

LOWCOUNTRY VIBE AT PORCH & SWING • TWENTY EIGHT: WHISKEY, WINE AND WAGYU • BISTANGO MERGES FINE ART, FOOD AND WINE

IRVINE

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FOOD & DRINK

MARCH 5, 2021 NO. 8

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Kang Ho Dong Baekjeong



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RESTAURANT REVIEW

PORCH & SWING: EXCEPTIONAL FOOD AND DINING WITH A LOWCOUNTRY VIBE

BY LIZ GOLDNER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PORCH & SWING

restaurant's ambience. The décor, echoing the gaslight district of Charleston where Parish grew up, harmonizes seamlessly with the hi-tech Irvine environment, replete with a reflecting pool and fountain. The wooden floors and tiles, contemporary lighting, lightly colored wooden tables and chairs of various heights, and butcher block serving areas, echo the down-home Charleston style, while complementing the modernist ambience of the expansive space. Several photos of downtown Charleston adorn the walls. And the restaurant's

Peach tea infused old fashioned



and as chef at Santa Ana's Playground DTSA.

Parish, who has worked as a mixologist and café and restaurant owner in Southern California for more than a decade, met Werner a few years ago. The pair were a natural fit, as soon after they met, Parish inspired Werner to use his culinary training to create recipes combining Lowcountry influences with his world-class expertise for their upcoming Porch and Swing.

Running the restaurant's expansive kitchen, Werner is a food artist, creating dishes that enthrall diners, that invite them to return to Porch & Swing, and to tell their friends and families about this amazing restaurant.

The restaurant's success – as it opened just last April in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic – is a testament to its high-quality food, excellent service and imaginative yet relaxed ambience.

Porch & Swing, 2010 Main St, Irvine, (949) 418-7988. Lunch: Tue.-Fri., 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Dinner: Tue.-Thur., 5 p.m.-9 p.m., Fri. & Sat., 5 p.m.-10 p.m. porchandswing.com

Scallops



Justin Werner



Andrew Parish

Traditional Charleston, SC style cuisine served in a hi-tech Irvine environment might seem an unusual recipe for success. Yet Andrew Parish's Porch & Swing, situated among gleaming high-rise buildings with an expansive patio, is a culinary tour de force. On a recent Saturday evening, patrons there, filling up every table inside (with social distancing) and on the patio, eagerly dined on a variety of Southern-inspired creations.

These delicacies include Skillet Cornbread, a warm, slightly sweet, textured dish, made from blue cornmeal and honey butter, served in a small cast iron skillet. Ride or Die Salad, combining apple, pickled cranberry, hazelnuts and quinoa, is offered, along with Pan Roasted Cauliflower with pickled shallots. Also on the menu are Grandma's Style Potato Gratin, a creamy creation flavored with roasted garlic, and Burrata & Farmers Market Rhubarb. These menu items are so meticulously prepared, with harmonious combinations of flavors, consistencies and colors, that dining at Porch & Swing becomes a gastronomic adventure.

Yet these appetizers – as divine as they are – are previews of coming

attractions. A signature entrée, Black Tiger Shrimp, balances plump flavorful shrimp with tahini, celery root and Brussels sprouts. Piquillo Pepper Cavatelli & Baby Octopus is deftly prepared with flavorful, tender octopus, enhanced with Swiss chard, castelvetrano olives and marcona almonds.

Another Lowcountry offering, and a mainstay of the restaurant, is the tender Roasted Pork Jowl with spicy pepper jam and creamy grits, the latter imported from Charleston. Other entrées are Local Flounder with potato purée, asparagus and sorrel, along with several beef dishes. Desserts, including vanilla-flavored Bread Pudding, Pineapple Curd and sorbets complete the meals.

Accompanying the exotic fare are several cocktails, including Mint Julep and The Mule, made with whiskey, sugar and mint. These and other cocktails are created by Parish who was a mixologist to the stars (in Los Angeles) before becoming a restaurant owner. Wines served at the restaurant are from international destinations including Argentina, Armenia, France, Greece, Italy, Spain and California locales.

Dovetailing with Porch & Swing's Southern-inspired offerings is the res-

casual atmosphere encourages family-style dining. At one table, the night I dined there, six close friends eagerly passed their dishes around to each other, so that all could sample the varieties of tastes and inventive combinations.

Speaking with Parish reveals that he is a passionate purveyor of Lowcountry dishes from his hometown of Charleston, as he learned cooking from his grandmother and mother, a professional Southern chef. He adds that Charleston is a food mecca hosting several restaurants with James Beard award-winning chefs. While Parish is not a chef, he inspires his master chef Justin Werner and suggests dishes to him.

Werner, a New York native, began exploring gourmet food in his early adulthood in this country and throughout Europe. During his adventures here and abroad, he learned about some of the world's most inventive and varied gourmet cuisines, while exploring the use of organic, recently harvested vegetables and herbs.

Werner has worked in Noma in Copenhagen, named by some food experts as the "Best Restaurant in the World," in Tom Colicchio's Craft in New York and L.A., Thomas Keller's Per Se in New York,

RESTAURANT FEATURE

WHISKEY, WINE & WAGYU: 3 REASONS TO CELEBRATE IRVINE'S TWENTY EIGHT

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TWENTY EIGHT



Heritage Pork Shoulder



Tomahawk Ribeye

Since 2014, Twenty Eight Restaurant and Bar has quietly occupied a sleek space near the corner of MacArthur Blvd. and Jamboree, on the border of Irvine and Newport Beach.

With a robust wine list, a stellar whiskey flight program, and a signature oak wood-fire grill, Irvine's Twenty Eight has flown under the radar for too long.

If you happen to overlook the char siu glazed Heritage Pork Shoulder, Twenty Eight's asian inspired dish served with fried bao buns, be sure not to miss the two beautiful cuts of Japanese and American Wagyu at the very top of the steak menu.

While guests may lose themselves in the mouth-watering awe of a sizzling slice of Japanese A5 Wagyu Ribeye "Snow Beef," Kevin Ho, General Manager and Sommelier of Twenty Eight OC, said this meat-forward menu is meant to entice.

"We have been driving a meat-centric menu – a global menu – primar-

ily focusing on different cuts of steak, coming from different purveyors and different farms," Ho said in an interview with *Irvine Weekly*.

But the effort spearheaded by Ho and Twenty Eight's executive Chef Jay Lacuesta is more than just meat.

"Beyond the steaks, we are most famous for our heritage pork shoulder. Chef Jay is big on texture, so usually when you have pork shoulder, it's really cooked all the way so it's falling apart – think like Carnitas, barbecued pulled pork. Chef Jay wanted it extremely tender so it still eats like a steak – it has a little bit of integrity still."

Aside from the real-world culinary splendor of its fare, Twenty Eight offers a collection of rare Napa Valley wine labels, along with an emphasis on the education of both American and Japanese whiskey/whisky spirits, paired with one of the strongest, high quality whiskey collections in Orange County.

Twenty Eight also provides custom whiskey experiences, in the form of

whiskey flights. These flights give guests a small taste of the spirit in order to contrast different flavors and styles of whiskey, bourbon and scotch from around the world.

While some may view the aspect of the whiskey spirit hard to swallow, with nearly a decade of experience as a sommelier, Ho explained that he often offers advice to novice whiskey drinkers.

In fact, one fun fact about the whiskey spirit is that it is spelled differently depending on the country of origin. The European and Japanese versions omit the "e", spelling it "whisky." Only the American spirit is spelled "whiskey."

"I look at whiskey drinkers two different ways. One is if you're totally new, if you don't know too much, I recommend starting off with a light whiskey cocktail – more like a sour. We have a cocktail called 'Do the Hokey Toki' made with Japanese style whisky called Suntory Toki whisky, St. Germain, Yuzu essence and orange bitters," he explained. "If you don't drink whiskey this is a great cock-

tail to start with. And as you're working your way up to an intermediate, then to kind of move into a spirit-forward cocktail, which would be like our Central Park, and that's what we like to call a woodsy Manhattan."

Twenty Eight curates its in-house wine and whiskey collection with a high level of care, which consists of rare bottles of whiskey including the highly sought after Pappy Van Winkle Bourbon, which is produced by the popular Buffalo Trace Whiskey facility.

Ho explained that the Pappy Van Winkle Bourbon has become a hot commodity considering the small amount the distillery produces, paired with increases in whiskey enthusiasm, nationally.

"But, beyond the rarity, they do get award after award, from being one of the top bourbons," Ho explained.

Yet, despite Twenty Eight's ability to curate some of the most rare spirits, nothing could have prepared the Irvine-based eatery for the challenges spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, thanks to a commitment to maintaining a flexible to-go menu, along with fun community events like a virtual happy hour, the Twenty Eight community together was still able to gather over drinks.

"About a year ago, the first time around, we had to rethink our menu, especially for to-go, because what our menu currently was, was not geared for takeout," Ho explained. "We had a lot of raw product – crudos and things like that – so we did have to change our menu a little bit."

In fact, Ho explained that by building off Twenty Eight's concept of whiskey flights, and whiskey tasting nights, the restaurant created to-go style whiskey tasting kits that have instantly become a go-to for any lover of whiskey.

"We want to continue that during the pandemic, but we did it as a tasting kit," he explained. "We started doing these whiskey kits with distilleries – we did it with Buffalo Trace, we did it with High West – we still continued doing our whiskey motif, even though we couldn't have guests in the restaurant."

While things seem to be moving in the right direction for California in terms of reopening, Twenty Eight deserves to see glasses raised high, as the team worked diligently to preserve a culinary community in Irvine – thanks the help of wine, wagyu and incredible whiskey.

Cheers, Twenty Eight.

RESTAURANT ART

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Mia Tavonatti, *Santita (Sanctity)*, Oil on canvas

BISTANGO RESTAURANT: MERGING FINE ART, FOOD AND WINE

BY LIZ GOLDNER

John Ghoukassian, founder and owner of Bistango, is an ardent admirer of 19th and 20th century European art. Growing up in Tehran in the mid-20th century, he often visited European cities, gravitating to cafes and bistros displaying paintings by local Impressionists.

When he chose a career in the 1970s, he combined his three loves – fine food, wine and art – and opened the acclaimed gourmet restaurant, “Lautrec,” in Tehran. He served European and Persian cuisine, while exhibiting Impressionist art on the restaurant walls.

Ghoukassian moved to the United States in 1983, and soon after opened Bistango (meaning bistro in French) restaurant in Los Angeles. He again

adorned the restaurant walls with fine art, creating the look and feel of the European bistros he loved. Three years later, he closed the L.A. location and opened a similar restaurant, also called Bistango, in Orange County. Located in the Atrium Building in Irvine, near the former Irvine Museum, the venue was designed by Venice-based architect Michael Carapetian as a combination restaurant and art gallery. The popular site, which recently reopened for outdoor dining, has exhibited art on its walls since its inception, while serving food that Ghoukassian calls “new American cuisine.” The extensive wine list includes award-winning varieties.

Antoinette Sullivan, curator of Bistango’s art shows for more than 30 years,

explains, “We presented our first art exhibition there at the restaurant’s opening in November 1987. We have hosted over 120 art shows displaying more than a thousand artists from Southern California and around the world.”

The many artists whose works have been exhibited there include Lita Albuquerque, Carlos Almaraz, Chuck Arnoldi, Billy Al Bengston, Paul Bond, Richard Diebenkorn, Laddie John Dill, Frank Dixon, Ray Jacob, Russell Jacques, Tom Lamb, Ed Moses, Eric Orr, Ron Pastucha, Ellen Rose, Fred Stoddard and Mia Tavonatti. Several of these artists have also exhibited at Bayside, which Ghoukassian owns.

Sullivan is honored to have exhibited the work of sculptor Márton Váró at

Bistango. “I met Márton in 1987,” she says, “after he arrived here from Hungary. I showed his work in our first exhibition and in others. In the early 1990s, friends and collectors Paul and Barbara Casanova commissioned Márton to work on a six-foot Persian Travertine stone sculpture, ‘Standing Figure.’ The piece was later donated to the Laguna College of Art and Design. In 2015, I introduced Márton to Louise Jacobs, Pacific Symphony Director, Group and Corporate Sales.” Váró was soon after commissioned to create a life-size marble sculpture of Pacific Symphony Music Director Carl St. Clair. “Maestro Carl St. Clair” was dedicated in 2019 and installed in Costa Mesa’s Pacific Symphony Headquarters.

Bistango exhibitor Bill Havlicek creates abstract paintings that are inspired by Courbet, Cezanne, Monet, Van Gogh, Wyeth, De Kooning, Gorky, Guston and Diebenkorn, as he explains. “He works with layers of color producing very subtle transparencies with a special luminosity,” Sullivan says.

Another Bistango exhibiting artist is Irvine based Mark Leysen. He builds large abstract expressionist paintings based on color and rhythm, with geometric forms providing balance and harmony. “Mark displayed his paintings at our first exhibition and at our 30th anniversary show,” Sullivan says. “Today, he is considered one of the foremost abstract artists in Southern California.”

Bistango has presented three to four exhibitions each year, providing an eclectic mix of styles and media by established, mid-career and emerging artists. “Several who exhibited at Bistango early in their careers went on to achieve national and even international acclaim,” says Sullivan. “Many collectors and art lovers have visited and dined at Bistango in part because of its quality art shows.”

Soon after the COVID-19 pandemic caused restaurants to close in 2020, Sullivan discontinued curating shows at Bistango. When the restaurant later began opening intermittently, Ghoukassian’s wife Diana, an art collector, photographic artist and gallery owner, began curating the art exhibitions. She chooses art pieces from her personal collection and from her gallery in the Atrium Building, “Diana’s Finds.”

Diana, born in Iran to Armenian parents and schooled in Europe, speaks eight languages and collects art from all over the world. The current exhibition at Bistango, reflecting her eclectic tastes, is an amalgam of 19th to 21st century art pieces. (While dining at Bistango is cur-

RESTAURANT ART

Chris Gwaltney, Untitled,
Oil on canvas



Márton Váró, 33 Cubes,
Carrara marble



Paul Jenkins and Fernand Leger.

"Bistango has presented food and wine connoisseurs with an inspiring selection of museum quality art exhibits for many years," Sullivan says. "The restaurant is known as much for its rotating art shows as for its fine dining and wine list. And John Ghoukassian has been involved in every detail of the exhibitions, from the art selection to the hanging of paintings and placing of sculptures. It is incredible that this wonderful dining oasis has been a cultural center for more than 30 years."

Indeed, Bistango's three-plus decade of success demonstrates that fine art, great food and world-class wine can merge seamlessly when presented with grace and devotion to details. For lunch, Bistango offers a variety of salads as appetizers and entrees, along with burgers sandwiches, rice and pasta selections. Dinner entrees include Chilean Sea Bass, Tamarind-Chili Glazed Salmon, New Zealand Te Mana Lamb Chops, chicken and beef selections. Tiramisu and cheesecake, among other selections are offered for dessert.

Bistango, 19100 Von Karman Ave., Irvine. (949) 752-5222.

Open for dining and viewing art, Mon.-Thurs, 11:30 a.m.-8 p.m., Fri., 11:30 a.m.-9 p.m., Sat., 5 p.m.-9 p.m. www.bistango.com

rently in a covered space just outside of the restaurant, visitors are welcome to enter it to look at the art she presents.)

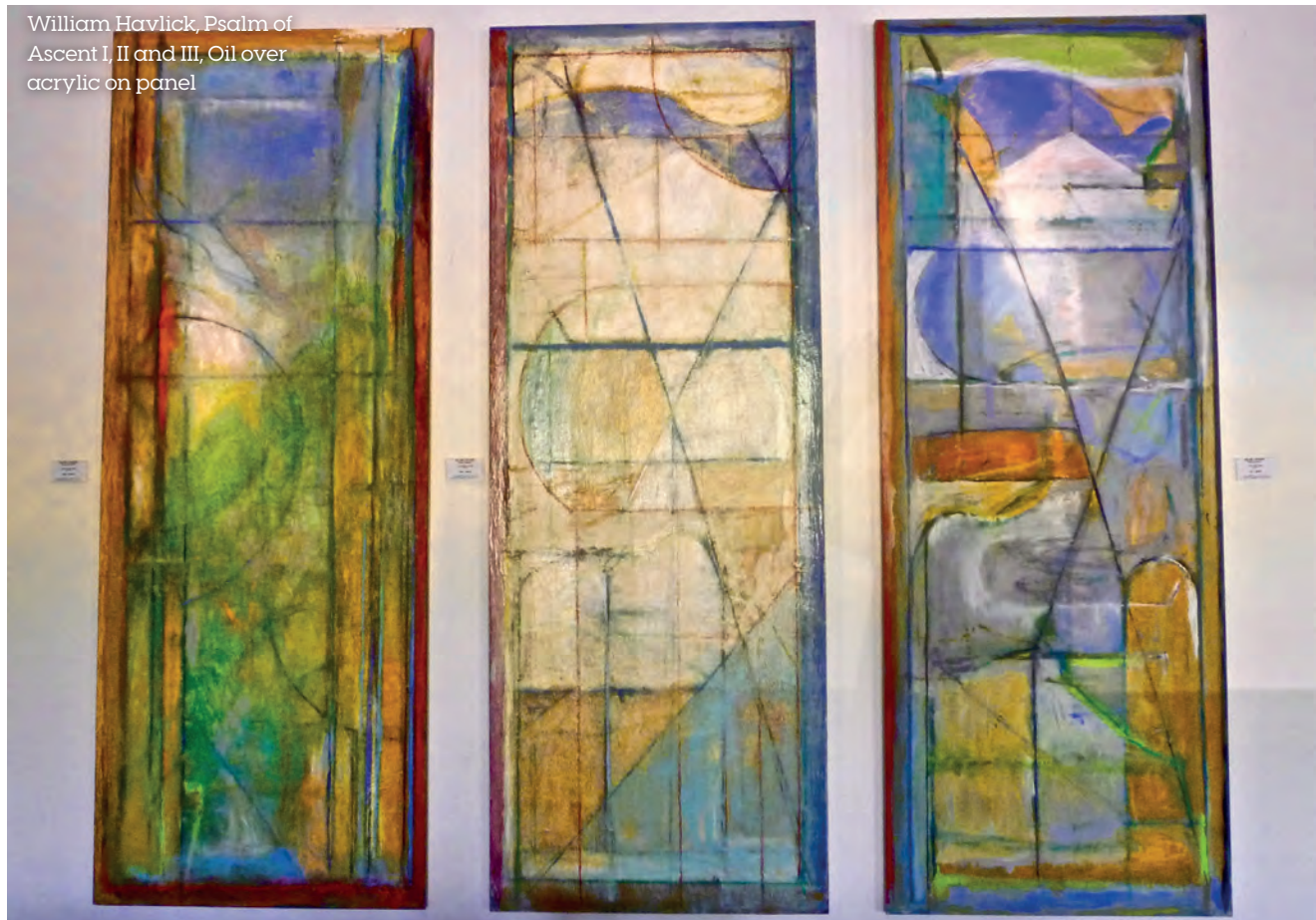
One of the more expressive artworks there is a vintage photograph of John Lennon, signed by Robert Freeman, the Beatles' photographer from 1962 to 1966. Nearby there is a sensual nude photo of Marilyn Monroe, shot in 1962 by photographer Bert Stern. There are two art deco style posters by Erté. Another poster, announcing a Picasso exhibition, is from the Picasso Museum in Barcelona.

Local artists whose works also adorn the restaurant walls include Chris Gwaltney. His "Untitled" oil, combining realism with abstraction and gestural brushwork, is a richly colorful composition, containing a shadowy human figure.

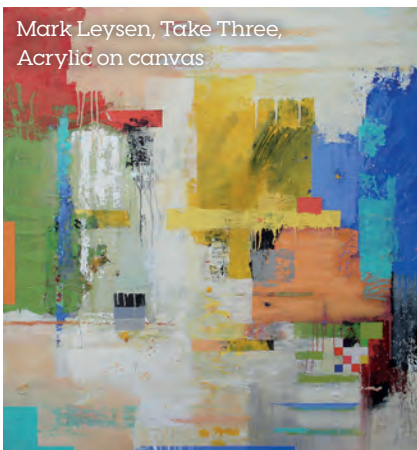
James Strombotne contributes a dark brooding watercolor to the venue. Jim Dine's "Eight Hearts" is a semi-abstract

painting depicting eight hearts. Other artists whose works are there are Peter Max, Wayne Thiebaud, Byron Galvez,

William Havlick, Psalm of
Ascent I, II and III, Oil over
acrylic on panel



Mark Leysen, Take Three,
Acrylic on canvas





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SIXTH SENSE DINING HELPS O.C. TASTE NOSTALGIA THROUGH ELEVATED CUISINE

CHEF ANH DO IS ABLE TO CREATE NOSTALGIC, PALATABLE JOURNEYS, MAPPED OUT THROUGH A PRIVATE MULTI-COURSE MEAL IN THE CLIENT'S OWN HOME.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SIXTH SENSE DINING



While Californians have been shuttered inside their homes for the greater majority of a year, Chef Anh Do, owner of the Orange County-based Sixth Sense Dining, has found a way to bring one-of-kind, global dining experiences into the homes of

Irvine residents.

For Do, Sixth Sense Dining is a literal term. By curating each private dinner menu based on details of his client's past experiences, Do is able to create nostalgic, palatable journeys, mapped out through a multi-course meal. Once equipped with his client's culinary

topography, Do cooks to create emotion within every bite.

"I really want my clients to be able to eat food and be able to have it evoke some memories within them," Do said in an interview with *Irvine Weekly*. "Our senses – sight, touch, hearing, smell – helps us cope with everyday life. Those

five senses accumulate to a sixth sense, which is emotion or memories. That's where the Sixth Sense name came from."

Do, a resident of Westminster, said he moved to Orange County from Vietnam when he was six years old. Prior to the pandemic, Do worked as an event chef for Fundamental L.A. As a self-trained chef, Do said he has been cooking for more than a decade, and started his small catering business in 2013, just as a side hustle, to sharpen his culinary talents.

"It allowed me to practice my creativity and to practice more recipes," Do explained. "I've never gone to culinary school, or had institutional training for culinary techniques. It was all learned on the job and trained through 15 years of experience."

With clients spanning from the Orange County coastline to the lush Hollywood Hills, Do and his Sixth Sense Dining business have spent the pandemic creating tasty, edible recollections of his clients' emotions, allowing Southern California residents to take a flavorful journey into the outside world – without leaving their homes.

Dishes range from classics like beef wellington, to outside-the-box molecular concepts like lobster bisque soup spheres, which Do has named "Soup Squared," made with lobster broth foam and a lobster ravioli.

"One of my actual signature dishes that I'm known for, and has been requested again and again – I call it Soup Squared – it looks like a green ravioli with a bunch of pearls all around it – those are soup spheres, so you have like two different type of soups that come together."

Irvine resident Russell Corrie spoke to *Irvine Weekly* about his recent Sixth Sense Dining experience on Valentine's Day, which he received as a gift from a friend. Corrie emphasized that there is seemingly no limit to culinary creativity during a dining experience with Do.

Corrie explained that during a conversation to discuss the menu, Do was able to tap into personally specific details, by asking questions about the couple's favorite travel destinations, fond childhood memories and favorite foods, all in order to create a completely unique menu – specific to Corrie's preferences.

Corrie, a 16-year resident of Irvine, said Sixth Sense was his first private dining experience, and was overwhelmed by Do's attention to detail, adding it was hard to believe this could be accom-

PRIVATE DINING

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plished in his own home.

Of note, Corrie said he obsessed over Do's blissfully creamy burrata and grilled peaches appetizer, featuring a cumquat puree, followed by a memorable short rib dish.

"The fact that it was in our house was the weirdest thing ever – it was like this total gastronomical experience in our dining room," he said. "Everything was put together in such a way – because we went to Europe and went to this gastronomic restaurant and it really reminded us of our trip to Barcelona."

Despite Do's ability to capture meaningful, sentimental value of memory within a dish, it does not take away from the fact that the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have shifted aspects of the American dining experience in countless ways.

Do, who has operated Sixth Sense Dining for six years, said with less than 1,000 followers on social media, his clientele has always been word of mouth.

"It's been a roller coaster," he said. "Even though I haven't reached a four-digit following – or even up to 500 – the amount of people I have so far has branched off into hundreds and thousands of people because of word of



mouth."

For now, Do says he is getting by, even considering his lack of social media clout. For Do, word of mouth between clients has paid off, which Do credits to

the exclusivity and uniqueness of his in-home Sixth Sense Dining experience.

With this, Do hopes that people will want to continue to allow his culinary creativity take center stage, regardless

of the pandemic.

"My clientele base has skyrocketed. Most clients are like, 'Oh, my gosh! I didn't even know this type of cuisine can be available at home!'" he explained. "I feel like the relationships my clients and I have built together, I have gone to a level that's trustworthy enough where they would still remember me on special occasion days, and my client base has grown large enough that those days will come often and consecutively."

Do said the debate regarding the best model of business for restaurants – from pop-up style, to brick and mortar, to food trucks – has been reignited by the negative impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the restaurant industry.

"This whole pandemic has changed [at least] my business mindset, because we see that all over the place that speciality restaurants, with only a single avenue to bring in revenue, have been destroyed – it's been horrible for them – the only ones surviving have been in the right place at the right time," he said. "It's really sad to see that happen."

Do's Sixth Sense Dining experience will start about \$100 a plate, depending on quality of ingredients and number of courses.

If a gastronomic trip down memory lane is something you would like to check out, the contact information can be found on the Sixth Sense Dining Facebook page.



IRVINE WEEKLY PICKS

20 OF THE BEST THINGS TO EAT AROUND IRVINE

OVER THE PAST YEAR, THERE'S BEEN PLENTY OF TIME TO SIT AND THINK ABOUT ALL THE DELICIOUS FOODS WE'D LOVE TO BE EATING WITH A GROUP OF OUR CLOSEST FRIENDS. WITH HOPE POTENTIALLY ON THE HORIZON, HERE'S A LIST OF THE 20 BEST THINGS TO TRY IN IRVINE.

BY IRVINE WEEKLY



BEST BUFFALO FRIES: THE BUFFALO SPOT

The Buffalo Spot has built a fried chicken empire with the help of a simple, yet tasty, niche – buffalo fries. After opening in Long Beach, California in 2013, the Buffalo Spot now has more than 30 locations across California, Arizona and Nevada. The Buffalo Spot has called Irvine home since May 2019. By popularizing the hashtag #World-FamousBuffaloFries on social media, the Buffalo Spot has created a unique niche for itself by serving heaps of French fries loaded with chopped and diced pieces of hand-breaded fried chicken. The chicken is then sauced with different flavors of “buffalo-style” sauce, with signature flavors like mango habanero, Tajin and pineapple

jalapeno.
4511 Campus Drive, Irvine.

BEST FILIPINO FRIED CHICKEN: JOLLIBEE

This Filipino staple has gained a cult following thanks to a delicious rendition of Filipino fried chicken, known as Chickenjoy. The crispy, flaky, golden brown chicken is one of the most celebrated fried chicken experiences around the world. Jollibee should be on the list of Irvine’s go-to spots at all times. If you go, be sure to try the mashed potatoes and gravy, and Filipino spaghetti. Lastly, whatever you do, be sure to get extra Jollibee gravy, because there’s never too much.

2180 Barranca Pkwy, Ste. #120, Irvine.

BEST SUSHI: OOTORO SUSHI

By placing an attention to detail on every aspect of dining, Ootoro Sushi in Irvine’s TRADE Shopping Center has silently gained Michelin Guide notoriety. For some background, Michelin Guide inspectors are trained to objectively evaluate dishes based on five core categories of dining, known as, “The Five Criteria – quality of the ingredients used, mastery of flavor and cooking techniques, the personality of the chef in his cuisine, value for money and consistency between visits.” Ootoro is a recipient of the The Michelin Plate: Good cooking distinction.

2222 Michelson Drive #246, Irvine.



BEST SHABU SHABU: DPOT HOT POT

Known as Shabu Shabu, which translates to, “Swish, Swish,” this Korean dish consists of adding noodles, protein and veggies to a pot of steaming hot broth that cooks on a stove built into the table. At dPot, you can create your own hot pot experience, selecting from Wagyu beef and many other cuts of top choice beef. Guests have reported about a tableside three-tiered plate rack with meat on top, veggies and noodles on the bottom, with a healthy serving of veggies, which include cabbage, bok choy, broccoli, carrots and tofu. dPot has two locations, one in Buena Park and the other in Irvine’s Woodbridge Village Center.

4636 Barranca Pkwy, Irvine.

BEST MORRACCAN SALMON SALAD: ZOV'S KITCHEN

Chef Zov Karamardian, owner and founder of the Orange County-based Zov’s Bistro and Bakery, has one dish that is the centerpiece of her menus – the Morraccan Salmon Salad with lentil and rice pilaf and charmaoula sauce. Chef Zov said she learned how to make this dish during a visit to Morocco, adding that it has become a permanent fixture on her menu. “I learned this dish from my visit to Morocco many many years ago and recreated the dish,” Chef Zov explained in an email to *Irvine Weekly*. “To this day I will be crucified if I ever take it off the menu. It is healthy, delicious and beautiful on the plate.”

3915 Portola Parkway, Irvine.

IRVINE WEEKLY PICKS



Agora
Churrascaria



Chile Relleno Tacos
Taco Rosa



The Buffalo Spot
Boss Fries

BEST TAQUIZA FOR TWO: TACO ROSA

Loaded up with skirt steak, chicken breast and tiger shrimp, Taco Rosa's Taquiza for Two is the ultimate date night platter. With Mexican cuisine at the core of Taco Rosa in Irvine, guests can always find familiar flavors and hearty portions, and highly recommended Cadillac margaritas. While COVID-19 has changed how Irvine experiences Taco Rosa, the days of dining in a dimly lit, authentically decorated Mexican cantina are not too far away. Until then, there's always take out!

13792 Jamboree Road, Irvine.

BEST CROQUE MONSIEUR: LA BOULANGERIE

The well-known San Franciscan bakery La Boulangerie has established roots in Irvine offering the elevated coffee and Paris cafe-style fare. While much of La Boulangerie's menu provides the norm – avocado toasts, croissants, along with a variety of soups and sandwiches. However, those looking to raise some eyebrows should go with the monstrous Croque Monsieur, built with Gruyere cheese, creme fraiche and pain de mie. Offering an all-day brunch, anytime is the perfect time for a quick bite at La Boulangerie.

5635 Alton Pkwy, Suite I, Irvine.

BEST ALL-AROUND VIBE: TRADE MARKET PLACE

With more than a dozen internationally themed restaurants, TRADE Food Hall in Irvine has an eclectic vibe, with plenty of outdoor space to work, eat and relax. From coffee to curry, to dental offices and shopping, TRADE Market Place has become a one-stop shop for necessities in Irvine.

2222 Michelson Drive, Irvine.

BEST CURRY: CURRY HOUSE COCO ICHIBANYA

With locations in Torrance, Irvine, Brentwood and Koreatown, CoCo Ichibanya Curry House has more than 1,400 locations around the globe. CoCo Curry House has a stellar reputation for its extravagant list of curry dishes. From chicken cutlets, pork cutlets, omelettes and even seafood, CoCo Curry House offers an incredible lineup of curry and rice dishes.

2710 Alton Pkwy, Irvine.

BEST BRAZILIAN STEAKHOUSE: AGORA CHURRASCARIA

If you like the idea of being served sizzling hot steak, sliced off the skewer, then Agora Churrascaria is the place for you. With a dozen cuts of meat, this Brazilian steakhouse serves beef, pork, lamb and chicken. Guests can signal their desire for additional meat with the use of a green ticket, left on the table which encourages

the waiters to bring more meat. Once the ticket is flipped to the red side, the meal will come to an end.

1830 Main Street, Irvine,

BEST AUTHENTIC ITALIAN PIZZA: ANGELINA'S PIZZERIA

With ingredients imported from Italy, Angelina's Pizzeria Napoletana specializes in authentic Neapolitan-style pizza, using old world cooking techniques. With wood fired ovens, Angelina's pizza program is certified by the Vera Pizza Napoletana, which is an organization founded by a group of Neapolitan

people.

8573 Irvine Center Dr, Irvine.

BEST SPICY RAMEN: SILVERLAKE RAMEN

Silverlake's popular ramen spot has expanded southward, opening in Huntington Beach, Long Beach and recently at the Irvine Spectrum. The Blaze is a spicy tonkotsu ramen, served with bean sprouts, steamed spinach, green onion and a soft boiled egg. Served with a healthy slab of pork belly or chashu. One of the tastiest bowls of ramen you can find in Irvine.

511 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.



Honey and Butter

IRVINE WEEKLY PICKS



Olive Oil Mediterranean
Chicken Shawerma
Calzone

BEST GRILLED CHEESE: THE MELT

Located at the Irvine Spectrum, there is undying hype around the concept of a grilled cheese. The cheese pull is a novelty in today's age of social media and with a long list of mac 'n' cheese, melt burger and melted classics – like a patty melt made with grilled angus and Waygu burger patties, caramelized onions and provolone cheese, and mustard – there's no shortage of Instagrammable eats at The Melt.

665 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

BEST MACARONS: HONEY AND BUTTER MACARONS

This small macaron shop at the Irvine Spectrum crafts incredibly detailed character-style macarons, with flavors like dark chocolate marmalade, French toast, Oreo and Honey Lemon. If you ever need a cool gift idea, or just have a sweet tooth, Honey and Butter will tick all your boxes.

633 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

BEST MEDITERRANEAN: OLIVE OIL MEDITERRANEAN GRILL

Located in the Cypress Village Shopping Center, Olive Oil is a casual Mediterranean joint, featuring a Chicken Shawarma Calzone and Olive Oil Calzone that you can only find in Irvine. They also offer a Mini Menu, which is mini versions of their regular menu items, that is ideal for catering.

14141 Jeffrey Rd, Irvine.



Curry House CoCo
Ichibanya

BEST UDON: FUKADA

Yelp reviews will showcase Irvine's and Orange County's undying loyalty to Fukada in Irvine. Well-known for their delicious rice bowls and wide variety of udon and don bowls. On top of high-rated food, guests also point to the affordability of Fukada's food, which is always consistent in quality and authenticity.

683 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.

BEST BAGELS: EAST COAST BAGELS

From pizza sandwich bagels to the traditional lox and cream cheese, East Coast Bagels is located in Irvine's Heritage Plaza. Thanks to their hefty bagel sandwiches, ECB is one of the highest rated bagel makers in Orange County. Pro Tip: Phone orders might take longer, sometimes it's best to wait in line.

14370 Culver Drive, Ste B, Irvine.

OUTSIDE IRVINE BEST SICHUAN CUISINE: SICHUAN IMPRESSION

For the spice lovers in Orange County, Sichuan Impression serves spicy Chinese Sichuan cuisine. Dishes like toothpick lamb, mapo tofu, rice flour pork belly, twice cooked pork and marbled beef noodle casserole. For the fearless spice seeker, Sichuan Impression also serves several Rattan Pepper dishes, including a wok-fried duck tongue.

3816 Red Hill Ave, Tustin.

BEST CLAY POT CHICKEN: YANG'S CHICKEN RICE

With more than 6,000 locations in China, Australia, Japan and Singapore,

Yang's Chicken Rice is well-known across the globe for its simple and delicious Clay Pot Chicken, known as Huang men ji. The dish is made with hearty thigh meat, tasty slices of ginger, shiitake mushrooms and sliced serrano peppers. Tustin is home to the first Yang's Braised Chicken in the United States. Priding itself on a secret family recipe, Yang's chicken and rice bowls are served in three levels: regular, authentic and spicy.

13824 Red Hill Ave, Tustin.

BEST TACO TUESDAY: HERMOSA TAQUERIA

Just outside the Irvine border in Tustin, Hermosa Taqueria is a female-owned and operated establishment serving latin cuisine in the Tustin Union Market. However, while not exactly Irvine-based, the amazing Taco Tuesday deal makes it all worthwhile. On Tuesday, Hermosa Taqueria offers \$2 off margaritas and beer, and \$3 off taco combos. With a protein lineup of birra, al pastor, chicken and carne asada, Hermosa Taqueria is a great local spot that showcases authentic cuisine.

2493 Park Ave, Tustin.



MARCH 5.6.7

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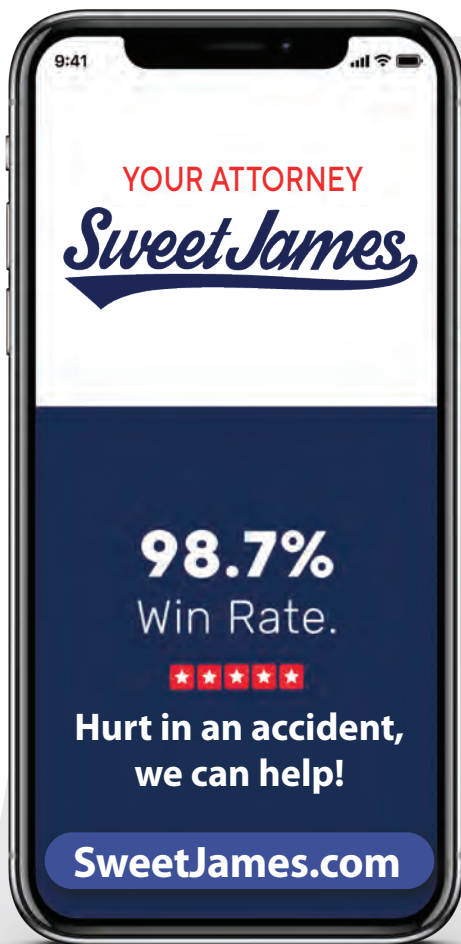
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BEST OF IRVINE FOOD & DRINK

IRVINE'S BEST NOODLES

FROM TOMATO BEEF NOODLE SOUP, TO HOT SANSAI UDON, TO TRUFFLE MAC N' CHEESE, TO SHIO RAMEN.

BY AUDREY FONG



AJ Restaurant

AUDREY FONG

Noodles are top-tier carbs; it's just a fact of life. From spaghetti and ramen to pho and chow mein, noodles come in a huge variety and can be cooked to match any palate desired. With so many restaurants specializing in noodle soups, Irvine is undoubtedly home to some of the best noodles out there.

A&J'S NOODLES IN SPICY SESAME SAUCE TOPPED WITH PEANUT POWDER

If you're a peanut butter fan, these noodles are a must! Peanuts and peanut butter are a popular ingredient in many Asian cuisines and these noodles from A&J are among the best peanut noodles in town. It's technically a slightly spicy sesame noodle topped with peanut powder, but it's got that nutty, thick texture that peanut butter has. Expert tip: Order it with thick noodles so that the sauce really sticks to each strand.

14805 Jeffrey Road, Irvine.

HI-HOUSE'S TOMATO NOODLE SOUP WITH BEEF SHANK, TENDON AND TRIPE

Beef noodle soup is practically a national art in Taiwan and the tomato beef noodle soups at Hi-House are next level. It's got the umami and spiciness that you love in a beef noodle soup countered by the sweetness of a tomato. The beef shank, tendon and tripe version is nice because of its variety of proteins, but they do offer a beef only version as well.

6638 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.

FUKADA'S HOT SANSAI UDON

Fukada is a favorite among Irvine locals for a reason. Their food is focused on the freshest and healthiest Japanese dishes and they always deliver. The hot sansai udon sticks out for its tender root vegetables, silky udon noodles and umami packed broth.

8683 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.



AJ Restaurant (Exterior)

AUDREY FONG

LEMONADE'S TRUFFLE MAC N' CHEESE

In the mood for something decadent? If so, Lemonade's smooth and creamy truffle mac n' cheese is just for you. Pair it with one of their fun lemonades for a delicious meal!

2967 Michelson Drive, Irvine.

PHO BA CO'S PHO WITH RARE STEAK AND WELL DONE BRISKET

Pho Ba Co is a family-owned restaurant and has been dishing out piping hot bowls of pho for over two decades. Their pho is served with an umami-packed beef broth that has been cooking for hours with herbs and spices. You can choose from a wide range of toppings including tofu, tendon, meatballs, tripe, steak and more.

4250 Barranca Pkwy, Irvine.

SANTOUKA'S SHIO RAMEN

Santouka is an award-winning ramen chain from Japan with locations all over the globe. Irvine's Santouka is tucked away in Mitsuwa's food court. While all of their broths are packed with flavor, their shio ramen, or salt ramen, is especially delicious with its rich flavor that pairs well with the fatty pieces of chashu pork that comes on top of each bowl.

14230 Culver Drive, Irvine.

SUP NOODLE BAR'S HOUSE GARLIC NOODLES WITH RIBEYE STEAK

Sup Noodle Bar is considered one of the best restaurants in Orange County by gourmards across Southern California. It's famous for both its pho and garlic noodles, which are easily the best garlic

noodles out there. What sets apart their garlic noodles is its strong garlic flavor, slightly chewy noodles, and super tender steak.

14370 Culver Drive, Unit 2H, Irvine.

TANG DU RESTAURANT'S CUMIN LAMB KNIFE CUT NOODLES

If you like your noodles thick, these knife cut noodles from Tang Du Restaurant are not to be missed. While they offer multiple noodle dishes with the knife cut variation, the cumin lamb one is the most flavorful and comes topped with a healthy dose of crisp cilantro.

5406 Walnut Ave #A, Irvine.



Sup Noodle Bar

AUDREY FONG

BEST OF IRVINE FOOD & DRINK

IRVINE'S BEST BRUNCH

FROM VERDE CHILAQUILES, TO JAPANESE BRICK-TOAST STYLE FRENCH TOAST, TO A HAWAIIAN MOCO LOCO.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



Burntzilla



Burntzilla

On weekends, in between breakfast and lunch – and possibly maybe dinner – there's a delightful concept called brunch. While brunch comes in all shapes, sizes and nationalities, it's always a welcome meal, any day of the week. Yet, even if you're not privy to a week-long brunch binge, here a few Brunch sports to put on your radar in 2021.

POACHED KITCHEN

With locations in Downey, and now Irvine, the main theme of Poached Kitchen is a combination between breakfast and brunch, with a little farmers market-style vibe mixed into the atmosphere.

Poached Kitchen's number-one selling item is the verde chilaquiles.

Served with crispy tortilla chips, salsa verde, two sunny up eggs, queso fresco, creamy cilantro sauce, pickled onions, cilantro and black beans. Pro tip: Both the red and green chilaquiles can be modified to fit vegan dietary restrictions.

7595 Harvard Avenue, Unit A, Irvine.

BURNTZILLA

If you love French toast, then this Japanese brick-toast style French toast at Burntzilla in Irvine is your perfect match. Japanese brick toast is a very extravagant dish, consisting of a hollowed out bread loaf and sweet toppings. Once removed, the center of the bread is usually cubed and added back into the hollowed-out loaf as a "stuffing," then topped with ice cream and honey. Now available during

weekend brunch, this is the latest game-changing concept brought forth



Poached Kitchen



Poached Kitchen

by the Orange County food truck entrepreneurs who created Irvine's brick and mortar Burntzilla.

"It's French toast on crack," Phi Nguyen, chef and co-owner of Burntzilla, explained to *Irvine Weekly*.

14413 Culver Drive, Irvine.

STACKS PANCAKE HOUSE

Despite being a small-scale restaurant that's not open past 3:00 p.m., the Irvine-based Stack's Pancakes House is undoubtedly a contender in the "Best Breakfast in O.C." conversation. Considering the hours of operation, and the style of fare, Stacks rides the fine line between breakfast and lunch. From a variety of different French toast dishes, to the Hawaiian breakfast staple loco moco, Stack's Pancake House is open seven days a week from 6:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Priding itself on Hawaiian-style breakfast, there's no shortage of local flavors and creativity featuring Spam and Portuguese sausage with eggs, Captain Crunch French Toast, and the Biscuits and Gravy. All solid starting points.

14421 Culver Drive, Irvine.

HABANA

Taking over the space formerly occupied by a Macy's, the Habana at the Irvine Spectrum does not sacrifice for space or style. The expansive brunch menu features authentic Cuban dishes like Ropa Vieja – a shredded Beef Dish with sweet peppers, onions, garlic tomatoes, sofrito black beans, buttered white rice and maduros. Don't sleep on the pork croquettes or the lechon asado. Now taking weekend brunch reservations on a gigantic outdoor patio.

708 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

HEALTHY EATING

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CRAFTED: TAKING THE GUESSWORK OUT OF MEAL PREP

GOURMET DELIVERY SERVICE DEVOTED TO PROMOTING A CULTURE OF HEALTHY EATING.

BY TARA FINLEY



In the past year, a few personal philosophies have become central mainstays in our way of living: Staying healthy and supporting local.

For obvious reasons, health is on the forefront of our minds. Achieving and maintaining health is not only beneficial to your own self, but the community and all those that rely on you. Speaking of community health and reliance, supporting local business is also more important than ever – showing love to the economy that feeds back into the services that we rely on most. It's been a hard year for everyone, and a community that supports each other helps to make it a little better.

Combine these two ethos – personal health and community support – and you have Crafted, a gourmet meal prep service based out of our neighboring Costa Mesa. Made by members of the community, for members of the community, they are devoted to promoting a culture of healthy eating. All their meals are made fresh locally by talented chefs and delivered or available for pickup twice a week on Monday and Thursday.

What inspired Crafted's creation?

"The idea came about after several of our team members at 24 Carrots Catering and Events tried similar services through their local gyms, but weren't impressed with the quality, variety or price of the meals," answers Andres Manzo of the Crafted team. "After discussing with our award-winning culinary team, we realized we had an opportunity to deliver the same fine dining, high quality cuisine people had come to expect from us, filtering it through a macro-based model to service the health and wellness community."

From that day, Crafted was born.

"We serve active individuals who enjoy exercising and eating healthy, busy professionals who may not have time or energy to eat right, and even everyday households that may have too much on

their plate and need someone to help fill it," invites Manzo. "Whether you're going to the gym or not, the health and wellness community is booming in the area. And in light of recent events, people have become even more in tune with their bodies and wanting to make a change for the better."

Calling Orange County home – based in

the same facility as their sister company, 24 Carrots Catering + Events – they service the entire area. The team is hoping to continue to prosper and expand into Los Angeles and the Inland Empire.

"Being one of the younger names in the meal prep game, we've had the opportunity to study the business model of other companies and see what works best and how we can set ourselves apart," explains Manzo. "We emphasize quality by always making our meals fresh and never freezing them. Even though this presents a unique challenge of every meal being made-to-order, we never want to compromise the freshness and flavor of our meals by freezing them."

"We also set ourselves apart with our emphasis on variety, offering a new menu each month. Eating healthy generates results over time, and we're in it for the long haul with our clients. We never want them to feel bored or tired of the Crafted dishes, which is why we change up the menu so frequently and consistently introduce new, exciting flavors to the menu."

Is Crafted subscription-based?

The short answer: no.

"There is no commitment, and our clients are free to order when it best suits them," answers Manzo. "We've entertained the idea of adding a subscription feature to the website, but we don't want our clients to ever feel pressured or stuck with meals they don't need. However, we are adding features to the website to resemble the convenience of a subscription model without the commitment."

Eating healthy is easier said than done, especially if it's a lifestyle change that's being pursued. Crafted aims to support those looking to maintain healthy eating in a way that's approachable and sustainable.

"Eating healthy can be difficult and overwhelming," supports Manzo. "So much noise out there in the form of different diet fads and diet culture has a reputation for being restrictive and unappealing. We want to provide a platform for long-term, sustainable change."

If you've tried to make this change and had trouble keeping it up, you aren't alone.

"We hear stories all too often about people being strict for a few weeks, then relapsing and gaining all the weight back," Manzo empathizes. "By making it easy, convenient, customizable and fun, we feel like our clients will get a better understanding of what their body needs and how it reacts to certain eating habits. We take the guesswork out of eating right by weighing and portioning each meal and providing the corresponding nutrition facts. Customers trust us to give their bodies the right type AND right quantity of macronutrients to best support their health goals, allowing them to focus on other areas of their health and fitness. We value the impact eating healthy has on all facets of life, not just from an aesthetic point of view. We want to make this available in the simplest and most delicious form possible."

If there's anything you could know about Crafted, it's how sincere they are about their mission.

"We want people to know how seriously we take the honor of trusting us to deliver quality and nutritious meals to them," says Manzo. "We respect the hours they dedicate in the gym or in their respective fields, and we consider it a privilege to be able to fuel their hustle. With so many other factors to consider when trying to eat healthy, achieve fitness goals, and be well, we want to act as personal chefs to our clients and take the guesswork out of meal prep."

To learn more about Crafted, visit get-craftedmeals.com



BEST OF IRVINE FOOD & DRINK

IRVINE'S BEST COFFEE AND TEA SPOTS

FROM HONEY GREEN MILK TEA, TO SWEET POTATO LATTES, TO GRASSHOPPER TEA.

BY AUDREY FONG

If you're looking for your morning mug of coffee or an afternoon cup of tea, Irvine has plenty of fun and delicious coffee and tea shops to choose from. The best part is that many of these stores offer something a little bit different from the average mega-coffee chain and some even feature aesthetic interiors ideal for snapping that perfect Instagram shot.

CHA FOR TEA

Cha for Tea is one of the original boba shops in Irvine and continues to be a favorite among UC Irvine students. One of the reasons why Cha for Tea has survived all these years despite the competition is because of its delicious drinks and super soft honey boba. If you haven't been before, try either the honey green milk tea or the mango green tea – two of their most popular drinks.

4740 Barranca Pkwy, Irvine.
4187 Campus Drive, Irvine.

CHERUBIC TEA

Formerly known as Spiritea, Cherubic Tea is the American sister to a popular Canadian tea chain. Known for its

high-quality teas, this spot makes each drink fresh using a teaspresso machine specifically made for their store and imported glacier water. This store's pretty, pastel pink interior is a favorite among bloggers for outfit and food photos.

13238 Jamboree Road, Irvine.

COFFEE TOMO

Coffee Tomo is a family-owned store that specializes in luxurious coffee. What makes them an ideal spot for a family or group of friends is their large menu that features both teas and non-caffeinated drinks in addition to their coffee drinks. They even recently added boba to the menu. Their sweet potato latte is one of the more unique beverages available.

15333 Culver Drive #450, Irvine.

CLOUDY CO TEA

Cloudy Co Tea is one of the newest boba shops in Irvine. The menu is made up of a selection of milk teas, fruit teas, coffees and slushies. What makes this spot stand out is that they use fresh fruit in all their drinks and real milk resulting in clean tasting beverages. Their largely



wooden panelled interior, reminiscent of East Asian tea shops, makes for an ideal backdrop for an Instagram outfit shot.

14370 Culver Drive, Suite D, Irvine.

KRISP FRESH LIVING

Krisp Fresh Living may have the friendliest service in town. Located in TRADE Irvine, this spot is a unique coffee shop that also serves up toasts, acai bowls, teas and pre-made foods perfect for lunch. The must-try drinks here are the Nutella Madeleine Latte and the Blueberry Matcha Latte.

2272 Michelson Drive, #100, Irvine.

OROBÆ

You know a spot is going to be amazing when the line is long – and Orobæ always has a line. Don't let the line discourage you as it moves quickly. The reason why Orobæ has so many die-hard fans is because of the high-quality

tea leaves used for each drink and because of the attentive owners, Felix and Ken, who are ready to answer your questions. If you're a tea lover, this spot is the best store in town for drinks that put the emphasis on the tea leaves' natural flavor.

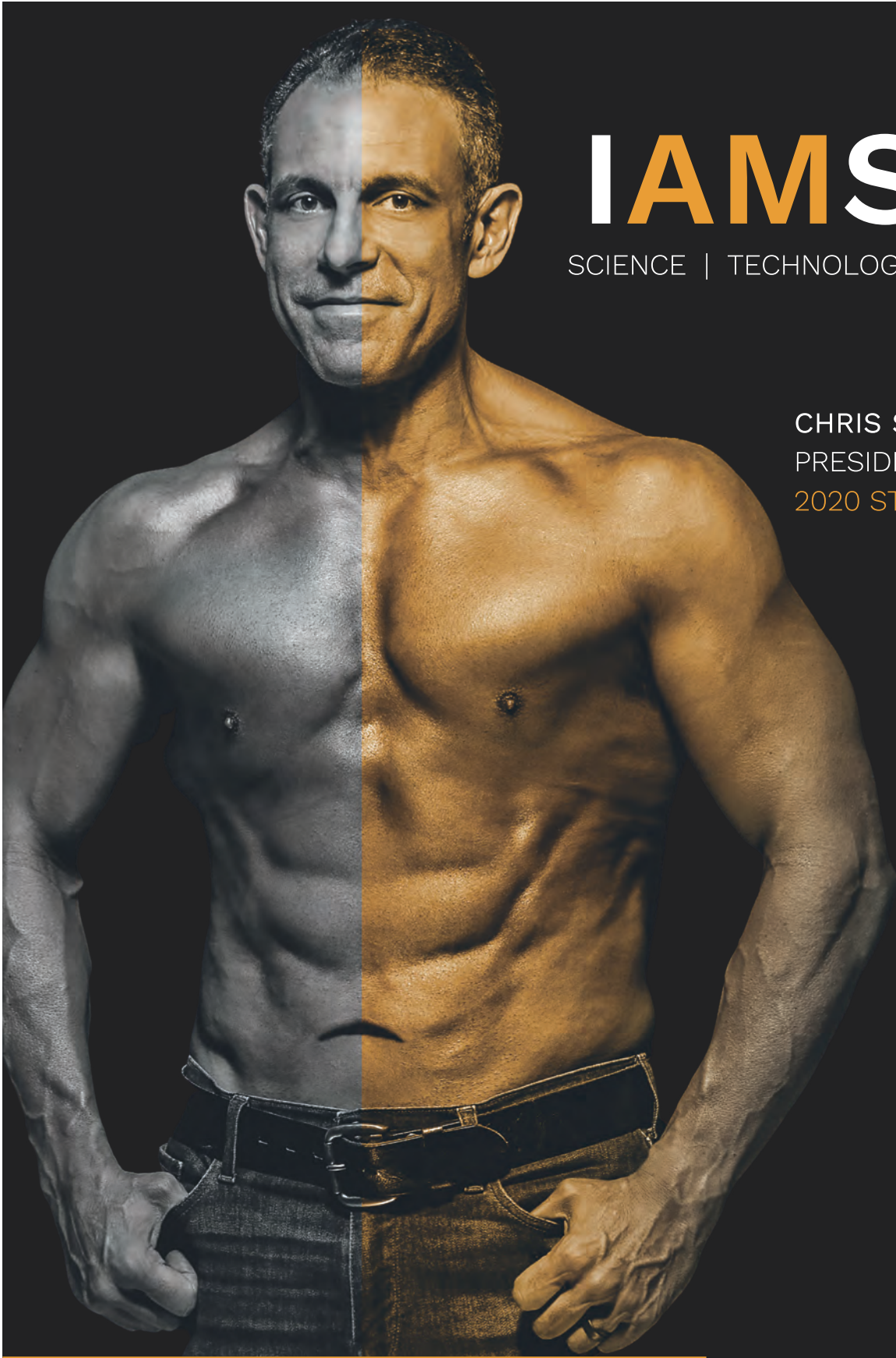
14250 Culver Drive, Suite E, Irvine.

REDSTRAW

Fresh fruits, a wide selection of tea leaves, fun combos and alternative milk options – these are just a few of the reasons why Redstraw is one of the best spots in Irvine for both coffee and tea. Everything is made fresh to order and many of the drinks will be brewed right before your eyes, so you can rest assured knowing each drink is made with care and attention. If you go, be sure to check out their Grasshopper tea, a refreshing blend of cucumber juice and black tea.

14031 Jeffrey Road, Irvine.





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IRVINE'S BEST AL FRESCO DINING

THESE OUTDOOR DINING ESTABLISHMENTS WILL GIVE YOU PLENTY OF ROOM TO SAFELY RELAX AND UNWIND.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



With so much focus on outdoor dining this year, namely due to the pandemic, it seems dining al fresco has become a welcome trait given the circumstances. Still, while Irvine and Orange County adjust to a new open-air normal, here's a list of Irvine's best outdoor options that will give you plenty of room to frolic, unwind and best of all – dine.

CUCINA ENOTECA

Located at the Irvine Spectrum Center, this well-known chain of modern-Italian restaurants in Orange County offers a robust wine list, with more than 200 different varieties from Italy and California. CUCINA Enoteca is currently providing guests with al fresco dining reservations, where they can enjoy the Irvine location's large, covered patio. If you go, be sure to try the pappardelle pasta, and the stuffed fried squash.

532 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

HANGAR 24

Come for the beer, stay for the paño. As one of Orange County's independent brewers, the minds behind Hangar 24 know exactly how to have a good time. With an extremely large outdoor patio, featuring billiards, ping pong tables and corn hole sets, one might overlook the fact that Hangar 24 also brews all its own beers! With shareable plates like carne asada fries, and bacon-wrapped beer-battered corn dogs and artisan flatbread pizzas, there's no shortage of fun, tasty fare at Hangar 24.

17877 Von Karman Ave, Ste. 110, Irvine.

BAEKJEONG KBBQ

Kang Ho Dong Baejeong, a well-

known Korean barbecue chain, visited by the likes of Anthony Bourdain, opened its first-ever outdoor dining patio at Irvine's Heritage Square last July. While COVID-19 continues to affect our day-to-day lives, outdoor dining will be the primary option for the foreseeable future. Until then, Baejeong is still

giving Irvine residents an opportunity to experience KBBQ outdoors. With a half-dozen locations in Southern California and one in New York City, the KBBQ chain gained major social media recognition in 2015 when the late Anthony Bourdain visited with a group of friends. It was clear at the time that

Bourdain knew about the excellence of Baejeong's selection. The prime boneless short rib, ribeye, thinly sliced brisket, beef tongue and marinated pork collar are perfect starting points.

14160 Culver Drive, Irvine.

JAVIER'S - IRVINE SPECTRUM

After temporarily closing in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Javier's took the opportunity to give the Irvine location a chance to freshen-up, while incorporating COVID-19 approved sanitization safeguards. Javier's Spectrum location is now open for outdoor seating and is accepting reservations. Specializing in elevated Mexican cuisine, Javier's is well-known for their Trio De Ceviche featuring a choice of ahi, camarón, pescado or pulpo. And for those looking to take the edge off, Javier's prides itself on maintaining the West Coast's largest collection of the world's finest tequila.

536 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

NORTH ITALIA

A poignantly curated menu of charcuterie, pasta and pizza, if the food at Irvine's North Italia doesn't transport you to the streets of Northern Italy, the atmosphere found on the restaurant's open air dining patio should make your stay quite enjoyable. The patio is mostly covered, with bar-style and table seating. There are also heaters and umbrellas to make your stay comfortable in any climate. Featuring a weekend brunch, along with a daily menu item made from scratch, the attention to hand-crafted detail seeps into every aspect of the dining experience at North Italia in Irvine.

2957 Michelson Drive, Irvine.



BEST OF IRVINE FOOD & DRINK

IRVINE WEEKLY.COM | MARCH 5, 2021

22

IRVINE'S BEST DELIVERY

FROM FLAKY APPLE PIES TO CRAFT RAMEN TAILORED FOR DELIVERY PERFECTION.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

If there's one thing many Irvine residents have in common over the past year, it's an increase in food delivery. Yet, despite the circumstances, many restaurants in Irvine adapted seamlessly to the challenge of transitioning their working kitchens into prep spaces for to-go and delivery orders. While some of our favorites were unable to keep their doors open during these difficult times, new concepts have arrived, introducing the idea of to-go and delivery-only establishments. Here's what's been working.

A CUP OF SUSHI

Subconsciously inspired by the novelty and trend of boba-style beverages, the Irvine-based Cup of Sushi, a new Japanese take-out concept, serves delicately layered, culinary mosaics of Japanese-inspired cuisine – in a clear plastic cup. Another concept spawned by the limitations of the pandemic, Cup of Sushi opened its first location in October 2020 as a takeout and delivery-only concept in Irvine. Using an Irvine-based cloud kitchen, Cup of Sushi allows customers to visit the store in person, but all the food is served to-go. Sushi fans can get their fix by ordering directly from Cup of Sushi, and can also use third party delivery apps like Yelp and Postmates. 17951 Sky Park Circle, Unit F, Irvine. acupofsushi.com

FLAKY APPLE PIE CO.

Coming from a family of pie makers, Irvine resident Brooke Cazier, AKA the Irvine Pie Lady, is the owner of the Flaky Apple Pie Co., a unique, web-based pie shop that specializes in homemade, ready-to-bake pies. Cazier is helping pie lovers everywhere slice through the pandemic. The Flaky Apple Pie Co. began to attract attention over the summer, as the COVID-19 pandemic forced non-essential travel restrictions, and the closure of many services in

Irvine. On most days, the Irvine pie lady can be found working inside the Hood Kitchen, a commissary kitchen space in Costa Mesa, where she spends hours constructing edible experiences for her pie-loving patrons.

www.flakyapplepieco.com

CLAY OVEN INDIAN CUISINE

After more than 30 years in Irvine, Clay Oven Indian Cuisine has relocated to Costa Mesa, now operating as a to-go or delivery only establishment, Tuesday through Saturday, 4:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m. For decades, Clay Oven has provided the residents of Irvine and Orange County authentic Indian specialties like tumerican Tandoori chicken, chicken tikka masala, along with several varieties of bread, known as naan, which include garlic, rosemary and sourdough. Now, through a new delivery model, Clay Oven hopes to continue this tradition with Clay Oven At Home, a never-before-offered family-style meal delivered every Sunday and Monday to large portions of Orange County, including as far south as Laguna Beach. Contact Clay Oven Irvine for more information on Clay Oven At Home Delivery.

350 Clinton Street, Costa Mesa.
www.clayovenirvine.com

HIRONORI CRAFT RAMEN

Recognized by the Michelin Guide in 2019, HiroNori has needed to transition from a fully functioning establishment to take-out and delivery only. However, despite the pandemic, HiroNori Craft Ramen has effortlessly transitioned its gourmet food experience to cater to the local health ordinance – without sacrificing flavor or quality. By utilizing the impeccable attention to detail, HiroNori wanted to maintain the same quality of service for their to-go format. Fumi Nagatsuka, manager of HiroNori

HiroNori Craft Ramen



A Cup of Sushi



Craft Ramen, said everything from to-go containers, to the cooking time for the noodles has been impacted in this new format. "We bought different packaging, to better accommodate the to-go experience, wider bowls, better containers," said Nagatsuka. "Cooking time for noodles for people getting it delivered to their home, or being picked up – they time it to go, so it will be perfectly cooked."

TRADE Food Hall: 2222 Michelson Drive #234, Irvine.

Sand Canyon: 6626 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.
hironori.com

POULTRY GRAM

With locations in San Jose, Brea, Hollywood and Irvine, this unique, delivery-only fried chicken establishment has popped up at the Irvine Spectrum. With a test kitchen at the Spectrum, Poultry Gram offers their doubled battered chicken sandwich – original and Nashville Hot – along with a variety of snacks that range from spicy wings to and tenders to season fries to cinnamon cayenne snickerdoodle cookies. Currently, users can access Poultry Gram eats through Postmates, GrubHub and DoorDash. 527 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine. www.poultrygram.com

BEST OF IRVINE FOOD & DRINK

IRVINE'S DISHES NOT TO MISS

FROM SPAGHETTI GRILLED CHEESE, TO BBQ PORK BUNS, TO TAIYAKI ICE CREAM.

BY AUDREY FONG

Only have a few days in Irvine or have guests visiting? Make sure that you and your guests don't miss out on some of the most delicious, Instagrammable, and unique dishes that this town has to offer with this guide to Irvine's must-try dishes. From cool desserts to mouthwatering lunches, this list is made up of some seriously fun eats.

THE BREAKFAST REPUBLIC'S CLUCK MADAME

Located across the street from UC Irvine, the Breakfast Republic is heaven for brunch enthusiasts. Their eggs benedicts are some of the best in town, especially their Cluck Madame, which puts a French twist on the classic with bechamel sauce and gruyere cheese. The super buttery and savory house potatoes that come on the side are perfect for dragging through the hollandaise sauce.

4213 Campus Drive, Irvine.

BURNT CRUMBS' SPAGHETTI GRILLED CHEESE

Carb lovers unite! This sandwich merges two childhood favorites – the grilled cheese and spaghetti. Made with spaghetti, mozzarella and meat sauce, this sandwich comes with marinara dipping sauce for extra flavor.

8549 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.

CLAY OVEN'S CHICKEN TIKKA MASALA

Chicken tikka masala has gotten a bad rep on the foodie scene for being the most basic Indian food, but the one from Clay Oven is a must try. It's richer, thicker and more tomato-y than the average chicken tikka masala and comes with juicy chunks of chicken. The sauce is so popular among diners that they even offer jars of it to-go.

350 Clinton Street, Costa Mesa.

HUI LAU SHAN'S MANGO SAGO

Hui Lau Shan is famous in Hong Kong for their mango desserts and the Irvine location is their first location within the U.S. Their mango sago is filled with refreshing mango flavor and comes topped with chopped mango sourced from around the world to ensure peak freshness and sweetness.

5365 Alton Pkwy, Suite M, Irvine.

MEET FRESH'S SIGNATURE ICE GRASS JELLY

This dessert is great for hot weather. It's light, perfectly sweetened, and comes with a host of different textures. The best part about it is that it's relatively healthy and low in calories, since it's mostly made up of shaved ice and grass jelly. Note: Grass jelly is just the name; it isn't actually made of grass and its taste is most similar to herbal tea.

2710 Alton Pkwy #105, Irvine.

TIM HO WAN'S BBQ PORK BUNS

Tim Ho Wan's Hong Kong location is the least expensive Michelin-starred restaurant in the world and Irvine is lucky to have their own store. Their BBQ pork buns, which feature a crumbly, almost cookie-like exterior and are filled with sweet and savory BBQ pork, are considered legendary. On the side of the store is a quick takeout section, making these buns easy to grab for meals or as a snack.

2700 Alton Pkwy, Irvine.

SOMI SOMI'S TAIYAKI ICE CREAM

Quite easily the most Instagrammable dessert in Irvine, Somi Somi is a must try. Each taiyaki, a fish shaped waffle, is filled with either custard, Nutella, or red bean and then topped with soft serve ice cream and toppings ranging from strawberries to macaron shells and sprinkles. What keeps foodies coming back to this shop are their fun flavors like matcha, milk tea, sesame and ube.

2700 Alton Pkwy #125, Irvine.
640 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

LA SIRENA GRILL'S SHRIMP QUESADILLA

Hands down, the best quesadilla in Irvine. La Sirena Grill's shrimp quesadilla comes jam packed with shrimp, cheese, onions and mushrooms all in a slightly spicy sauce. You can then top it with a variety of salsas and sauces from their toppings bar. It's messy, it's delicious, it's unforgettable.

3931 Portola Pkwy, Irvine.





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“If not for Keith’s compassion and superior defense strategy, we might have lost all of our hard-earned retirement savings to a very opportunistic claimant. The stress prior to retaining Keith was nearly unbearable.”

- Jim and Carol Hoffman

BEST OF IRVINE FOOD & DRINK

IRVINE'S BEST HIDDEN GEMS

THESE RESTAURANTS MAY BE TUCKED AWAY, BUT THEY'RE WORTH THE SEARCH.

BY AUDREY FONG

Take a walk off the beaten path and order some takeout from one of Irvine's hidden gems. Even though these spots are low key, the flavors on their dishes certainly are not.

DOSIRAK

When you walk into Dosirak, the first thing that hits you are the walls of dozens and dozens of different Korean side dishes known as banchan. From potato salad to kimchi, pickled radishes and spicy garlic stems, this place has all of the banchan you could ever want. In addition to banchan, they also make some of the best kimbap and rice bowls in town.

6280 Scholarship, Irvine.

HOUSE OF KABOB

Located in a strip mall, House of Kebab is a small, family-owned restaurant specializing in kabobs, stews and dips. One of the best parts about ordering here is that they offer an appetizer sampler, where you can actually choose which three appetizers you want. Definitely don't miss out on their maust'moosier, a yogurt dip topped with fried shallots.

92 Corporate Park F, Irvine.

KAYA

Kaya is one of the older Korean restaurants in Irvine. It's got a large menu, super friendly staff, and a huge selection of banchan. Even though it's a bit tucked away in the corner of a shopping center, it's worth the search because once you try it, you'll be hooked. If you're a first timer, try their galbi (marinated ribs), seafood pancake and octopus dolsoot bibimbap (a rice bowl with spicy octopus and vegetables).

14120 Culver Drive #G, Irvine.

KOKONUT

Kokonut is a blogger favorite and they opened their first Irvine location inside of Duke Bakery. They pretty much only serve one thing – coconut pudding with various toppings, but it's so refreshing and delicious that you'll immediately see why their customers keep coming back. If you go, try one of the puddings topped with fresh fruit for a light and healthy dessert.

15435 Jeffrey Road, Unit 105, Irvine.

LAYER CAKE BAKERY

Flaky croissants, decadent brownies, earl grey tarts and colorful macarons – what's not to love about Layer Cake Bakery's fresh-baked goods? Layer



Cake Bakery first made waves in the foodie scene for their super moist red velvet cake, but continues to impress with their artisanal coffee, sandwich selection and unique French pastries.

4250 Barranca Pkwy, Irvine.

NOODOLOGY

Noodology is a noodle lover's dream because the menu is literally 95% noodles. Whether you like your noodles thick or thin, flour or rice, dry or soupy, Noodology has got your noodle cravings covered. What makes their noodles so special though is the silky soft texture of their rice noodles.

15455 Jeffrey Road #300, Irvine.

YU'S GARDEN

Need a quick, healthy meal? If so, Yu's Garden is the best spot in Irvine for readily made Chinese dishes. Each dish is replenished multiple times a day, so you can be sure your dishes are fresh. While they do have a menu for ordering straight from the kitchen, most of their die-hard fans stick to the pre-made foods in the display case because their food is that good. This spot also has a ton of vegetarian and vegan dishes, making it an inclusive destination.

5408 Walnut Ave, Irvine.



BEST OF IRVINE FOOD & DRINK

IRVINE'S BEST BURGERS

FROM THE DOUBLE TRUFFLE, TO THE BISON IS GOUDA, TO THE HUSKY.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

roasted bananas. After winning numerous Orange County food awards as a food truck, it's safe to say The Cut Handcrafted Burgers has become a well-integrated part of the brick and mortar burger scene in Irvine and only seems to get better with age, 3831 Alton Pkwy #C, Irvine.

THE COUNTER

The Counter, located in the Woodbury Town Center, features a build-your-own burger program, with unique protein options that include The Impossible Burger, turkey burgers, beef patties and organic bison. The Counter also offers a wide selection of curated burgers, one of which is called Bison Is Gouda AKA B.I.G! Made with organic bison, smoked gouda, bacon onion jam, sunny side up egg, baby spinach, scallions and house made 1,000 island dressing. The B.I.G is one of Irvine Weekly's best burgers of 2021.

6416 Irvine Boulevard, Irvine.

THE STAND

Established in 2003, the Stand has served the city of Irvine sandwiches, hot dogs and craft beer for almost two decades. While there's nothing fancy about The Stand, there are some good burgers. However, of all the signature burgers, and the customizations, the Ultimate Egg reigns supreme. If you've never experienced a bacon cheeseburger with a fried egg, be sure to add that to your food bucket list of 2021, and every year after.

5633 Alton Pkwy #200, Irvine.

Colombian burger



COURTESY OF THE CUT

The burger is an existential part of American cuisine. Endless debates have started over which burger is the most superior in the realm. While it might not be possible to pick the perfect burger – there's only one way to find out. So, if you're looking to make your pick for the best burger in Irvine, we suggest you start with our top five.

BURGER LOUNGE

Straight forward and no nonsense – and delicious – is what you should expect from the lineup of burgers at Burger Lounge in Irvine. Sporting a menu of burgers, fries and shakes, this is what a burger joint should feel like. While there's not a bad choice on the menu, The Husky should be on everyone's radar. Double grass-fed beef, double organic white cheddar cheese, shredded lettuce, tomato, pickles, fresh onion and 1,000 Island dressing. Another interesting burger on the menu is the plant-based organic quinoa vegan burger.

8553 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.

UMAMI BURGER

For those unaware, umami is defined as the taste and flavor of food. There's no wrong turn at Umami Burger, but for \$10, the Double Truffle is the best bang for your buck. This truffle laced burger features two patties, truffle cheese fondue, truffle aioli and a truffle glaze. For a \$10 price point, it might seem way too good to be true – and it is. You can also order any burger on the menu with an Impossible Beef Patty – or two. With locations across the United States, Irvine is lucky to have one of the most unique corporate burger joints at the Irvine Spectrum.

527 Spectrum Center Drive, Irvine.

THE CUT

The brian child of Chef Andres Dangond, the Cut Handcrafted Burgers is a burger lover's mecca. Keeping it simple, the cut designates Original and Savory burgers. Yet, in a world closed off to outside experiences, this year we recommend you step outside

your comfort zone and experience The Columbian, made with smoked mozzarella, cilantro chimichurri and

Ultimate Egg Burger



COURTESY OF THE STAND

BEST OF IRVINE FOOD & DRINK

ONLY IN IRVINE - THE BEST RESTAURANTS YOU CAN ONLY FIND HERE

BY AUDREY FONG



Irvine is home to unique dining options that traverse the globe in flavor. Many of these restaurants are only available in Irvine, contributing to Irvine's growing reputation as a foodie destination in Southern California. Below are a few dining options you'll only find here.

ALL THAT SHABU

All That Shabu is one of the best all-you-can-eat restaurants in Irvine. For those of you that aren't familiar

with shabu, it is basically Japanese hot pot. Before you start your meal, you choose a broth in which you'll boil your food in. The staff then brings over platters of sliced meats, while everything else like the vegetables, noodles and seafood are all served buffet style.

15315 Culver Drive #145, Irvine.

CHAN CHAN

Chan Chan is unlike any other Korean restaurant in Irvine in that it largely focuses on Korean street food.



They are most popular for their delicious fried chicken that comes in a variety of flavors (sweet garlic is a fan favorite) and their various rice cake dishes.

14250 Culver Drive, Irvine.

EVERYDAY EATERY

Not only is this spot super cute, but the service is exceptionally friendly, making Everyday Eatery one of the best spots for brunch in Irvine. Most of their dishes lean towards the healthier side; think lots of fresh vegetables and lean meats. On top of having beautifully plated and delicious meals, they also have a team of baristas to brew your drink to perfection.

6634 Irvine Center Drive, Irvine.

LE DIPLOMAT CAFÉ

From the outside, this café may not look like much, but Le Diplomat Café has been a favorite among UC Irvine students for decades. What keeps hungry Ant-eaters knocking on their door are their famous garlic chicken sandwiches. These hot sandwiches come layered with chunks of chicken, oozy cheese, and an aromatic garlic sauce that makes everything better.

4237 Campus Drive, Bl6l, Irvine.

SAGAMI

Sagami is an authentic, high quality Japanese restaurant that offers regional specialties from across the island nation. From fresh sushi to steaming bowls of udon and soba, Sagami's menu is large enough where the whole family can find something they will love. The best part of Sagami is that it cooks up unique dishes like ceviche sushi rolls and tori namban (a fried chicken marinated in soy sauce and topped with tartar sauce).

3850 Barranca Pkwy, Suite B, Irvine.

TAQUIERO TACO PATIO

From its outdoor patio to its extensive toppings bar, Taquero Taco Patio is a fun spot to hang out at. While the menu isn't large, everything here is delicious and made to order. The must try taco here is the al pastor, which comes topped with pineapple for a savory and sweet combo that cannot be missed.

4517 Campus Drive, Irvine.



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