

Home » New s » Cover Story » Best Of 2009 Good Grub - 6

Best Of 2009 Good Grub - 6

WEDNESDAY, 30 SEPTEMBER 2009 00:00 FORT WORTH WEEKLY STAFF

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Page 7 of 8

Seafood

Readers' choice: Eddie Vs Prime Seafood, 3120 W 7th St, FW

Critic's choice: La Tortilandia Mexican Restaurant, 1112 W Berry St, FW

La Tortilandia means "tortilla land," and true to its name, the restaurant's Mexican cuisine is second to none. But it's the recent addition of spicy, fried seafood dishes that makes this place a winner. If you get a hankering for something fishy and salty but don't want to pay \$25 for a lobster tail, La Tortilandia offers cheap, delicious plates like the Torti Combo. This beautifully presented smorgasbord includes three fish tacos, two ceviche tostadas, three fried oysters, two shrimps, a salad, and a large dollop of creamy guacamole for \$10.95. That's value. If that's not enough to tempt you, listen to the mariachis on Friday nights while drinking the \$6 house margarita and throwing back a dozen oysters on the half-shell for \$8.50.



La Tortilandia's spicy seafood menu goes beyond what's offered at most local restaurants. Lee Chastain

New Restaurant

Readers' choice: Ellerbe Fine Foods, 1501 W Magnolia Av, FW

Critic's choice: Ellerbe Fine Foods

Judging by the wait for a table at this four-month-old restaurant, the people have spoken: Ellerbe is the new star attraction on a street full of dining stars. Restaurateur Richard King and chef Molly McCook fill their cheerful renovated 1920s gas station with stunning Californian-meets-Southern dishes born of the simplest of foodie fashions - farm-to-table dining, which uses seasonal, locally, or regionally grown ingredients for the best possible taste. McCook's understated preparation lets the foods' natural flavors shine, whether a simple salad of Brazos Valley blue cheese and perfectly ripe heirloom tomatoes or locally grown peppers and eggplant with fresh Louisiana shrimp. The wine list, too, is updated regularly to match the ever-changing menu. With its contemporary-casual setting, unpretentious service, and dazzling cuisine, Ellerbe is truly a breath of fresh air.

Chef

Readers' choice: (tie) Jon Bonnell, Bonnell's Fine Texas Cuisine; Keith Hicks, Buttons, both FW

Critic's choice: Lou Lambert, Dutch's Burgers and Beer, and Lambert's Steaks, Seafood & Whiskey

Growing up as part of a West Texas ranching family, chef/restaurateur Lou Lambert was connected to the concept of how animals and vegetables turn into dinner. But he became enthralled with the business of food during lunches with his grandfather at Odessa's white-tablecloth Lincoln Hotel. After stints in restaurant management, Lambert graduated from the University of North Texas' hotel and restaurant management program, then enrolled in the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y. The rigor of the program helped bridge all the aspects of his informal training - sourcing the food, operating a kitchen, and blending the flavors of West Texas with traditional French cuisine. The menu at Dutch's is pretty much as advertised - burgers, sides, and beer. At his eponymously named White Settlement location, you'll find ceviche and house-cured meats, along with boar ribs, fried green tomatoes, and salmon smoked in his parking lot wood smoker. Save room for dessert: lemon pot de crème or comforting coconut cream pie.

French Fries

Critic's choice: Eddie Vs Prime Seafood

Why would someone order fries at a fancy seafood place? In this case, because someone has clued them in. The fries at Eddie Vs are a spud above, but nobody quite knows why. Manager Rich Sabotowski says there's no

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real secret in the seasoning. Of course the fries, like everything else at this restaurant, are scrumptiously fresh. Perhaps it's the outside: The fries are crusty, almost breaded in texture. Perhaps it's the presentation: They come in a silver spiral cone lined with parchment paper that does double-duty, wicking off any excess oil.



Salad

Critic's choice: Iceberg wedge, Eddie Vs Prime Seafood

When can a quarter of a head of iceberg lettuce be the best salad in Fort Worth? When it's served super-chilled on a practically frozen plate, accompanied by Maytag blue cheese, unbelievably fresh, beautiful tomatoes, a few chives, and possibly the best buttermilk blue cheese dressing on the planet. Get the dressing on the side, and you can assemble it yourself, with all its cheesy glory. It's not quite one of those meal-in-itself salads - not enough protein. However, it's reason enough to go to Eddie Vs if you haven't already been.

Sausage

Critic's choice: Grilled Halloumi cheese, Lili's Bistro

The best sausage dish in the 817 doesn't even have that word in its name. The chefs grill chicken apple sausage with halloumi cheese (a mild, tasty white cheese that originated in Cyprus) that's been wrapped in roasted red bell pepper, then serve it all with herbed white beans and lemon garlic aioli. It's like beanie-weenies that have been to foodie heaven.

Host

Readers' choice: Vance Martin, Lili's Bistro

Critic's choice: Cef Zambrano, Zambrano Wine Cellar, 910 Houston St, FW

His reputation is expanding faster than a restaurant critic's waistline. The King of Spain wept upon tasting his tapas, gourmet pizzas, and seared salmon with lemon-dill sauce. His hands smell like spices from yet-to-be-discovered tropical islands. He won Sammy Davis Jr.'s smile in a kick-boxing match with one leg tied behind his back and Dean Martin's cool in a game of five-card draw while blindfolded. Archbishops call him "Your Grace." His carefully selected wine list includes bottles from alternate dimensions. His charm is insured by Lloyd's of London. Most important of all, my friends: Cef Zambrano, host of the ongoing cocktail party that bears his name, makes his guests feel like they're the most interesting people in the world.

Nontraditional Burger

Critic's Choice: Chicken and roasted green chile burger, Dutch's

The bun is sweet and soft, the Swiss cheese is tantalizingly gooey, the chicken breast is tender and juicy, and the mayo is herbal-icious. These are all great things when it comes to flavor, but what makes this nontraditional burger really reach out and tickle your taste buds is the large, roasted chile that screams, "Taste me! Love me! Devour me!"

Field of One

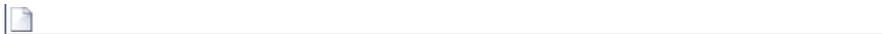
Critic's choice: Potager Café, 315 S Mesquite St, Ari

Potager's "pay what you think your meal was worth" policy certainly makes it unique, but that's not what makes it special. Thanks to owner Cynthia Chippindale, a Le Cordon Bleu-trained chef, this small, vibrant café is an Arlington pioneer in the use of locally grown, organic foods - many from her own garden, others obtained from local farmers and artisans. Always based on the best ingredients available, the no-set-price menu on one day might include a shallot-and-raspberries salad with tarragon chicken and goat-cheese quiche; on the next, caesar salad with black bean soup and fruit-glazed, hormone-free sirloin. In this relaxing atmosphere, the only challenge is calculating how much to pay for such a fabulous meal. We say, give it your all.

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