

The Best Restaurants in America

The 38 restaurants that defined dining in 2016

by Bill Addison Dec 5, 2016, 11:20am EST

My job as Eater's restaurant editor is to travel the country year-round. (Greatest gig ever.) At each destination — whether I'm reviewing a specific restaurant in Los Angeles or Indianapolis, or gorging my way through the astonishing breadth of Houston's dining scene, or writing about the Vietnamese cultural influence on New Orleans — I'm also deliberating over

which places to include on this annual list of 38 restaurants. It's the cornerstone of my work, the culmination of my calendar.

"Best" is the most subjective word in the English language, and narrowing down this group is as grueling as it is exhilarating. Of course these places all serve wonderful food: avant-garde noodle bowls in Manhattan, soul-soothing roast chicken in San Francisco, Lebanese mezze in Michigan, the Russian layered salad known as "herring under a fur coat" in Portland, Oregon. Their culinary excellence is a given. But each of these restaurants also leads the dining conversation in their communities — and by extension, the nation. Together, they form a mosaic illustrating how we eat in this country, and how we build culture around food.

Like [the city-based Eater 38 maps](#) on which it is modeled, this roster of restaurants evolves slowly. The worst part is removing places from the list to make way for new ones (or, in the case of Houston's Oxheart, a stalwart of previous years' lists, because of [its upcoming closure](#) to revamp). Both inclusion and exclusion ultimately always come down to the question of which restaurants feel most relevant right now —

even if their relevance comes in the form of a certain timelessness. Newcomers this year include a Sichuan upstart in California's San Gabriel Valley, a fine-dining star in Minneapolis, and a standard-bearer of Southern graciousness in Birmingham, Alabama. (To qualify for inclusion on this list, restaurants must be open for at least 18 months; the too-young serious players get their own list, our annual [Best New Restaurants in America](#) roundup).

Get Right to the Good Stuff

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This is the third year of this list; more than half of the restaurants recognized have been here before, and those standard bearers who've made it in every time — there are fourteen of them — are hereby designated Hall of Famers. Just as exciting: This year, for the first time, I've named a

Best Restaurant in America. Dining at this luminary is such a dynamic experience that, honestly, the decision to name it as the finest among paragons wasn't all that difficult.

Most of all, in a complicated time for our country, this body of restaurants represents a definition of the United States that I cherish: multicultural, ambitious, welcoming. These are places for us all to savor. I'll meet you at the table.

The Best Restaurants in America

★ = an Eater Hall of Fame restaurant, on this list for three consecutive years

The 2015 list | The 2014 list

Al Ameer, Dearborn, MI | ★ **Alinea**, Chicago | ★ **Benu**, San Francisco | ★ **Blue Hill at Stone Barns**, Pocantico Hills, NY | **Cosme**, New York | ★ **Eventide Oyster Co.**, Portland, ME | ★ **FIG**, Charleston, SC | ★ **Franklin Barbecue**, Austin | ★ **Frasca Food & Wine**, Boulder | **Garcia's Mexican Restaurant**, San Antonio | **Herbsaint**, New Orleans | **Highlands Bar & Grill**, Birmingham, AL | **Hugo's**, Houston | ★ **Husk Nashville**, Nashville | **Kachka**, Portland, OR | **Liholiho Yacht Club**, San Francisco | **Milktooth**, Indianapolis | **Miller Union**, Atlanta | ★ **Momofuku Noodle Bar**, New York | **Parachute**, Chicago | **Petit Trois**, Los Angeles | **La Petite Grocery**, New Orleans | **Pizzeria Bianco**, Phoenix | **Poole's Downtown Diner**, Raleigh | ★ **Prince's Hot Chicken**, Nashville | **The Publican**, Chicago | **Raku**, Las Vegas | ★ **Roberta's**, Brooklyn | ★ **Rose's Luxury**, Washington, DC | **Saison**, San Francisco | **Sarma**, Somerville, MA | **Spoon and Stable**, Minneapolis | **Sqirl**, Los Angeles | **Szechuan Impression**, Alhambra, CA | **The Willows Inn**, Lummi Island, WA | ★ **Woodberry Kitchen**, Baltimore | ★ **Zahav**, Philadelphia | **Zuni Cafe**, San Francisco

Restaurant of the Year

Blue Hill at Stone Barns

Pocantico Hills, New York

You can start to understand chef Dan Barber's revolutionary ethos by reading his books, watching

his TED Talks, or dropping by the Manhattan outpost of his Blue Hill mini-empire. But for the most thorough — and deeply pleasurable — immersion into his world, you have to make the trek 30 miles north of New York City to the Stone Barns Center. There, you'll find Barber's crown jewel: Blue Hill at Stone Barns, a restaurant tucked in the hills of a century-old working farm. Stone Barns isn't just an exquisite fine-dining restaurant serving magnificent tasting menus; it's an experiment, a laboratory, a learning center, and a model for the future of agriculture. The travel itself builds anticipation: on the train or in a car, the city falls away, mile after mile, until finally you turn down the farm's long, winding driveway, where the surrounding lushness tunes your mind and senses for the feast ahead. [Read more about Blue Hill at Stone Barns, the Best Restaurant in America →](#)

Meet the Newcomers

Beyond their freshness on our list of the best restaurants in America, there's no easy throughline with this group—and that's as it should be. Our class includes restaurants from every corner of the country, with menus reflecting cuisines both homegrown and imported, mostly young trailblazers but also one institution that's been around since 1962. One thing they do all have in common: After dining at each of them, I sighed with intense emotion and thought to myself, "This place is special. The world needs to know about it." —BA

Al Ameer, Dearborn, MI | Detroit's metropolitan area is home to the largest Arab American populations in the United States. Dearborn, in particular, houses an abundance of restaurants serving mezze like hummus and falafel, as well as colossal kebabs. Al Ameer, opened by Khalil Ammar and Zaki Hashem in 1989, shines as an example of hospitality and superb cooking. They also run a beer hop, an advantage that shows in the freshness of their less-stuffed lamb. 12710 West Warren Ave., Dearborn, MI 48126, alameerrestaurant.com

Petit Trois, Los Angeles | French cuisine is making gains as a front-and-center cuisine across America, and I'd argue that Ludo Lefebvre's transcendent take on bistro food singlehandedly nudged things along. He runs this tiny, all-day, card-only, walk-in-only spot with Vinny Dotolo and Shook (their sensational tasting menu counter Trois Amis, which was on this list last year, sits next door), and in the kitchen, classics like rolled omelets, butter-drenched buche de seignolles, escargot, and croque monsieurs have more refinement and moxie than you remember. 718 Highland Ave., 323.468.7777, petittrois.com

[Read more about Petit Trois →](#)

La Petite Grocery, New Orleans | The elegant dining room at Justin Devillier's Garden District charmer—hardwood floors, crown molding, dim lighting as thick as caramel—unwittingly senses with its quintessential New Orleans vibe, and the bartenders craft an impeccable Sazerac. Devillier's kitschy style leans contemporary, but with flawless dishes like beignets and turtle Bolognese, still evokes an unmistakable sense of place. 4238 Magazine St., New Orleans, 504.885.1111, lapetitegrocery.com

[Read more about La Petite Grocery →](#)

[e about Al Ameer →](#)

new York | Cosme heralds a new generation of upscale Mexican restaurants, gradually appearing in our nation, run by natives of Mexico (many of whom have successful restaurants in their home country). Chef-ricque Olvera and chef de cuisine Daniela Soto-Innes of New York — and America — with triumphs like lush, braised duck carnitas for two and their genius, iconic dessert, cornhusk meringue with silky corn (pictured above). 35 East 21st St., New York, 10003, 559, [cosmenyc.com](#)

[e about Cosme →](#)

Mexican Restaurant, San Antonio | Singling out one restaurant above all others in the Lone Star State? I could give you a list of names. But let's start with Garcia's, while we scarf down a Deluxe Mexican Plate (it includes two cheese enchiladas, a pork tamale, a essential web of yellow cheese, for starters) and two of the restaurant's unorthodox, awesome tacos: one with brisket, braised around a bone-in pork chop. 842 Fredericksburg Ave., San Antonio, 210.735.5686, [no website](#)

[Mexican Restaurant →](#)

s Bar and Grill, Birmingham | Decades before the city turned to its latest round of having paroxysms of over-the-top Southern food, Frank Stitt returned to his native Alabama from cooking stints in California and France and opened the flagship of his three Birmingham restaurants, a national destination, and his elegant interpretation of regional cuisine is as vital as ever. The restaurant's hospitality has long been equally distinguished as

[Read more about La Petite Grocery →](#)

Saison, San Francisco | First, the sticker shock: Saison menu costs \$398 per person, not including an optional wine pairing of \$298. But what you get is one of the country's most remarkable dining experiences: Joshua Skenes's brilliant cooking is at once surgically precise and disarmingly comforting. Before a meal veers into sea urchin, abalone, and hairy pig, for example, you might be served a mound of cauliflower paired with biscuits fresh from the oven. 178 Townsend St., San Francisco, 415.828.7990, [saisonsf.com](#)

[Read more about Saison →](#)

Sarma, Somerville, MA | Inspired by the mezze spread served at *meyhanes* (Turkish taverns), Cassie Piuma ran an exhilarating survey of the herbaceous, sun-baked flavors of the Middle East. Her recipes meld with the local season, assisted by produce from the farm of co-owner Ana S. 249 Pearl St., Somerville, 617.764.4464, [sarmarestaurant.com](#)

[Read more about Sarma →](#)

Spoon and Stable | Gavin Kaysen returned from New York to Minnesota, his home state, to open a restaurant that serves modern American cooking at its most fully realized. He draws on cuisines from around the globe for inspiration, but always links his menu back to the upper Midwest with splendors like bison tartare and whimsies like fried cheddar curds over creamed spinach. 211 North First St., 612.224.2244, [spoonandstable.com](#)

[Read more about Spoon and Stable →](#)

Sqirl, Los Angeles | If Jessica Koslow's tiny storefront in the Silver Lake neighborhood wasn't already a phenomenon,

due to Stitt's secret weapon: his gracious wife (and house maven) Pardis Stitt. 2011 11th Ave. South, Miami, 205.939.1400, highlandsbarandgrill.com
[Read more about Highlands Bar & Grill →](#)

Houston | The enduring crown jewel among the four restaurants that chef Hugo Ortega owns with his wife, Tracy, Hugo's recounts Ortega's culinary travels, research, and stories through his native Mexico — gastronomic tradition via dishes that are complex, but always balanced. Every dish (try of chiles and meats and maize (truly, don't miss the one with habanero salsa and tortillas) stands out even in a city with excellent Mexican restaurants. 1600 Westheimer Ave., 524.7744, hugosrestaurant.net
[Read more about Hugo's →](#)

Yacht Club, San Francisco | In the dishes that make up the restaurant's menu, Ravi Kapur weaves flavors that reflect his Indian, Indian, and Chinese heritages; the result is a self-assured style of cooking that joyfully transcends boundaries. After a meal of tuna poke, fried oyster and beef in lettuce wraps, and twice-cooked pork, don't miss the "Hawaii," a torch-bronzed beehive meringue filled with melized pineapple ice cream. 871 Sutter St., San Francisco, 415.440.5446, liholihoyachtclub.com
[Read more about Liholiho Yacht Club →](#)

1, Indianapolis | Jonathan Brooks is at the vanguard of the so-called chef-disruptors changing how America thinks about dinnertime eating. His dishes — like savory puffed Dutch potato cakes with roasted broccoli, aged cheddar, beer and pickled fennel — have the kind of punchy, bold flavors you'd expect at dinnertime, but the restaurant is open for breakfast and lunch. 524 Virginia Ave., Indianapolis, 317.444.1111, thebitterleaves.com
[Read more about The Bitter Leaves →](#)

Shorthand for the California breakfast and the ascent of the grain bowl — then the publication of [her cookbook](#) sealed the deal. There are reasons for her victory: The combined flavors of the famous sorrel rice bowl suggest how sunshine on a lemon might taste, and the ricotta toast painted with three jars of jam (upon request) resembles a flag to which I'd gladly pledge allegiance. 720 North Virgil Ave., Los Angeles, 323.284.8888, sqirlla.com
[Read more about Sqirl →](#)

Szechuan Impression | In seeking out Sichuan restaurants coast to coast, none have impressed me more than Ly and Kelly Xiao's bright corner perch in a San Gabriel Valley strip mall. Dishes like lamb on toothpicks and hot pots of a dozen different animal cuts bubbling in red oil show off the exceptional clarity of flavor and an alchemical approach to spicing, a take on the cuisine that's famously fiery but incredibly nuanced. 1900 Valley Blvd., Alhambra, CA, 626.283.4622, szechuanimpressioninc.com
[Read more about Szechuan Impression →](#)

Willows Inn, Lummi Island, WA | On a tiny island in the San Juan Islands, Northwest, two hours north of Seattle, Blaine Wetzel orchestrates four-hour dinners that double as manifestations of the area's unparalleled bounty. Stay the night to fully appreciate the spectacular setting; sitting down to the array of local ingredients at breakfast is a waking dream. 2579 West Shore Drive, Lummi Island, 360.758.2620, willows-inn.com
[Read more about The Willows Inn →](#)

Zuni Cafe, San Francisco | Zuni Cafe is the nation's oldest neighborhood restaurant. Judy Rodgers, who died three years ago, built the place into a guidepost of physical and cultural history.

es customers for breakfast and lunch. 334 Virginia
 inapolis, 317.986.5131, milktoothindy.com
[e about Milktooth →](#)

ion, Atlanta | Steven Satterfield draws on the breadth
 inary South — its agrarian roots and its modern,
 t-rich perspective — to craft dishes with the depth
 tricacy of a Faulkner short story. Among his many
 ie man is a rice whisperer — if Savannah red rice or
 id andouille gumbo happen to be revolving through
 (which is as terrific at lunch as it is at dinner), you
 ctly what to order. 999 Brady Ave., Atlanta,
 '550, millerunion.com
[e about Miller Union →](#)

comfort. Owner Gilbert Pilgram and head chef Rebecca
 maintain her legacy triumphantly. Menus evolve daily
 season, but there's no escaping the Zuni classics: the
 roast chicken for two, the trend-igniting burger, the pe
 Caesar salad, and the bowl of polenta that is surely m
 than corn. 1658 Market St., San Francisco, 415.552.2522,
zunicafe.com
[Read more about Zuni Cafe →](#)

Returning Greats

★ = an Eater Hall of Fame restaurant, on this list for three consecutive years

★ **Alinea, Chicago** | This year's renovation made America's most audacious fine-dining
 restaurant more interactive and more luxurious — which is to say, better than ever. 1723 N.
 Halstead, Chicago, IL, 312.867.0110, alinearestaurant.com
[Read more about Alinea →](#)

★ **Benu, San Francisco, CA** | Corey Lee's unique, eloquent, and lavish bridging of East and West
 cuisines is in itself a reason to visit the Bay Area. 22 Hawthorne St, San Francisco, CA, 415.685.4860,
benusf.com
[Read more about Benu →](#)

★ **Eventide Oyster Co., Portland, ME** | The oyster bar of everyone's dreams also sneaks in
 surprises like dashi chowder and green curry lobster stew. 86 Middle St, Portland, ME,
 207.774.8538, eventideoysterco.com
[Read more about Eventide Oyster Co. →](#)

★ **FIG, Charleston, SC** | Only one meal in Charleston? Make it Mike Lata and Jason Stanhope's paragon, which takes its cues from the Lowcountry's abundant waters. 232 Meeting St, Charleston, SC, 843.805.5900, eatatfig.com
[Read more about FIG →](#)

★ **Frasca Food & Wine, Boulder, CO** | Bobby Stuckey leads the most attentive service team in America; thrilling Italian cooking and an astounding wine list send the meal over the moon. 1738 Pearl St, Boulder, CO, 303.442.6966, frascafoodandwine.com
[Read more about Frasca Food & Wine →](#)

★ **Franklin Barbecue, Austin, TX** | Like seeing the Grand Canyon or the Statue of Liberty, everyone should experience the long waits and ample rewards of Franklin Barbecue at least once. 900 E 11th St, Austin, TX 512.653.1187, franklinbarbecue.com
[Read more about Franklin Barbecue →](#)

★ **Herbsaint, New Orleans, LA** | Nola's myriad cultures assimilate on Donald Link and Rebecca Wilcomb's graceful menu. 701 St Charles Ave, New Orleans, LA, 504.524.4114, herbsaint.com
[Read more about Herbsaint →](#)

★ **Husk, Nashville, TN** | Multidimensional tastes of the South coalesce onto gorgeous plates at Sean Brock's genial tour de force. 37 Rutledge St, Nashville, TN, 615.256.6565, husknashville.com
[Read more about Husk Nashville →](#)

★ **Kachka, Portland, OR** | Bonnie and Israel Morales offer the most spirited introduction to Russian dining (and drinking!) in America. 720 SE Grand Ave, Portland, OR, 503.235.0059, kachkapdx.com
[Read more about Kachka →](#)

★ **Momofuku Noodle Bar, New York, NY** | Even with a global empire, David Chang's East Village prototype still best exemplifies his radical, game-changing approach to casual counter dining. 171 1st Avenue, New York, NY, 212.777.7773, momofuku.com
[Read more about Momofuku Noodle Bar →](#)



"Herring under a fur coat" at Kachka in Portland, OR



Broccoli with ras el hanout and dates at Parachute in Chicago

Parachute, Chicago, IL | Korean flavors mark the starting point for Beverly Kim and Johnny Clark's unexpected but always exceptional forays into global flavors. 3500 N Elston Ave, Chicago, IL, 773.654.1460, parachuterestaurant.com
[Read more about Parachute →](#)

Pizzeria Bianco, Phoenix, AZ | Smoky pies from the godfather of America's pizza revolution can still rewire synapses with their greatness. 623 E Adams St, Phoenix, AZ, 602.258.8300, pizzeriabianco.com

[Read more about Pizzeria Bianco →](#)

Poole's Downtown Diner, Raleigh, NC | Ashley Christensen's flagship blends high-low dining and Southern-French sensibilities (oh, that macaroni au gratin!) in a singular ode to Americana. 426 S McDowell St, Raleigh, NC, 919.832.4477, ac-restaurants.com/pooles
[Read more about Poole's Downtown Diner →](#)

★ **Prince's Hot Chicken, Nashville, TN** | Trace the unending hot chicken craze right back to the long, long lines at Andre Prince Jeffries' perennial must-visit. 123 Ewing Dr, Nashville, TN, 615.226.9442, princeshotchicken.com
[Read more about Prince's Hot Chicken →](#)

The Publican, Chicago, IL | Paul Kahan defines the twenty-first century beer hall, serving a raucous excess of craft brews, oysters, and pork. 837 W Fulton Market, Chicago, IL, 312.733.9555, thepublicanrestaurant.com
[Read more about The Publican →](#)

Raku, Las Vegas, NV | Get off the Strip to find the true soul of Vegas dining at this Japanese robata grill specialist. 5030 W. Spring Mountain Rd. #2, Las Vegas, NV, 702.367.3511, raku-grill.com
[Read more about Raku →](#)

★ **Roberta's, Brooklyn, NY** | Carlo Mirarchi takes a uniquely freethinking approach to composing a menu; his inventiveness begins with — but reaches far beyond — unbelievable pizza. 261 Moore St, Brooklyn, NY, 718.417.1118, robertaspizza.com

[Read more about Roberta's →](#)

★ **Rose's Luxury, Washington, DC** | Often-lengthy waits for a table end with calming hospitality and Aaron Silverman's strikingly thrilling acts of culinary daring. 717 8th St SE, Washington, DC, 202.580.8889, rosesluxury.com

[Read more about Rose's Luxury →](#)



The dining room at the Publican, Chicago

★ **Woodberry Kitchen, Baltimore, MD** | The kitchen at Spike and Amy Gjerde's always-thronged flagship mines the Chesapeake region's under-rated culinary treasures, which reach far beyond blue crab. 2010 Clipper Park Rd, Baltimore, MD, 410.464.8000, woodberrykitchen.com

[Read more about Woodberry Kitchen →](#)

★ **Zahav, Philadelphia, PA** | To best appreciate Mike Solomonov's passionate, exuberant distillation of his Israeli heritage, bring a group, and prepare to feast on mezze and smoked lamb. 237 St James Pl, Philadelphia, PA, 237 St James Pl, Philadelphia, PA, zahavrestaurant.com

[Read more about Zahav →](#)

The Best New Restaurants 2016 | The Best Restaurants in America 2015 | The Best Restaurants in America 2014

Bill Addison is Eater's restaurant editor, roving the country uncovering America's essential restaurants. Read all his columns [in the archive](#).

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