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THE BEST RESTAURANTS ISSUE

WHERE TO DINE (& DRINK) IN THE VALLEY

FEATURING

THE BUZZWORTHY OPENINGS, KILLER COCKTAILS, HOT TAPAS SPOTS, DESSERTS THAT DAZZLE & MORE

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BIRD DOG

Chef Robbie Wilson delivers a dining experience that reflects his time cooking at The French Laundry, Matsuhisa and, most recently, Mattei's Tavern in Santa Barbara. While the Bird Dog menu changes frequently, the small plates include sashimi, salad and veggie options. For the second course, the fried chicken thigh (\$18) is emerging as a signature dish, and Wilson's wagyu and duck preparations are also earning well-deserved raves.

POWER MOVE Request Table No. 31, which is next to the open kitchen. You'll be right on top of the action, practically rubbing shoulders with the chefs. 420 Ramona St., Palo Alto, 650.656.8180, birddogpa.com

BLACK SHEEP BRASSERIE

The folks behind The Lexington House and CasCal debuted Black Sheep late last year. Settle into a tufted, red banquette with a charcuterie board (\$15), before moving on to the pillowy gnocchi in an herb cream sauce (\$19) or succulent duck à l'orange (\$27). For dessert, the beignets (\$8) and croissant bread pudding (\$10) are winners.

POWER MOVE With drink experts Stephen Shelton and Jimmy Marino of TLH involved with BSB, it's no surprise that the cocktails are a draw. Put your trust in the bartenders—pick a liquor or ingredient, and let them mix up something special for you. 1202 Lincoln Ave., San Jose, 408.816.7251, blacksheepbrasserie.com

THE BLUE DOOR RESTAURANT

At owners Pete and Sylvia Foundas' spacious and contemporary oasis, chef Charles Armenta melds Greek, American and French influences in dishes like pot roast with demi-glace (\$22). Spanakopita (\$9) honors an old family recipe, while Blue Door Mac (\$15) combines sinfully rich bechamel with spinach, mushrooms and chicken. Pastas are housemade, and all breads and rolls are baked daily.

POWER MOVE Ask for a table by the cozy two-way fireplace. There are also heat lamps outside, so you can dine alfresco even when it's chilly. Westgate Center, 1502 Saratoga Ave., San Jose, 408.866.4176, thebluedoorrestaurant.com



DIG IN & DRINK UP
Bird Dog's dinner menu is available at the bar, as well as in the main dining room.

THE BYWATER

The latest venture from chef David Kinch (of three-Michelin star Manresa) has been one of the year's most anticipated openings. The Bywater serves New Orleans-inspired dishes such as red beans and rice (\$16), chicken liver mousse with tomatillo jam (\$12), gumbo (\$18) and po' boys (\$15 to \$19), as well as drinks like the Sazerac (\$12) and hurricane (\$13), natch.

POWER MOVE The Oysters Rock-a-Fella (\$18) is a must-order: Kinch's version is half spinach, half watercress, with a complex velouté involving hollandaise, absinthe, Pernod, bacon and cream. 532 N. Santa Cruz Ave., Los Gatos, 408.560.9639, thebywaterca.com

CETRELLA

Fourteen years after opening in Half Moon Bay, Cetrella inaugurated a Los Altos location. The menu melds California and Mediterranean cuisines. Order the Spanish octopus (\$18), followed by the Genoese linguine (\$21) or braised short rib (\$28). And save room for the Valrhona chocolate trio (\$10). Another reason to go: Starting this summer, the restaurant plans to offer patio seating.

POWER MOVE Among the off-list items that are available—if you know to request them—are the 2016 George T. Stagg Jr. bourbon (\$18) and a half-bottle of the 2001 Viader Cabernet Sauvignon Blend (\$90). 400 Main St., Los Altos, 650.948.0400, cetrella.com

LA BOHÈME

Bernard Cartal opened La Bohème a few doors from his other popular French eatery, Pastis. At the newer establishment, the menu features familiar classics—like onion soup (\$9) and salade Lyonnaise (\$14) to start. The crispy-skinned duck confit (\$23) and fries accompanied by mussels bathed in a garlicky white wine broth (\$16) are also highlights.

POWER MOVE Skip the parking-stalking on California Avenue. One block over, on Cambridge Avenue, there's more street parking and lots. 415 California Ave., Palo Alto, 650.561.3577, labohemepaloalto.com

NASCH AUSTRIAN BISTRO

Chef/owner Matthias Fröschl delivers tasty specialties like schnitzel (\$22) and spätzle (\$16), along with Bavarian pretzels, herring, potato salad and sauerkraut (sides \$5). Rich, moist chicken paprikash (\$20) demands a Blaufränkisch, but beers and ales are plentiful. Indulge in apfelstrudel or Sacher torte (\$6 each) with Austrian roasted kaffee for dessert.

POWER MOVE For a grown-up version of mac 'n' cheese, order the spätzle with bacon and cabbage; it isn't on the dinner menu, so just ask. 217A N. Santa Cruz Ave., Los Gatos, 408.402.5092, nasch-bistro.com

THE OXFORD

While primarily influenced by London street food, the menu at The Oxford

also draws on Middle Eastern, Asian, Indian and North African fare. In the few months it's been open, the falafel sliders with mint tahini yogurt (\$10) and burger with housemade pickles (\$15) have been especially popular. Of course, you can also get a platter of beer-battered fish and chips (\$14).

POWER MOVE Most of the syrups, sodas and elixirs are prepared in-house. The bartenders pride themselves on creating concoctions based on a guest's preferred flavor profiles; be sure to let them know yours. 195 S. Murphy Ave., Sunnyvale, 408.245.8503, theoxfordca.com

RELISH GASTRO LOUNGE

After 13 years, Khin Khin and Josiah Slone shuttered their iconic Sent Sovi and opened Relish in the same spot. At the casual new eatery, small plates, wine and craft beer are the focus.

The menu skews more upscale than a typical gastropub with selections such as deviled eggs dressed up with tobiko (\$5) and a delectable duck confit (\$25).

POWER MOVE Three premium bottles of wine remain available from the Sent Sovi cellar, including a 2011 Mt. Brave Cabernet Sauvignon Mount Veeder (\$150). Once those are sold, they will be replaced on the wine list by a few other prestige varietals. 14583 Big Basin Way, Saratoga, 408.867.3110, relishsaratoga.com

THYME

In Thyme's intimate dining room, those with reservations find their names on handwritten place cards—a personal touch further reflected in the food, service and experience. The restaurant's "fresh-to-table" concept features a changing menu of modern California cuisine with a British flair—think sausages and mash (\$23.50) and salmon with spicy lentils and wilted spinach (\$25.50). Owner/chef Winston Haddaway spent years living in London, where he had a gastropub.

POWER MOVE Try Haddaway's rack of lamb (\$27.50) which, unlike in a lot of other places, is not par-cooked beforehand. The lamb is freshly cooked all at once, making it especially juicy and flavorful. 496 Hamilton Ave., Palo Alto, 650.704.6828, thyme-pa.com