles can romp on a playground, typically anchored by an impressive red tube slide that shovels scoopfuls of children out onto the fake turf like bulk Sour Patch Kids at a candy shop. According to an expert playground tester: "I like that the slide goes super high and it moves fast." Burn denim, kid.

5400 BURNET RD.; 3210 ESPERANZA CROSSING #100; 5902 BEE CAVES RD., WEST LAKE HILLS; HATCREEKBURGERS.COM

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POP-UP

BAD LARRY BURGER CLUB

FINALISTS: BOM BAKESHOP, CHAPO BELL, COMADRE PANADERÍA, THE FIERY TALON

Is it a burger pop-up or is it an excuse to get hammered on a Monday night? Yes. Matthew Bolick (co-owner of Better Half) makes "Gucci McDonald's" smash burgers for lucky folks who are both willing to stand in a long line (with booze and beats) and lucky enough to actually get one. Check Instagram (@badlarryburgerclub) for all the deets and (try to) see for yourself.

BADLARRYBURGERCLUB.CLUB

SERVICE

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FINALISTS: BARLEY SWINE, COMEDOR, OLAMAIE, SUERTE

Complimentary valets meet you at your car and kick off Uchiko's incredible service. Diners rave about the attentiveness of welcoming hosts, waiters who ask about allergies and take time to listen to your preferences in order to make the best recommendations, and staff that go above and beyond to make dining at Uchiko an experience to remember.

4200 N. LAMAR, UCHIKO.AUSTIN.COM



JOHN ANDERSON

SPECIAL OCCASION RESTAURANT

JEFFREY'S

FINALISTS: DIPPIDIP TATSU-YA, HESTIA, MATTIE'S AT GREEN PASTURES, SIENA RISTORANTE TOSCANA

By now you've heard tales of Jeffrey's \$500 steak and caviar service. It is very Clarksville, and very fine dining indeed, but that 32-day dry-aged porterhouse is just under \$200 actually, and it's 42 ounces, which is plenty for the whole table. And if you wore your good shoes, they boast one of the most prestigious wine collections this side of the Mississippi - and it's half-price on Sundays.

1204 W. LYNN, JEFFREYSOFAUSTIN.COM

VIEW

THE OASIS

FINALISTS: EASY TIGER SOUTH, JACOBY'S RESTAURANT + MERCANTILE, P6 AT THE LINE AUSTIN, SWAY

The food at the Oasis is secondary to the spectacular views of Lake Travis and the absolutely breathtaking sunsets at this 40-year-old lakeside restaurant. Grab yourself a beer or a cocktail and soak in the splendor as Mother Nature shows off her best work: the cliffs, trees, and vibrant open sky of the Texas Hill Country.

6550 COMANCHE TRL., OASIS-AUSTIN.COM

WEEKEND BRUNCH

JACK ALLEN'S KITCHEN

FINALISTS: CHEZ ZEE, DISTRICT KITCHEN + COCKTAILS, HANK'S, SAWYER & CO.

Looking for a delicious way to kick off your weekend? Chicken and biscuits, barbacoa eggs Benedict, and mascarpone-stuffed challah French toast are the good life choices available to you at Jack Allen's Kitchen's weekend brunch. Their Southern-inspired menu and farm-to-table concept mean Texas portions of elevated comfort foods, plus a full menu of specialty cocktails.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, JACKALLENSKITCHEN.COM

WILD CARD

FREDERICKSBURG PEACHES - BEST SEASONAL PILGRIMAGE

FINALISTS: MIDNIGHT IN THE GARDEN (SUPPER CLUB), MOE'S TAVERN (NICKEL CITY'S ANNUAL HALLOWEEN MAKEOVER), THE PITCH (FOOD AND ENTERTAINMENT COMPLEX), YARD BAR AND FAT CITY (DOG PARK AND RESTAURANT)

You never need an excuse to head to the picturesque Hill Country, but mid-May to mid-August - peak peach season - is the best time to head 80 miles east to Fredericksburg and neighboring Stonewall, where orchards galore are producing the juiciest, most intensely sweet peaches in the state.



JANA BIRCHUM

BATHROOMS

EBERLY

FINALISTS: GABRIELA'S SOUTH, HONEY MOON SPIRIT LOUNGE, KITTY COHEN'S, LA BARBECUE

A bathroom is many things beyond just a repository - if you know, you know. Eberly's facilities are private, pristine, and placid: a winning combo on all fronts. A commingled sleek space for washing up, Instagrammable lighting, dark blues, accented with hip prints of musicians, and sturdy disposable towels: You might want to stay a minute longer.

615 S. LAMAR, EBERLYAUSTIN.COM



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Nada Chicken at ThunderCloud

KIMBERLEY JONES



A bento box at Bento Picnic

JOHN ANDERSON



Platanos fritos at El Sunzal

KEVIN CURTIN

WE'VE ALL GOT OUR FAVORITES... CHRONICLE EDITORIAL STAFFERS NAME THEIR MOST ESSENTIAL DISHES



Managing Editor James Renovitch: I'm far from a vegetarian, but dang I love that tasty, fake meat and its surrounding sandwich fixins in ThunderCloud Subs' signature Nada Chicken sandwich. Prepare for some small talk with your sandwichmaker and some impatient toe-tapping from those behind you in line while you wait for the patties to cook.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, THUNDERCLOUD.COM

Assistant News Editor Maggie Thompson: I'm one of those people in their 20s who moved here from the West Coast, could not score a place in Austin, and landed last minute in sweet home Cedar Park. I'm glad for it, because of hidden gems like Aleida's Latin Food. The restaurant on Little Elm Trail is very charming and there's always a magnificent cake on display (major abuela vibes), but something about the food truck outside the Chevron at S. Bell Boulevard hits different. The original arepa has literally appeared to me in a dream, crispy and smothered in Aleida's sauce.

RESTAURANT: 2011 LITTLE ELM TRL., CEDAR PARK;
FOOD TRUCK: 602 S. BELL BLVD., CEDAR PARK. ALEIDAS.COM

Arts and Food Listings Editor / Food Lieutenant Wayne Alan Brenner: I can drive to El Rincon, a funky Tex-Mex joint in Pflugerville, from my house in three minutes. I might drive there anyway if it took an hour. The bustling cantina ambience, the ever-flowing coffee and perfect salsa, and omg, that generous carne guisada plate: precisely what's required to defeat the most hungover morning, any day of the week.

200 E. PECAN, PFLUGERVILLE, ELRINCONTEXMEX.COM

Special Screenings and Community Listings Editor Katherine McNeveins: The last time I ordered my fave at Vivo, I said this is what I would want for my last meal. Kind of a morbid thought, but it cemented in my mind how good it was, as if I didn't know: shrimp tacos, perfectly spiced and on lightly griddled tortillas with cheese, so it's almost a quesadilla, and complemented by cool chipotle cream sauce, crisp cabbage, and the best chips and salsa in town.

6406 N. I-35 #2343, VIVOAUSTIN.COM

Editor-in-Chief Kimberley Jones: I love the salt & pepper tofu at Bun Belly so much I pay Favor's stupid-high \$6 fee just to get it delivered to my front door. It's a sinus-clearing salad, heavily dressed in lime, with sautéed jalapeños and radish. The main event is the pillowy tofu, encased in a delicately seasoned tempura that somehow still retains most of its crunch even with the trip across town. Worth every cent.

6929 AIRPORT #132, BUNBELLYATX.COM

Staff writer Rachel Rascoe: I've phased through lunch fixations on a few poke bowls around town, but Poke-Poke on Hancock has held my focus the longest for its consistent freshness and perfectly simple OG seasoning (soy sauce, sesame oil, onions, and sesame seeds). Specifically, I get the Lil Salmon Poke with white rice, kale, and - if I'm feeling particularly snazzy - macadamia nuts.

2320 HANCOCK, POKE-POKE.COM

Proofreader and Qmmunity Editor James Scott: In all honesty, I could put any dish from Bouldin Creek Cafe as my essential dish: the Swamp Thing hangover cure; the magical pile of beans, vegan cheese, and rice of the Slacker's Banquet; or the vegan-style eggs Benedict, the Renedict, which always makes me think of our Managing Editor James Renovitch. But the potato leek omelette stands above them all, a starchy king covered in black pepper sour cream and stuffed with delicious potatoes and leeks. Breakfast of the champions, I'd say.

1900 S. FIRST, BOULDINCREEKCAFE.COM

Proofreader and News reporter Lina Fisher: The bean burrito at JewBoy Burgers is my guilty working lunch, because it's both practical (\$5, filling, and handheld) and indulgent (schmaltz and queso?? c'maaaaan). The Garden Bento box at Bento Picnic is ideal for special occasions - something about the everything-bagel-esque seasoning they put on the fresh avocado with the kale salad, the sweet squash, and pickled veggies on the side? Vegetarian deliciousness at its finest.

5111 AIRPORT, JEWBOYBURGERS.COM
2600 E. CESAR CHAVEZ, BENTOPICNIC.COM

Food Editor Melanie Haupt: I'm not a big fried chicken consumer, but my family really loves it. So when Tumble 22 comes up in the family takeout night rotation, I'm grateful that there's a salad option available. The full Cobb salad is a huge portion, and it's stuffed with yummy things like avocado and bacon and cheese and deviled eggs. Even without the plump chicken tenders, it's an extremely filling dish. If I'm going to eat fried chicken, I might as well make myself feel better about it by having it on a bed of lettuce.

VARIOUS LOCATIONS, TUMBLE22.COM

News Editor Mike Clark-Madison: Orange chicken at 888: I would not order this dish anywhere else (unless I were jonesing for mall Chinese, which sometimes I do), and it's not what most people would order at the Vietnamese-forward Pan-Asian mainstay, but try it - fruity but also spicy and a little astringent, with perfectly flash-fried chicken, and hearty enough for your hungriest moments.

2400 E. OLTORF STE. 1-A, 888PANASIANRESTAURANT.COM

Culture Editor Richard Whittaker: A fish dish can be complicated, but the fish itself should be simple. District Kitchen + Cocktail's rainbow trout bridges that seemingly illogical divide by searing the river trout to buttery, flaky perfection, then laying it on golden raisin wild rice that has the look but nothing like the texture of a rocky riverbed. The pesto sauce adds just enough zip against the surprising indulgence of the roasted Brussels sprouts. Pair with the Citrus Old Fashioned.

5900 W. SLAUGHTER STE. D-500; 7858 SHOAL CREEK BLVD. STE. B; DISTRICTAUSTIN.COM

Proofreader Jasmine Lane: Oh man, those Cuban yucca fries. Something about hanging out on the patio at Kinda Tropical with a cocktail and a crisp, starchy pile of yucca fries really brings the weekend home. And that jalapeño avocado dip? Magic.

3501 E. SEVENTH, KINDATROPICAL.COM

Music Editor Kevin Curtin: Plátanos fritos con crema y frijol at El Sunzal: Perfectly ripened plantains, sliced vertically and fried, then laid onto the center of a plate and offset with a rich, tangy Salvadoran cream on one side and uncongealed refried pinto beans on the other. Altogether, this \$6 dish, which pairs well with à la carte pupusas, presents an image akin to a yin yang symbol. And why not? It's fruit, protein, and dairy in unexpected harmony.

642 CALLES



INDEX OF THIS YEAR'S *WINNERS!*

OVERALL

Established Restaurant: Odd Duck
New Restaurant: Birdie's
Most Missed/Dearly Departed:
 Texas French Bread
Chef: Fermín Núñez - Suerte
Pastry Chef: Ariana Quant - Uchi
Sous-chef: Javier Nuñez - Odd Duck

DINING OUT

Breakfast: Kerbey Lane Cafe
Fine Dining: Jeffrey's
Drive-Through: P. Terry's Burger Stand
Late-Night Dining: Kerbey Lane Cafe
Food Truck: Veracruz All Natural
Bakery: Upper Crust Bakery
Kids' Menu: Hat Creek Burger Co.

CUISINES

African: Taste of Ethiopia
Barbecue: Terry Black's Barbecue
Chinese: Lin Asian Bar + Dim Sum
French: Justine's Brasserie
Indian: Clay Pit
Interior Mexican: Fonda San Miguel
Italian: Red Ash Italia
Korean: Chi'Lantro BBQ
Mediterranean: Aba
Middle Eastern/Arab: Halal Bros
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Thai: Titaya's Thai Cuisine
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Tex-Mex: Matt's El Rancho
Wild Card: Evangeline Cafe - Best Cajun

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Breakfast Taco: Veracruz All Natural
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 Meanwhile Brewing Co.
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 Pub & Brewery
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Mocktails: DrinkWell
Distillery: Tito's Handmade Vodka
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 Wine Festival
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Playscape: Hat Creek Burger Co.
Pop-Up: Bad Larry Burger Club
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 - Best Seasonal Pilgrimage
Ambience: Tiki Tatsu-Ya
Lakeside Dining: Hula Hut
Service: Uchiko
Bathrooms: Eberly



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