

Restaurant Guide

Austin's Top 50

1. Barley Swine. 2024 S. Lamar Blvd. 512-394-8150, BarleySwine.com

If you were trite enough to ask talented Barley Swine chef-owner Bryce Gilmore what kind of food he makes, he'd likely answer, "Texas Cuisine."

Barley Swine is a restaurant that serves small sharable plates and sources ingredients from local farmers, including this dish of scrambled egg, shiitake dumplings, smoked roe and almond. What's Texas Cuisine, you wonder? Like chili? Not exactly, but in at least one case you're not far off. Try a complex and hearty dish of smoked lamb loin with pinto beans, pickled mustard seeds and wilted turnip greens. It tastes like haute cowboy campfire food served in beautiful earthenware instead of a jangly tin pot. Or there's a pancake made of mesquite-smoked flour that wraps its gentle embrace around apples, bacon, candied hazelnuts and acorn squash. But Texas Cuisine can also mean more exotic flavors like grilled goat heart with curried eggplant, sweet figs and crunchy homemade falafel.

2. Uchi. 801 S. Lamar Blvd. 512-916-4808, UchiAustin.com*

Uchiko. 4200 N. Lamar Blvd. 512-916-4808, UchiAustin.com/Uchiko*

Anytime I leave a restaurant with even a tinge of regret at having spent about \$100 per person on a good-but-not-great dinner, I always say, "We could've just gone to [Uchi/Uchiko](#)." Tyson Cole's restaurants never disappoint when it comes to service or food, both delivering the most consistently exceptional dining experiences in town. They're experts at presenting the perfect bite, often in startlingly simple forms — an umami blast of oily Spanish anchovy with wisps of salty shaved bottarga, torched slabs of velvety beef belly, cured Norwegian mackerel with tiny tomato cups holding a teardrop of truffle oil.

While regulars could order blind from the restaurants' menus and sound like seasoned Japanophiles — machi cure (smoked yellowtail with yucca crisp and almond) and maguro sashimi (big eye tuna with pumpkin seed oil and tart goat cheese), please — part of the enjoyment is finding what specials chefs de cuisine Jeramie Robison (Uchi) and Page Pressley (Uchiko) and their teams have imagined on a daily basis, from an oyster with frozen kimchi peach foam to a grilled scallop served on cashew butter and ringed by a powdered form of the nut. And don't forget dessert. A recent scoop of apple-miso sorbet and coffee pana cotta with white chocolate sorbet made me think Cole and executive pastry chef/director of culinary operations Philip Speer should get in the dessert bar business.

3. Lenoir. 1807 S. First St. 512-215-9778, LenoirRestaurant.com

Todd Duplechan is one of the city's most talented chefs. He's also not afraid to acknowledge when he doesn't know something. So when one of his suppliers told him about soft-shell crawfish, the Texas native admitted he'd never heard of them. But he was intrigued. Lucky for us. Duplechan turned those little fried gems — yes, you eat them head and all — into the centerpiece of a revelatory dish punctuated by Thai herbs and crunchy sour pork sausage. That dish is indicative of the imagination at work at this small shabby-chic restaurant owned by Duplechan and his wife, Jessica Maher. It's a place where you'll also find dishes like goat spam,

sliced like gyro meat, energized by sambal and turmeric and served with a marigold crepe; or rice-paper ravioli topped with smoked tomato water.

The almost exclusively European wine list (there remains a soft spot for the Great Northwest) is impressive for a restaurant of this size and is curated by Mark Sayre, Duplechan's former co-worker at the Four Seasons in Austin. With a three-course menu set at \$38, and additional courses costing \$10, Lenoir is the best value of any restaurant in Austin.

4. Congress. 200 Congress Ave. 512-827-2760, CongressAustin.com/Congress

Chef David Bull made a name for himself at the Driskill Grill, an old bastion of fine dining in Austin, and later returned to town from a stint in Dallas to help redefine what people should expect from first-class dining in the capital. Painted in handsome browns and muted creams and filled with a palpable but pleasant rock-and-soul soundtrack, the dining room at Congress exudes confidence and sophistication, much like the food that comes from Bull's kitchen.

An artfully presented beef tartare arrives laced with crisp kale and anchovy, the salty fish bringing out the iron of the beef. Bull came of age in his family's Italian restaurant, and his delicate treatment of carrot ravioli, stringy burrata with poached pear, and cheese agnolotti makes me hopeful that someday he may turn his attention to an Italian restaurant. Bull shows a deft touch with dishes like a Thai-South American fusion of hamachi sashimi with aji limo and coconut, and his ability to execute bold flavors with precise technique makes for head-turning comforters like tête de cochon with pickled peaches; an apple and fig salad with ham hock and fig mostardo; and a gamey rack of goat with English peas, cumin yogurt, morel mushrooms and a dense and savory garlic sausage. For dessert, a playful adult take on favorite childhood flavors — banana mousse with peanut butter ice cream and compressed banana.

5. The Carillon. 1900 University Ave. 512-404-3655, TheCarillonRestaurant.com

The restaurant helmed by chef Josh Watkins is the most underrated in the city. It hides at the bottom of the massive AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center on the University of Texas campus and lacks warmth, but its food takes care of the comforting. Weapons-grade bones protrude from a mustard-crusting Colorado rack of lamb served with savory cornbread pudding and Brussels sprouts, and veal tenderloin comes with the low-country flavors of sweet potato hash and mustard greens.

But not all of the proteins are suited for traveling businessmen. The kitchen turns out exquisite raw fish dishes like the citrusy escolar sashimi and the longtime menu fixture hamachi crudo with the sweet-and-salty chew and crunch of currants, celery and hazelnuts.

6. Wink. 1014 N. Lamar Blvd. 512-482-8868, WinkRestaurant.com

The names of the farmers and ranchers at the bottom of Wink's menu aren't there for marketing purposes. They're people chef/co-owners Stewart Scruggs and Mark Paul have worked with for years. The two men opened their restaurant more than 12 years ago, and it seems all the young bucks (many of whom passed through Wink's kitchen) are catching on.

Wink's menu constantly rotates, but you can always expect interesting proteins served with seasonal grains and vegetables, such as a tender mid-rare duck and globe carrots atop pearly barley, blackbuck antelope with trumpet mushrooms, and guinea breast with potato puree and parsnips. Wink favors earth and spice and does an impressive job of coaxing sweetness from vegetables. They're also not afraid to be daring, as seen with a hamachi sashimi with buttery avocado, compressed melon and the distinctive taste of seaweed. The flavors initially seem discordant but find a rounded complexity that lingers.

The Wink trio often proves irresistible for dessert — a tart lemon meringue pot, satiny crème brûlée and dense chocolate lava cake, but if you want to be indulgent, turn to a Wink staple for an alternative dessert — slices of seared foie gras served with a fruit coulis. These guys were serving foie gras way before foie gras was cool in Austin.

7. Foreign & Domestic. 306 E. 53rd St. 512-459-1010, FNDAustin.com

With its long counter, open kitchen, tight spaces, kitchen whites and bright interior, Foreign & Domestic resembles a modern update on the classic diner. Comforting food and a bit of attitude are hallmarks of a diner, and this place has both in ample supply. Even if the dishes aren't always familiar, the food resonates, like fall-apart-at-your-fork braised goat spiked with tart pickled cherries and the sweet embrace of corn pudding offset with smoked eggplant. Roasted quail with duck tongue stew and boudin noir may challenge some diners intellectually, but the hearty dishes reward with their restorative flavor and depth.

Chef Ned Elliott's restaurant earned a reputation early on as a nose-to-tail joint, and the winged-pig logo doesn't dissuade one from that idea, but the kitchen has packed the house with \$1 oyster nights on Tuesdays, and their citrusy ceviche with toasted garlic makes me believe the restaurant's rumored raw bar should be a hit. And let's not forget some of the best homespun desserts in town, such as salted caramel ice cream and coffee gelée atop brûléed banana bread.

8. Sway. 1417 S. 1st St. 512-326-1999, SwayAustin.com

Few new dishes in the Austin dining scene received as much universal praise this year as Sway's Son-in-Law. A lightly breaded and fried soft-boiled egg oozes a honeyed golden yolk across a dish of braised pork. The sauce represents what Sway does so well, finding a balance of salty and sweet — here with soy sauces and palm sugar laced with chili vinegar.

The Jungle curry, with its tri-tip beef shoulder and a sauce packed with red chilies, holy basil, green Thai eggplant and coconut cream, creates a culinary cacophony that matches the lively banter arising from Sway's impressive mahogany communal tables.

The boisterous restaurant also can handle subtlety, as evidenced by a colorful tangle of green papaya salad and the puffed-up salt-and-pepper shrimp dabbed with fermented black bean and chili oil. The latter is one of my favorite dishes of 2013.

9. Qui. 1600 E. Sixth St. 512-436-9626, QuiAustin.com

Paul Qui's restaurant overflows with ambition and ideas — from the staff's handmade aprons to the service pottery to the eclectic menu. The "Top Chef" winner pulls culinary inspiration from his time in the Uchi family (yellowtail sashimi with calamansi and huckleberries), his family's Filipino heritage (pork blood stew) and other great chefs from around the world (the artful vegetarian Ode to Michel Bras).

The menu rotates regularly, but the Rabbit 7 Ways held a semi-permanent place during the restaurant's first few months. The kitchen's inventiveness shined on the dish that delivered the bunny as a tamarind-glazed and grilled belly at one end of the plate and a melt-in-your mouth loin spiced with turmeric at the other.

And don't let the awards and technique fool you; Qui exercises his playful side: witness the cheddar foam on a nori chip (a decadent play on Cheez Whiz and crackers) to start the meal, or the cheddar cheese ice cream sandwich at dinner's conclusion.

10. Franklin Barbecue. 900 E. 11th St. 512-653-1187, FranklinBarbecue.com

The pilgrims bound for ol' St. Peter's don't have nearly the amount of fun as the barbecue fanatics who line up six days a week to get a taste of the smoked meat at Franklin Barbecue. What was once a penance — maybe a 45-minute wait in the hot sun at Franklin's original trailer near the Interstate 35 feeder road — has turned into a party. People bring coolers, chairs and Frisbees. They also bring their appetites, because there's no use in waiting two hours for lunch if you can't put away at least a three-meat plate. Of course any plate at Franklin must start with that brisket, a caramelized bark protecting the accordion of rippled sinew and fat bordered by a deep ruby smoke ring. Yea, the turkey's moist and the tangle of pulled pork finds a nice balance of lean and fat, and the espresso sauce was good enough to get bottled and wind up in supermarkets. But those lines? They're for the brisket (and maybe the masochistic need for bragging rights).

11. Parkside. 301 E. Sixth St. 512-474-9898, Parkside-Austin.com

Go into almost any kitchen in Austin and you're likely to find a cook who has either worked with Shawn Cirkiel or worked for him. And if your search turns up empty, somebody in that kitchen probably knows someone who has. The Austin native is one of only a handful of chefs behind more than one restaurant on this list. And while Olive & June is moving to the head of the Italian pack in Austin, and people are buzzing about Cirkiel's new restaurant going into the Radisson, Parkside will always be the restaurant most people immediately associate with the chef. It's the spot that put Cirkiel on the map as a restaurateur and marked the chef as a man with an eye (palate?) for captivating flavors that span genres. He makes elevated bistro fare, like seared scallops given earth and ascendancy by eggplant, sweet peppers and a mango vinaigrette; hybridizes the country and "the City" with corned beef tongue pastrami with pickled radishes; executes delicate raw dishes like fluke with almond, chive and lemon; and still puts out one of the best cheeseburgers in town. Cirkiel says he and his crew like to cook what they like to eat. Apparently they like to eat what a lot of us like to eat.

12. Ruth's Chris Steakhouse. 107 W. Sixth St. 512-477-7884, RuthsChris.com

Sure, you can find a Ruth's Chris Steakhouse in almost every major metropolitan area in the country, but the one here has been locally owned since it opened 28 years ago, and it serves my favorite steaks in town. And that local ownership thing isn't just a marketing tool. There are few restaurants in town where you'll find the owner posted up near the bar chatting with regulars on a nightly basis. But go to Ruth's and get a melt-in-your mouth porterhouse for two or the marbled ribeye, and chances are you will see Greg Davey, Gary Porfirio or Bill Andrews with one eye on a football game and one on guests. And, yes, the steaks are famous for arriving with a

dissolving pat of butter, but get the chicken stuffed with garlic and herbed cheese. You'll think the bird was raised on butter.

13. Driskill Grill. 604 Brazos St. 512-391-7162, DriskillGrill.com

This restaurant feels old, in both the good and bad. Partly dated and partly a welcome throwback to a time with well-outfitted servers, baroque woodwork and no concrete floors to bounce sound around like a steel circus tent. Lovers of the contemporary Austin food scene may have their doubts at first glance, but the Driskill consistently puts out excellent food. Start with a silky potato-truffle bisque deep with earthy flavors and hiding a bit of crème fraîche at the bottom to cut the heaviness. The steak tartare is ornate but somehow finds a balance that allows all of the flavors to shine: the mild sulfur of egg yolk crumbles on bottom, the salty sturgeon caviar, the iron of fresh crimson beef, the sweet-tart strawberry-balsamic jam and the garlic of aioli. The appetizer is an indicator to go ahead and get the filet for dinner, which comes with the sunset glow of cheddar grits and the grounded pull of roasted mushrooms.

14. Fabi & Rosi. 509 Hearn St. 512-236-0642, FabiandRosi.com

Want a romantic dinner away from the frenzied rush of downtown? Fabi & Rosi provides an elegant setting without stuffiness and inspires conviviality without the boisterousness of some other places in town. Chef Wolfgang Murber is German (exhibit A: his schnitzel and spätzel) but his menu is pan-European, spoken with a Texas twang. Duck confit sits at the center of a green bean salad with a tissue-thin poached egg, and tender escargot swim in an herbaceous and garlicky butter. The rosy center of a medium-rare steak blushes amid the perfume of French fries tossed in truffle oil, and a crepinette of Dewberry Farms chicken with red cabbage seems like the perfect Texas-Germany two-step.

15. El Naranjo. 85 Rainey St. 512-474-2776, ElNaranjo-Restaurant.com

The nights I've visited this pale green bungalow with the multiple handsome dining spaces — all hard wood and shades of brown — the restaurant has hosted a decent-sized crowd. But if Oaxacan chef Iliana de la Vega's restaurant was located in the middle of downtown or a neighborhood less focused on inebriation than the Rainey Street District, there would be lines out the door. De la Vega and her husband and co-owner Ernesto Torrealba planted their flag on Rainey Street several years ago with a food truck of the same name before making the transition to this elegant space. Pick your protein (duck, chicken, shrimp, pork) or vegetables and let de la Vega dazzle you with her variations on mole, from the herb, chile and tomatillo-based mole amarillo de Oaxaca to the more familiar mole poblano, with its deep flavors of nuts, Christmas spices and a touch of chocolate. Tuna ceviche was electric with the tart flavors of white grapefruit on a recent visit. And El Naranjo follows the seasons; so if you missed the recent conclusion of the chile en nogada cycle (pepper stuffed with pork and slathered in walnut cream accented by pomegranate seeds), all I can say is, "I'm sorry."

16. Trio. 98 San Jacinto Blvd. 512-685-8300, TrioRestaurantAustin.com

You needn't check into a room at the Four Seasons to be treated like a VIP at Trio. The accommodating and exceedingly polite staff anticipates your needs in guiding you through the restaurant's menu and wine list, composed by sommelier Mark Sayre, one of Trio's finest ambassadors. Trio focuses its attention on wine (ask for Sayre's sage advice here), seafood and steaks. The lump crab cake balances sweet and spicy, and a firm grouper stands up to the smokiness of roasted onions and the sun-glow warmth of a seductive brown butter Hollandaise. But the runaway star at a recent meal was the cold mesquite-smoked 14-ounce bone-in ribeye that drew from fat and fire for a depth of flavor unlike any I've had in a steak this year.

17. Olive & June. 3411 Glenview Ave. 512-467-9898, OliveAndJune-Austin.com

The multi-tiered treehouse blends modernity, naturalism and a vintage red-sauce restaurant flare. It just depends on where you sit. The large menu also lends itself to a variety of experiences: spend the entire meal hopping around the small plates section and try simply seasoned cobia thrown on the grill and skewered or a striped bass crudo piqued by chili oil; move over to a roster of some of the best pasta in town, like an abundant bowl of twisted gemelli in a white wine sauce that picks up flavors of fennel, arugula and garlic; or head to the entrees, where you'll find an elevated version of a humble braised rabbit with pancetta and the bright nuttiness of a pistachio salsa verde.

18. Tam Deli. 8222 N. Lamar Blvd. 512-834-6458, Facebook.com/TamDeliAndCafe

Tam's garlic shrimp banh mi (add extra shrimp), served on a flaky homemade baguette, is my favorite sandwich in Austin. But it's not the only reason I keep going back. There's the restorative bowls of pho; the savory, salty and sweet pleasures of the papaya salad with beef jerky; the bun thit nuong (grilled pork served with vermicelli and eye-opening lime and basil); a Vietnamese egg crepe stuffed with pork and shrimp; crunchy fried shrimp and yam fritters; and delicate cream puffs for dessert. All of this from sisters Tam Bui and Tran Ngoc, two of the nicest and most chatty (once you get them going) restaurant owners in town.

19. La Condesa. 400 W. Second St. 512-499-0300, LaCondesaAustin.com

La Condesa has long felt like the culinary epicenter of the 2nd Street District party. With a perched bar area, wrap-around windows and a large wall adorned with colorful graffiti, the restaurant looks like a high-end warehouse art gallery. And the plating of the food has its own artful flare, especially in a roster of ceviches that utilizes bright citrus, spicy and sweet elements to accentuate the elegant slices of raw fish.

The taco selection nods to the streets of Mexico with classic carnitas, but there's refinement and imagination at play with tacos like the Greek-inspired venison arápicos with cucumber and yogurt and the piquant Mexican take on a New York deli sandwich, the carne torcida tacos, with its cabbage slaw and smoked brisket pastrami on a rye tortilla. Larger appetites can attack a juicy chicken breast shrouded in a complex mole or a medium-rare New York strip enlivened with

citrus-habanero butter. Wash it all down with La Condesa's clásica margarita. Ringed with a chunky cactus-lemongrass-infused salt, it's my favorite in town.

20. Swift's Attic. 315 Congress Ave. 512-482-8200, SwiftsAttic.com

The weekend crowds, noise and hip design can sometimes make this place feel like a club as much as a restaurant, but management knows how to cultivate that vibe and makes everyone feel like they are part of the party. The best way to enjoy Swift's is with a group, allowing you to sample a variety of plates like chili-glazed chicken wings with crispy and smoky sweetbreads; cobia crudo with a salty-sweet watermelon gastrique; and tender goat shoulder served with plump homemade ricotta gnocchi. Callie Speer's whimsical Popcorn & a Movie (buttered popcorn gelato with a crunchy housemade candy bar, caramel corn and root beer gel) has stayed on the menu since the restaurant opened, and with good reason, but for an alternate dessert idea, try the combination of acid and fat from a plate of strawberries and lardo.

21. Justine's. 4710 E. Fifth St. 512-385-2900, Justines1937.com

A blend of style and grace, Justine's offers a unique dining experience, whether you're sitting at a small table in the dimly lit intimate dining room listening to vinyl or out under the trees and twinkle lights. You'll find musicians, writers and east side regulars here, but there's no air of pretense. Even with its French accent, Justine's is about making you feel comforted by its food, like mussels in a buttery wine broth, a thick pork chop with creamy au gratin potatoes, steak frites that tend toward the rare side of things, and a housemade assortment of rotating charcuterie.

22. Clark's. 1200 W. Sixth St. 512-297-2525, ClarksOysterBar.com

You can find some of the city's best burgers in the most unexpected places. Like the gruyere-topped one at this jewel-box oyster bar that looks like it was snatched up from the Hamptons, dusted of sand, and placed in West Austin. Of course, the oyster program is also spectacular, with briny summersides from Prince Edward Island and creamy Wellfleets from Massachusetts. A diverse sashimi plate on a recent visit offered slabs of hamachi, hirame, walu, halibut and tuna. The clam chowder shows restraint, easing up on the cream to allow flavors of celery, wine and bacon to all make their presence known, and crispy halibut stays firm in a fragrant bowl of sofrito and wilted spinach steaming with garlic. The prices match the feel of exclusivity at the tiny spot.

23. La Traviata. 314 Congress Ave. 512-479-8131, LaTraviata.net

From the awning outside to the narrow dining room's exposed brick walls, La Traviata would feel right at home in a much bigger city. And its spaghetti alla carbonara would be able to vouch for the restaurant's Italian bona fides. Chunks of pancetta and onion cling to the creamy strands of spaghetti topped by an egg yolk that you stir into the bird's nest of one of the best pasta dishes in town. They don't make their own spaghetti, but they do make their ravioli by hand. On a recent visit the centers of the pasta pillows gave way to a light blast of ricotta, though the pinched corners were a little thick and undercooked. Spicy lamb meatballs absorb a lightly

creamy tomato sauce full of snap and crunch from roasted bell peppers and pine nuts. La Traviata has been home to business lunches and romantic dinners for more than 12 years, but it still somehow feels like a secret for those of us who know.

24. Jeffrey's. 1204 W. Lynn St. 512-477-5584, JeffreysOfAustin.com

There's something a little pretentious about this place that dedicates so much energy to style. There are also some really great things going on at the re-imagined West Austin restaurant. The upscale neighborhood-hangout vibe has been replaced by a clubby Manhattan steakhouse feel, but the kitchen has its moments, like with a gorgeous truffle-laced beef tartare, one of the best crab cakes in town and solid cocktails at the pinched bar. The dry-aged steaks are the stars of the menu, but I've found them to be inconsistent — under-seasoned one night, sublime another. I also had one of my best service experiences of last year at Jeffrey's, following a bumpy one.

25. Jezebel. 800 W. Sixth St. 512-436-9643, RestaurantJezebel.com

Chef Parind Vora is a self-assured man with a unique vision. With his Restaurant Jezebel, he wanted to heighten customers' expectations of fine dining in Austin, so he instituted the only jacket-required dress code I know of in town and did away with menus, instead implementing a Q&A approach that allowed the chef to tailor meals to guests' preferences. That approach (five courses for \$100, another \$100 for wine pairings) led to some uneven service and unexpected (not always in the best way) dishes. But there's no denying Vora's creativity and attention to detail.

Culinary highlights from my visits there included medium-rare roasted quail with rounded flavors of carrot puree and the tart acidic piercing of cherry reduction and passion fruit vinaigrette; smoky and peppery sturgeon with tender parsnips; and a seared hunk of foie gras painted with a sweet Thai chili glaze and topped with chopped rose petals.

26. 2nd Bar + Kitchen. 200 Congress Ave. 512-827-2750, CongressAustin.com/second

Angular, multi-leveled, bright, hopping and just a little too cool to be bothered with trying to be sexy, Second Bar + Kitchen is the kind of restaurant we need more of on what should be downtown's showcase avenue. The kitchen, shared with adjacent high-class sibling Congress, specializes in bistro fare and upscale bar food. It's hard to categorize a place that serves fried pickles with hot sauce and bleu cheese dip then turns around and executes a sumptuous pappardelle with truffled ricotta and roasted mushrooms. There's a meaty seared salmon with pork belly fried rice and Thai influences of coconut and nam pla. Then further down the menu it's a roster of pizzas. Of course, the best of these pizzas features black truffle, bleu cheese, pork belly confit and medjool dates. Second Bar + Kitchen is the type of restaurant that can please both tourists and top brass from the neighboring office towers.

27. Contigo. 2027 Anchor Lane. 512-614-2260, ContigoTexas.com/Austin

You know that ranch you tell yourself you'd build if you won the lottery? The one you'd invite all of your friends to for a big dinner under twinkle lights and then blow their minds with that

sweet ox-tail slider recipe you got out of Garden & Gun (they do recipes, right?). Contigo is that place. Oh, and I see you invited your friend with the mustache who used to live in New Orleans and knows how to make the perfect Vieux Carre. Contigo makes soulful rustic food like rabbit and dumplings but isn't afraid to show its technique, like with a pork liver pâté served with viscous honey. The cheeseburger blanketed with white cheddar and served on brioche bun is one of the best in town, but sometimes your inner vegetarian just wants a grilled cheese (with a pickled green tomato).

28. Olivia. 2043 S. Lamar Blvd. 512-804-2700, Olivia-Austin.com

James Holmes' restaurant has something of a split personality. But in an intriguing way. There's the refined sensibility of a classy place for a quiet dinner, where you might order grilled scallops with low-country accents from blue crab and wild rice with earthy beets and preserved lemon adding punctuation; a delicate plate of cobia crudo with tart kiwi, smooth avocado and the crunch of a walnut-ginger granola; or a smoked oyster topped with pungent bleu cheese and a chewy crumble of coffee-bacon jam. Then there's brunch, which is an elbows-on-the-table affair with dishes Abilene-native Holmes has named after Texas greats. There's the Willie Nelson chicken-fried steak that swims in a brawny red-eye brown gravy, topped with fried eggs, and the Dandy Don Meredith, an oily concoction of gamey serrano-inflamed goat chili topped with shredded cheddar cheese and, of course, two fried eggs. There may not be a better hangover cure in town.

29. Vino Vino. 4119 Guadalupe St. 512-465-9282, VinoVinoAustin.com

This temple of wine and neighborhood cheer feels like the kind of place where everybody knows your name. And the long bar and large tables encourage making new friends. Servers maintain an impressive level of knowledge and take away any intimidation factor by helping to pair one of the hundreds of bottles on hand with dishes like scallops with a tart lemon soubise studded with turnips and baby carrots or tender quail with earthy mushroom ravioli with a complementary porcini cream sauce. Happy hour here offers great deals on one of the best mussels and fries in town as well as juicy beef sliders.

30. Texas French Bread. 2900 Rio Grande St. 512-499-0544, TexasFrenchBread.com

Mild-mannered sunlit bakery by day, Texas French Bread turns down the lights and puts on some cool music at night (maybe Iron & Wine, maybe one of Radiohead's mellower records) for a bistro that feels almost like a dinner party, which is how dinner service here originated. Co-owner Murph Willcott makes the rounds at the tables, talking to regulars and uncorking wine. Brother Ben can often be found in the kitchen that puts out a roasted chicken with garden-fresh vegetables, a creamy and floral risotto and excellent pasta dishes, such as firm ribbons of tagliatelle shined by sorrel pesto and fresh tomatoes. The Willcotts' parents opened Texas French Bread as a bakery in 1981, and the restaurant honors that history with a great pastry program that includes a smooth butterscotch budino with a layer of salted caramel topped by a cloud of cream.

31. Noble Pig. 11815 RM 620 N. Suite 4. 382-6248, NoblePigAustin.com

The best sandwiches in Austin. That's all you need to know. But I'll tell you more. I'll tell you about bread that balances chew and crunch. I'll tell you about fatty duck pastrami that falls apart between bread spread with a tart and creamy housemade Russian dressing. I'll tell you about a homemade Italian sausage, roasted tomato and provolone sandwich that could be deconstructed and tossed into a magnificent bowl of pasta. I'll tell you about piquant pimento cheese, an in-house pickling program and exceptional charcuterie made from lamb and pig. You want to talk sandwich artists? How about chef-owners with pedigrees from the likes of Asti and Whole Foods. Folks in Central Austin will get a Noble Pig to call their own soon, as the guys are set to open a shop on Burnet Road.

32. Asti. 408 E. 43rd St. 512-451-1218, AstiAustin.com

Emmett and Lisa Fox's restaurant has helped anchor this retro shopping center in Hyde Park for 13 years and remains a delightful spot for lunch, sunlight pouring in from all angles, as well as an intimate dinner destination. The sturdy pizza beams with a buttery, crunchy crust and dustings of semolina. Sweet roasted pear blends with the mild funk of gorgonzola on a cantine pizza topped with bitter arugula. Prosciutto lends its lusty salt to a panino with bread that's been grilled before hitting the press, and the fried egg's yolk leaks from the sandwich with a restrained honeyed consistency. The carbonara on a recent visit was a bit runny and pale, though the guanciale was smoky and tender, and you can never go wrong with the mild spice of Asti's rigatoni amatriciana (add the homemade sausage for \$3 extra).

33. Home Slice Pizza. 1415 S. Congress Ave. 512-444-7437, HomeSlicePizza.com

I recently spent my fourth consecutive Sunday heading over to Home Slice to pick up one of their pizzas for dinner. For dinner by myself. That pattern provides a positive rebuttal to one of my past criticisms of the super busy pizza place on South Congress — consistency. When they're on point, they're the best NYC-style slice in town, and they've been firing on all cylinders lately. Not too oily, with a crunchy edge and supportive base, Home Slice has taken the lead as my current preferred NYC-style pizza. I also pop in for an Italian sub every couple of months.

34. Szechuan House. 11005 Burnet Road. 512-832-8989, SzechuanHouseAustin.com

A friend of mine waited an hour for dinner at a crowded Szechuan House last year. He returned for dinner the next week. Such is the draw of this Chinese restaurant (that never demands that kind of wait on a regular day). I was struck by the lack of excess oil on the spicy fried fish at a recent meal that also included twice-cooked pork (strips of bacon that retained springiness) with black bean sauce and jalapenos, and a tender beef dish that carried strong flavors of cumin that recalled Mexican food. I think we confused our server with a couple of questions, but he provided one of the most polite service experiences I've had this year.

35. Ramen Tatsu-Ya. 8557 Research Blvd. 512-339-0855, Ramen-TatsuYa.com

The ramen craze may have lost a little of its momentum since last year, but this small shop in North Austin still packs the crowds daily. Lines? For soup? Well, it's not just any soup. Tens of

hours go into making the specialty tonkotsu ramen, its thick, milky stock bathing fresh noodles that arrive weekly from Keisuke-san, a noodle-maker in Los Angeles.

The #1 original features a swirl of pork belly that looks like a cinnamon bun and a tangy marinated egg with a viscous golden center. Other variations include a ramen spiked with soy and the kick of black peppercorns and a miso ramen with ground pork, toasted sesame and sweet corn. In addition to the soups, Tatsu-Ya offers smaller plates like fried Brussels sprouts with tart apricot vinegar and curry spice and a fried slider served with a sweet sauce on a Hawaiian roll. And, don't worry, vegans; Ramen Tatsu-Ya has heard your cries. There's now a vegan ramen available on Sunday nights.

36. Epicerie. 2307 Hancock Drive. 512-371-6840, EpicerieAustin.com

This sun-lit restaurant (and its superfluous "grocery") created a bit of stir when it prepared to move into the neighborhood. But Epicerie is no drunken party animal that has friends over who park in your yard. Chef Sarah McIntosh's French bistro delivers well-constructed sandwiches like an open-faced cured salmon with cream cheese and egg on toasted rye and a lamb sandwich sliced into rippled waves and served with yogurt and cucumber. Even the hearty dishes here show restraint, like a crispy veal breast with buttered carrots and barley in a veal jus and a smooth boudin with homemade mustard. Don't forget the sweets on your way out. I suggest the salted chocolate chip cookie or tart lemon bar.

37. Trace. 200 Lavaca St. 512-542-3660, TraceAustin.com

Trace does an admirable job battling the stereotypes that often come with being a hotel restaurant. Service is polite and measured in the mod space colored with shades of black and white, and the menu is always fresh and engaging. The restaurant has shuffled through a few chefs over the past 18 months, but menu and execution have generally stayed consistent, playing to each chef's particular strengths and passions. To wit: Larry Kocurek, formerly of Kocurek Family Artisanal Charcuterie, delivers an excellent plate of housemade charcuterie, along with a trio of game that includes antelope loin, boar sausage and venison chili. One of my favorite dishes from a previous iteration of Trace's kitchen was a braised lamb shoulder served with spiced peanut curry, couscous salad, mint and cilantro.

38. Hopfields. 3110 Guadalupe St. 512-537-0467, HopfieldsAustin.com

Who knows how much money I'd spend at this place if I were a UT college student? The French-inspired gastropub serves one of the city's best burgers, topped with Camembert cheese, sweet and smoky caramelized onions and grain mustard, and a sinful French ham sandwich smeared with creamy butter. Vegetarians can take pleasure from the flaky mushroom-leek tarte and the slippery crunch of ratatouille.

39. Fonda San Miguel. 2330 W. North Loop Blvd. 512-459-4121, FondaSanMiguel.com

Fonda San Miguel introduced Austinites to the idea that Mexican food didn't need a "Tex" in front of it and that you shouldn't always expect it to be cheap. Austin's original home for quality

interior Mexican cuisine maintains an admirable level of consistency, with classics like a tangy cochinita pibil, the broiled caper and olive-flecked pescado Veracruzano, and, my favorite, a relleno de picadillo, the lightly battered and pan-fried green pepper splitting wide in its tomato sauce to reveal tender pork and the sweet crunch of raisins and almonds. Austin is now home to more than a few quality interior-Mexican restaurants, and Fonda San Miguel helped pave the way.

40. Perla's Seafood & Oyster Bar. 1400 S. Congress Ave. 512-291-7300, PerlasAustin.com

There is a definite Manhattan Beach vibe at this restaurant where a seat on the deck is a commodity worth waiting for. The umbrella-dotted perch offers great people-watching while you dine on a host of oak-grilled fish, such as a meaty swordfish that absorbs the warm embrace of garlic drawn butter, or sample the abundance of a complex bouillabasse. If you're just looking for a snack while you enjoy one of the bar's excellent cocktails, bright herbs and tart capers deliver nice contrast to the smoky char of grilled octopus served with crispy potatoes.

41. Little Deli. 7101-A Woodrow Ave. 512-467-7402, LittleDeliAndPizza.com

The crown jewel of the throwback Crestview Shopping Center, this shoebox-size deli puts out exceptional Jersey-style pizzas and great deli sandwiches. The Harry's Perfect is a half-pound of pastrami the size of your head and worth every calorie. I wish every neighborhood in town could boast such a great lunchtime staple

42. Lucy's. 2218 College Ave. 512-297-2423, and 5408 Burnet Road, 512-514-0664LucysFriedChicken.com

Fried chicken and pie. Lucy's could execute those two things well (which they do) and go ahead and call it a day. But, like his collection of LP covers that adorn the walls, chef-owner James Holmes likes to give folks a wide-ranging Texas experience that stumbles into Louisiana, from a spicy Gulf shrimp campechana to Texas chili (no beans, of course), fried chicken livers and a creamy chicken boudin. The original location off South Congress that feels a bit like a friend's ranch house has spawned a Burnet Road outpost in the home of the old Austin Diner.

43. Green Pastures. 811 W. Live Oak St. 512-444-1888, GreenPasturesRestaurant.com

The décor is dated, and the place feels like Scooby-Doo and his gang could wander through at any time to investigate a mystery, but this historic building and its lush grounds have a unique charm. And the food is better than you might expect. There is something country club-ish about a tempura lobster tail, but the batter is light and crunchy, as is the accompanying jicama slaw. The rack of lamb with vibrant green chimichurri and mango chutney remains one of my favorite lamb preparations in town, and the menu delivers on a range of familiar Texas dishes, like bacon-wrapped quail, redfish topped with crawfish and boar sausage. Green Pastures is also home to one of my favorite quasi-hidden bars in Austin.

44. East Side Pies. (Multiple locations) 1401 Rosewood Ave. 512-524-0933, EastSidePies.com

Farm-to-table pizza? The folks at East Side Pies have long prided themselves on serving fresh ingredients from local farmers, and they've received kudos for backing up their marketing talk with praise from purveyors. The three locations offer almost two dozen veggie and fruit toppings to go with seven different sauces on their cracker-crust pizzas. Experiment with a hummus or spinach-curry sauce, or keep it traditional with a classic Margherita (here called a Marge). ESP has a knack for flavor profiles (see: the Guiche — spinach, goat cheese, green chilies, sun-dried tomatoes and roasted garlic), so before you order your standard pie, give one of their specialty creations a whirl.

45. Enoteca. 1610 S. Congress Ave. 512-441-7672, [austinvespaio.com/enoteca.html](http://austinvespaio.com/enoteca/enoteca.html)

Not much has changed over the years at this South Congress staple, and that's a good thing, as evidenced by the steady crowds. Homemade fennel sausage tops one of their best pizzas, along with roasted red peppers, mozzarella and pecorino cheeses. Chianti jus relaxes a rosy medium-rare hanger steak on one of the best steak frites plates in town, and fleshy tomatoes swim in a boiling cauldron of rigatoni with tender pork meatballs and mildly spicy arrabbiata sauce. The pastrami panino with chile pesto and caramelized onions is a welcomed left-field surprise at lunch.

46. Asiana. 801 E. William Cannon Drive No. 205. 512-445-3435, AsianaIndianCuisine.com

We know better than to judge restaurants simply by their location or visual aesthetic at this point, right? Asiana is one of the solid examples in Austin of food that transcends its modest environment. The bright burnt-orange creamy chicken tikka masala, spiced with turmeric and paprika for a mild kick and cooked evenly to a startling white, is a nice point of entry, as is the butter paneer, its velvety and nut-infused sauce cloaking cubes of cheese curd. Make sure you sample the spicy cauliflower at the lunch buffet; the knobby vegetable's flame color matches its curried heat.

47. Whip In. 1950 S. Interstate 35. 512-442-5337, WhipIn.com

A uniquely Austin joint that blends an "Old Austin" vibe with a "New Austin" focus on gustatory pleasures, the Whip In was opened as a convenience store by the Topiwala family in 1986. It has since expanded to include a wine bar, a quality-rich tap wall with more than six dozen beers on draft, and a kitchen that delivers Indian-cuisine with a Texas touch.

The combo rice bowl is one of my favorite ways to get my veggies. Try the comforting chana dal (yellow lentils, squash and tomatoes), the sweet crunch of Zambian corn with coconut milk and the iron brace of vinegary collard greens. For some Texas-Indian fusion, the Mumbai Migas add cilantro chutney, feta and basmati rice to the traditional eggs scrambled with corn tortillas, and the goat sliders deliver a spicy-cool balance from roasted jalapeno and herbaceous chutney.

48. El Alma. 1025 Barton Springs Road. 512-609-8923, ElAlmaCafe.com

El Alma has sat at the corner of Barton Springs and Dawson roads for almost 2 1/2 years. Maybe the restaurant from the El Chile group has finally broken the curse of that tricky location. Much

of the credit is due to the stewardship of chef Alma Alcocer-Thomas, a 16-year veteran of Jeffrey's, who's also made stops at Tacos and Tequila and Fonda San Miguel.

Chile-dusted shrimp serve as the centerpiece of the citrusy shrimp chelada appetizer that comes with a shot of lager to pour over the concoction. Caramelized onions and large dollops of guacamole top the carne asada tacos that make for a nice happy hour snack on the rooftop patio. Indulge your sweet-and-savory tooth with a shimmering Mexican Coke-marinated pork chop and its smoky and mildly sweet pasilla-Coke sauce.

49. Stiles Switch. 6610 N. Lamar Blvd. 512-380-9199, StilesSwitchBBQ.com

Combine the lack of monstrous wait with a climate-controlled environment, and Stiles Switch has carved something of a niche for itself in the Austin barbecue scene. The brisket is the best smoked meat option from this pit overseen by a former Louis Mueller Barbecue pit boss, and since this is Central Texas, that's where most people will focus their eating energies.

50. Taco-Mex. 2944 E. 12th St. 512-524-1880, Facebook.com/TacoMex.Austin

What started as a window next to a self-service laundry on Manor Road has expanded to a quaint sit-down restaurant with orange walls ringed by stuffed animals. The tile-walled cafe has a welcoming vibe and cranks out excellent tacos, from the burnt-orange citrus and spice of pastor to chocolatey mole draped over pulled chicken. Make sure you don't miss the "special tacos" section of the menu, which is where you'll find flaky pan-sauteed fish with crisp, buttery skin beneath fanned slices of fresh avocado.