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AUSTIN EATS

A ROUNDUP OF THE BEST SPOTS DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS **D4**



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT, PHOTOS BY DENISE CHAMBERS, CHAD HARLAN, FOTOJIA, PENNY DE LOS SANTOS AND VANESSA ESCOBEDO BARBA



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Austin's great food ro

This rollicking college town doesn't run on live music alone

BY MARIE ELENA MARTINEZ
Special to Newsday

Best known as the Live Music Capital of the World, Austin, Texas, usually gets spotlighted when the thumping Austin City Limits Festival sets up shop within the expansive Zilker Park, or when South by Southwest, another music extravaganza, breezes through in March. Home to the University of Texas' football-obsessed campus, the Texas capital is growing in reputation not just for a stellar musical landscape or Longhorns sports, but for its food culture.

"Top Chef: Texas" shot episodes in Austin, and its two Austin-based cheftestants go way beyond Tex-Mex and BBQ. With recent honors from the James Beard Foundation, Food & Wine, The New York Times and Bon Appétit, it's clear that Austin is fast becoming a go-to destination for gourmands.

The downtown chefs

Austin's chef du jour is Tyson Cole, named Best New Chef of the Southwest at the 2011 James Beard Awards. You wouldn't have associated Texas with great sushi until Cole opened **Uchi** to great fanfare in 2003. By July 2010, Cole's second restaurant, **Uchiko**, came alive with executive chef Paul Qui, one of this season's "Top Chef" contenders, at the helm. At Uchi and Uchiko, presentation is flawless, and flavor pairings that seem off — tuna and goat cheese? — are sublime. (Uchi, 801 S. Lamar Blvd.; Uchiko, 4200 N. Lamar Blvd.; 512-916-4808, uchiaustin.com).

After Cole, it's all about David Bull's **Congress**, named Best New Restaurant in Texas by The New York Times. Served in a lush, cream-colored dining room, Congress' three-course (\$75) and seven-course (\$125) menus feature locally sourced ingredients, as well as paired wines (200 Congress Ave., 512-827-2760, congressaustin.com). Andrew Curren is another noteworthy addition to Austin's Executive Chef club. At **24 Diner**, the "Top Chef" competitor

ON THE COVER

Neon lights up Sixth Street; The Cupcake Bar offers do-it-yourself; it's a Capitol town; sevice at La Condesa; Andrew Curren works magic at 24 Diner.



AP PHOTO

Singing on Sixth Street speaks to the city's "Live Music Capital" moniker.

is putting an upscale twist on comfort food, such as meat loaf with sweet onion gravy (600 N. Lamar Blvd., 512-472-5400, 24diner.com).

The BBQ/Tex-Mex duo

There are few better states than Texas for smoky barbecue and spicy Tex-Mex. Across downtown's West Second Street, a pair of restaurants deliver both. For barbecue, head to **Lambert's**, in a historic brick building that features live music upstairs. The room is laced with aromas of bacon and brown sugar; it's hard to think straight. Start with the crispy wild boar ribs (\$12) and finish with a



PHOTO BY REBECCA FONDREN

At Uchiko, duck and candied kumquat is served in a mason jar.



undup



At 24 Diner, "Top Chef" competitor Andrew Curren tweaks comfort food.

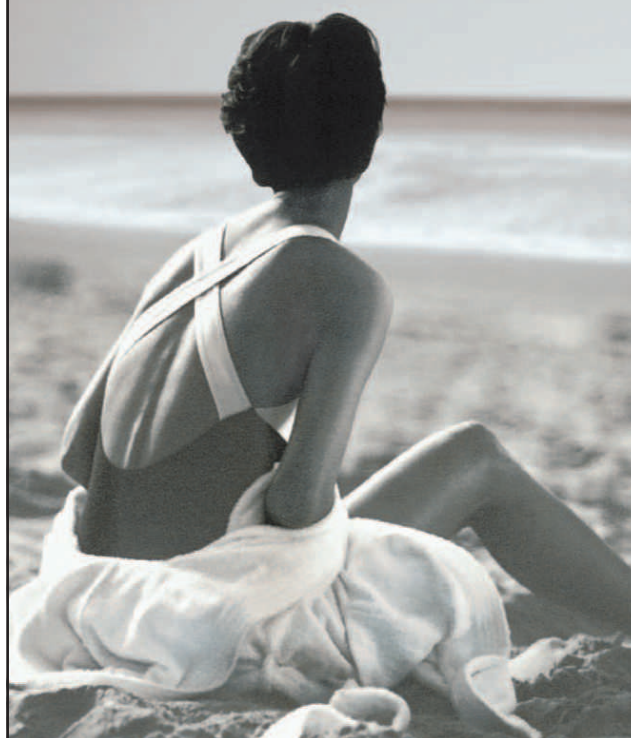


Chef Tyson Cole opened Uchi and Uchiko, its offshoot. At left, his pork belly with citrus.

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Austin's great food roundup

AUSTIN from D4

heaping plate of one, two or three smoked meats, such as maple-and-coriander pork ribs, with a side of mac 'n' cheese (\$16) (401 W. Second St., 512-494-1500, lambertsaustin.com).

Across the street, **La Condesa** is Lambert's Tex-Mex sister. Here, the same owners excel at Mexican in a swanky bilevel space that pumps out stiff margaritas, fresh seviches such as the excellent cobia with spicy aguachiles (\$15), and cochinito, a whole roasted suckling pig served family-style (400A W. Second St., 512-499-0300, lacondesaustin.com).

The food trailers

Austin also is home to more than 1,500 mobile eateries that offer an abundance of choices, from kebabs to pizza to sweets. Gluten-free? Vegetarian? There's a trailer for that, while another sells only chicken and waffles. A few of Austin's can't-miss spots include **Torchy's Tacos** (1311 S. First St., 512-366-0537, torchystacos.com), where messy offerings such as the green chili pork can be had for less than \$5; **Gourdough's** (512-607-6568, gourdoughs.com), where killer doughnuts such as the Funky Monkey are topped with caramelized bananas (\$4.25); **G'Raj Mahal** (512-480-2255, grajmahalaustin.com), where chicken tikka masala can be inhaled for \$11; and **East Side King** (512-422-5884, eastsidekingaustin.com), where Uchiko's Paul Qui is taking Asian street food to new heights.

Not all the trailers are serving fast-food fixes. At **Odd Duck Farm to Trailer** (512-565-4149, oddduckfarmtotrailer.com), chef Bryce Gilmore sells slow-roasted pork belly sliders rubbed with coffee. Named one of Food & Wine's Best New Chefs for 2011, Gilmore is also chef-owner of the brick-and-mortar restaurant **Barley Swine** (2024 S. Lamar Blvd.,



The Texas capital is home to more than 1,500 mobile eateries; below, stiff margaritas at **La Condesa**; right, confections abound at **Whole Foods Market**, which began here.



PHOTO BY PENNY DE LOS SANTOS

512-394-8150, barleyswine.com).

The East Side

Across town from glam South Congress, or SoCo, the grittier East Side is slowly becoming Austin's destination for food and drink. **Franklin BBQ** has a cultlike following — including a YouTube video homage — and was recently named Best Barbecue in America by Bon Appétit magazine. That long line is worth it for perfectly smoked and gently crisped brisket (\$16) and pulled pork (\$13 a pound) (900 E. 11th St., 512-653-1187, franklinbarbecue.com).

Cashing in on the burger-bar craze, **Your Mom's Burgers** (1701 E. Cesar Chavez St.,



AP PHOTO

512-474-MOMS, eatatyourmoms.com) is churning out two-fisted varieties for under \$8, while **Justine's** (4710 E. Fifth St., 512-385-2900, justines1937.com) polishes things up with elegant bistro fare.

After eating, check out the scene at some of Austin's favorite dive bars. Be sure to order your drink with Tito's — Austin's hometown, handmade vodka — at standbys **Rio Rita** (1308 E. Sixth St., 512-524-0384, riorita.net), **Yellow Jacket Social Club** (1704 E. Fifth St., 512-480-9572, yellowjacketsocialclub.com) or **Shangri La** (1016 E. Sixth St., 512-524-4291, shangrilaustin.com). Work through the next morning's hangover at **Cisco's** (1511 E. Sixth St., 512-478-2420). The cheap breakfast tacos

stuffed with eggs, chorizo and cheese; or the migas (\$8), scrambled eggs with all the fixings, are guaranteed remedies.

The sweets

Austin isn't just about savory stuff; there's plenty for those with a sweet tooth. Tap your inner child at **The Cupcake Bar**, on the UT campus (512-903-0187, thecupcakebar.austin.com). Pick your cake, then your frosting and choose from over 75 toppings (sprinkles, Oreos, praline crunch, etc.). The team at **Waltons Fancy and Staple** (609 W. Sixth St., 512-542-3380, waltons.fancyandstaple.com), which is also responsible for Sandra Bullock's nearby Bess Bistro, has assembled a menu of sand-

wiches and snacks, as well as freshly baked breads and treats such as Texas cream puffs and spicy peanut brittle. The brand-new **Austin Cake Ball Kitchen & Bar** (3401 Esperanza Crossing, 512-215-3633, austin.cakeball.com) serves cocktails, small bites and their beloved cake balls — more than a cupcake, less than a cake — in a relaxed kitchen and bar setting.

The healthy stuff

With such indulgent food at every turn, Austin prides itself on being an active city. Runners take laps around Lady Bird Lake, while hikers tackle the trails. Rent a bike at **Mellow Johnny's Bike Shop** for as little as \$30 a day (400 Nueces St., 512-473-0222, mellowjohnnys.com) and cycle over to supermarket behemoth **Whole Foods** (525 N. Lamar Blvd., 512-476-1206, wholefoodsmarket.com).

When Whole Foods was founded in Austin in 1980 with a staff of 19, the concept of organic food was still novel. Today, the market is the most visited tourist attraction in the city, on par with the state capitol building. Featuring four in-store eateries, a new 5-Step Animal Welfare Rating program for assessing how your meat is raised, and on-site cooking coaches to guide shoppers through recipes, Whole Foods is educating at-home cooks on the tenets of eating well.

Insider access

Want to explore an Austin neighborhood through its food? **Austin Eats Food Tours** (512-963-4545, austineatsfoodtours.com) are three-hour walking tours (\$65-\$69) that sample six to eight different spots within Austin's culinary scene. With tours on foot or by bike, and visits to old-school staples such as **Hut's Hamburgers**, a converted drive-in from the 1930s, this is the best way to experience Austin's food scene in one day.

Still hungry? The inaugural **Austin Food & Wine Festival**, sponsored by Food & Wine magazine, will take place this year from April 27 to 29, showcasing Austin's chefs and food, as well as other food celebrities. Tickets go on sale Jan. 24 (austinfoodandwinefestival.com).

For family-friendly things to do in Austin:



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