EatDrinkDFW

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THE APPEAL OF THE GOURMET GROCER

Come for the sandwich, stay for the experience

+ Restaurants worthy of a road trip

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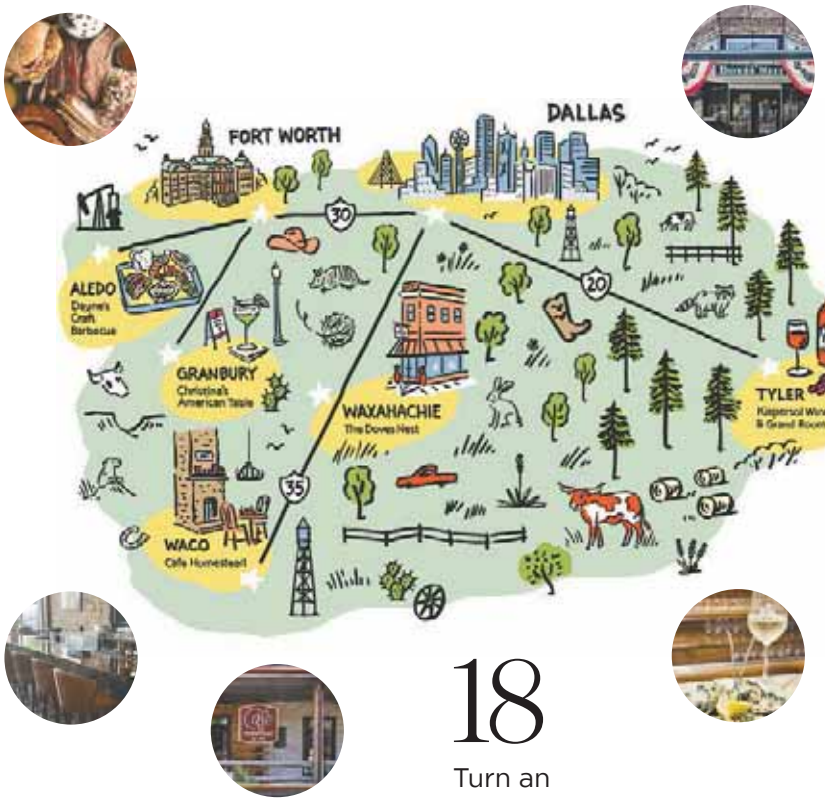

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New Discoveries Await

Sometimes, the best story idea can come out of a single conversation. A prime example: our piece about the best places to find some of Dallas' buzziest foods (Page 24). Our editors were chatting over lunch one day last month — a lunch of chicken salad — and someone asked if we had heard about the latest local social media trend where people were weighing in on the best chicken salad. Apparently, Dallas cookbook author Alex Snodgrass and influencer Chris James Kahle had declared Cottage Grocery the winner.

As we were debating the accuracy of this choice (let's be honest, it's pretty subjective), we started throwing out other types of food we love — ramen, french fries, birria, gelato (clearly we love food around here) — and the best places to find them. And, well, we had our first story for our upcoming issue of *EatDrinkDFW*.

While our picks are clearly based on personal opinion, and we're sure you have your own favorites (though we challenge anyone to find better skinny fries than the ones at Hudson House), we hope that, if nothing else, our story will help you discover something new. And speaking of finding new favorites, we're also deep in production on our upcoming *Best in DFW* magazine, where we'll reveal the winners of our annual People's Choice competition, which spans everything from best restaurants and bars to shopping, concert venues, hair salons and more. Look for it online and in print on Sept. 27.

Meanwhile, if you're in need of a respite from the heat, we have a roundup of bars offering refreshing cocktails (Page 4) that are akin to a vacation in a glass, including the beachy Blue Tulum served at Urbano Cafe's Sylvestro Bar. It's topped with coconut cream and a little umbrella, and our writer guarantees you will "100% feel hot sand beneath your feet" as you sip it. We also caught up with two James Beard-nominated North Texas chefs about their love of cooking (Page 8), and we explore the ever-growing appeal of the gourmet food market, from tried-and-true staples like Eatzi's, Kuby's and Jimmy's to the newest kid on the block (or, well, Greenville Avenue), Walkers' (Page 30).

There's a lot more to discover, too, so happy reading.



We challenge anyone to find better skinny fries than the ones at Hudson House.

BAKERY: JUSTIN DOHERTY; MAP INSETS: COURTESY THE BUSINESSES

EatDrinkDFW

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ON THE COVER
Towering sandwiches at Walkers', a new gourmet market on Greenville Avenue

Photo by Dacoge Media

MAGIC HOUR

At Urbano Cafe's Sylvestro Bar, take your pick of refreshing cocktails, including (from left) the Pineapple Highball, Blood Orange Fig Cobbler, Mango Chili Martini and the Blue Tulum.

BY **NICK RALLO**

Dallas bars are serving up hot-weather cocktails that will transport you to cool breezes and coastal escapes.

Last week, strawberries and cherries were the freshest thing. This week, Jose Gonzalez is on the hunt for anything vibrantly *melon* — cantaloupe and honeydew, in particular, given the North Texas heat. As the bar master at East Dallas' instant treasure Olōyō, Gonzalez is forever on the lookout for the freshest, most vibrant fruits and herbs that he can magic into a cocktail, and he will absolutely use scraps. Got a pile of seemingly useless avocado pits? He'll make an avocado nut syrup. Lime and watermelon rinds can be packed with sugar to extract the pure essence of their fruit or just straight-up pickled and used in tamales that Olōyō chef Olivia Lopez might whip up.

Gonzalez also loves playing with heat: His spiced hibiscus cordial **Jefa** margarita is a showstopper. It stars Don Fulano blanco tequila and a dark violet hibiscus cordial infused with a punchy stock of ancho and guajillo chiles. He then adds in lots of lime and key lime juice and a few drops of angostura bitters fused with ancho chiles for another wave of tangy heat. Frosty shards of watermelon granita, served as a garnish, ease the spice. It's a masterwork of a cocktail, as if someone swept a glass through the sky over Colima, Mexico.

Is he opposed to a classic margarita? Of course not. It just has to be made right.

"Honestly, I'm a purist," he says with a laugh. "I wouldn't buy a half-assed margarita," he says. "My training taught me to taste the difference between fresh lime juice and six-hour lime juice."



Jefa

OPPOSITE: SUSIE OSZUSTOWICZ; THIS PAGE: KATHY TRAN

So how does he make it? “To me, it’s about getting a little bit nerdy with it,” he says. “We let you pick between Highland tequila [sweeter, fruitier agave] and Valley tequila [earthier, more peppery]. It means we get to explain the difference in agaves.”

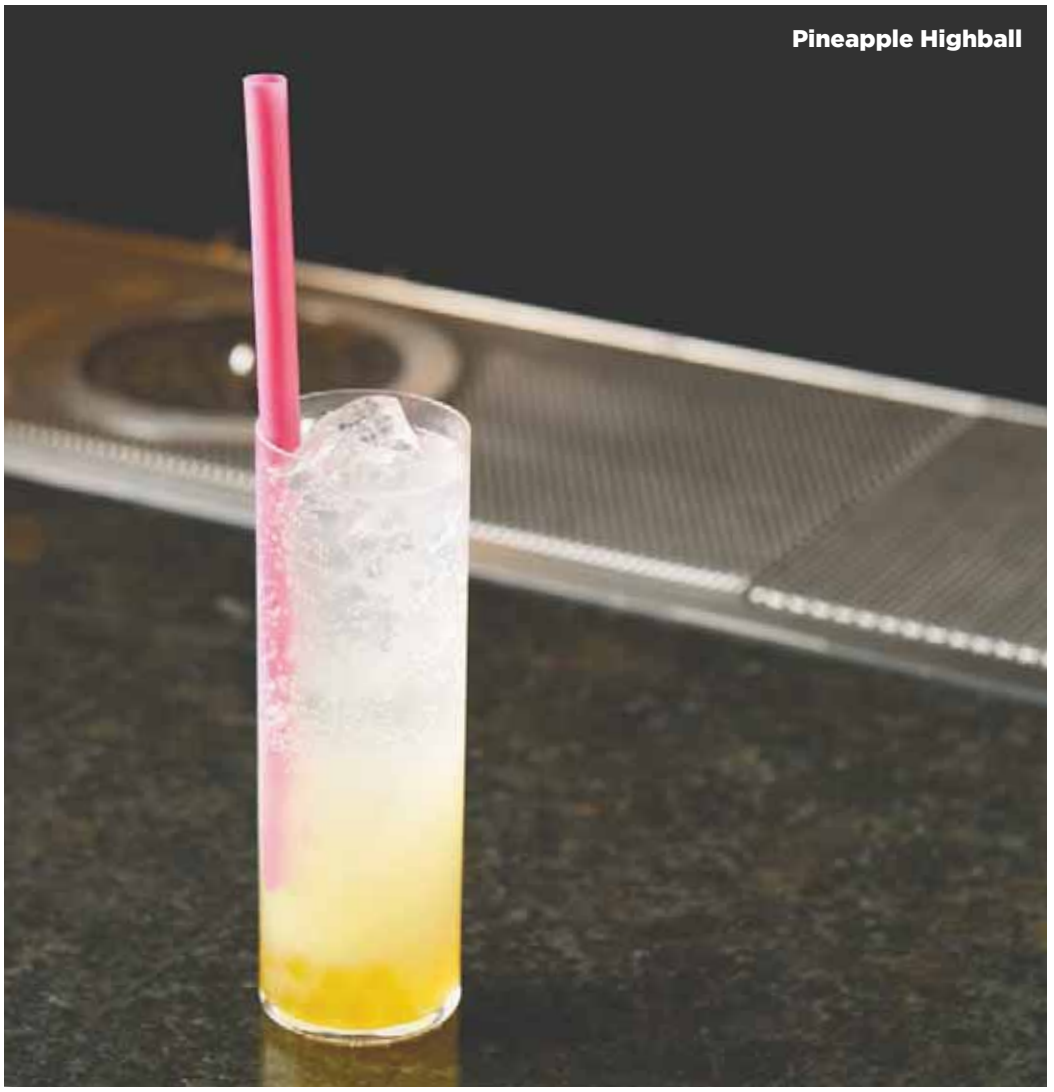
In other words, you get to choose your own cocktail adventure.

Whatever you do, don’t pass over his version of a spicy pina colada. There’s no cream of coconut in his version: It’s rich, juicy pineapple with lime juice, that sensational morita pepper, a splash of mezcal, very coconutty coconut water, and ice chuffed into a coupe glass with a Japanese ice shaver.

Hot weather just begs for a cocktail that includes a little paper umbrella. Some gummy-worm-blue concoction, strong as a slap to the face? Yes, please. Enter Trenton Crawford, the maestro behind Sylvestro Bar at Urbano Cafe in Old East Dallas, and his drink, the **Blue Tulum**. It sends problems flapping away like an irritated duck. He reverse-engineered Big Blue cream soda, making his own syrup that tastes exactly like it. The drink is as blue as Shark Week (and has a similar bite), with a healthy dose of tequila and rum; Combier Le Bleu liqueur, which is citrusy and adds the electric blue color; Combier coconut liqueur; bubbly soda; and fresh lemon. One sip, the house-made coconut cream hitting your lips, and you’ll 100% feel hot sand beneath your feet, despite the concrete jungle of Bryan Street just outside the door.

Crawford’s favorite thing right now is Brazil’s national cocktail, the wondrous caipirinha. Crawford’s father spent time in Brazil and introduced him to it. “This is something that everyone can make at home,” he says. Despite its simplicity — cachaça (Brazilian sugarcane spirit), a sugar cube and pulverized lime (lots of lime) — it’s big on flavor.

Another must-have is Crawford’s **Pineapple Highball**. He uses mezcal from Durango, Mexico — “It’s incredibly soft and approachable. It’s not that kind of charcoal-flavored tequila,” he says. He infuses the mezcal with the pineapple skin, the flesh



Pineapple Highball



Blue Tulum

Topped with coconut cream and a paper umbrella, the drink is as blue as Shark Week (and has a similar bite).

closest to the rind, and deploys a homemade lime cordial (limes packed in sugar to extract their flavor). It's given a bow tie with Velvet Falernum, a sweet-spiced Barbados liqueur, and some pops of passion fruit.

"That's one I'm really excited about. I leaned really hard into the ranch water trend [as inspiration]," Crawford says.

Gabe Sanchez, bar master of East Dallas' Black Swan Saloon and Saint Valentine, calls Asahi Wilkinson Tansan the "holy grail of carbonated water." He found little cans of it in a lone store in Plano. You've never had a crispy mineral water like Tansan — it tastes like a peppered glacier and forms an alluvial fan of fizz through your brain.

Why search North Dallas for one brand of carbonated water? Easy: Sanchez cares about a few simple ingredients, done with precision and a boatload of care. "You take really good Japanese whisky and nice ice cubes, you make the glass very cold and add Asahi water, and it's really eye-opening," he says.

He keeps his summer drinks just as simple and sharp. Cantaloupe and mezcal are an underrated combo, he says. Same with watermelon and gin. Actually, watermelon and tequila will also blow your hair back. Spin and strain the watermelon juice to remove the heavier parts, then mix it with either liquor to make a heat-busting cocktail. Stop by Saint Valentine for his "4,5,6" with blanco tequila, watermelon, tangerine juice and ancho chile syrup — and the proof will be in the cocktail.

For a trip to Italy in a glass, head to the rooftop bar at Via Triozzi (aka the Terrazza), on Lower Greenville, where mixologist Zak Kolbas (he built the bar menu) created the **Olive Oil Cake Sour** — inspired by the classic Italian olive oil cake.

"It's a whiskey sour complemented with notes of vanilla, almond and orange," Kolbas says. The drink features Fiori di Sicilia (an Italian extract that tastes toasty, warm and citrusy), and then he whisks in a silky, grassy olive oil. A taste of the cocktail, and you'll be transported to a lush Tuscan garden under the skies of a never-ending sunset. Like we said, Italy in a glass.

A taste of the cocktail, and you'll be transported to a lush Tuscan garden under the skies of a never-ending sunset.



Olive Oil Cake Sour

OPPOSITE: SETH BRAMMER; THIS PAGE: DACOGE MEDIA

YES, CHEF

From pastries to pasta, two North Texas chefs are earning national recognition.



Osteria il Muro owner and chef Scott Girling grows tomatoes, herbs, melons, squash, cauliflower and more in the garden behind his restaurant.

BY **KELLEY BRUSS**

Two tiny Italian restaurants in North Texas earned outsized attention this spring as chefs from their kitchens were named finalists for the 2026 James Beard Awards. Maggie Huff, pastry chef at Lucia in the Bishop Arts District, was one of five nationwide finalists for Outstanding Pastry Chef or Baker. Scott Girling, owner and executive chef at Denton's Osteria il Muro, was one of five finalists for Best Chef: Texas.

The significance of a James Beard Award can't be overstated — in the foodie world, it's akin to an Oscar. While neither chef ended up taking an award home, for a culinary professional, even a simple nomination can make one's career. Despite their busy schedules, Huff and Girling took time to chat with us about their nominations and their love of cooking.

Grab your cappuccino and a biscotti, and let's meet the chefs.

Scott Girling

Owner and chef, Osteria il Muro

Girling's earliest conception of a good meal was formed at his grandparents' Michigan home. His great-grandfather had immigrated to the United States from Sicily. There were frequent family get-togethers, he says, but "there wasn't a ton of Italian food."

That's by Italian family standards. Girling remembers waiting in line for his turn at the folding-table spread, scooping out lasagna (his favorite), sausage and peppers, and sometimes even gnocchi with tomato sauce.

When he was ready for his own restaurant, Girling wanted to incorporate not only the flavors that stuck with him but also the feeling of a cozy gathering. He opened Denton's Osteria il Muro in a repurposed 800-square-foot home. "We treat this like a house party," he says.

Girling has been in the kitchen since he was a kid. He remembers lots of experiments and not many successes. "Trying to create



OPPOSITE: CHITOSE SUZUKI/THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS; THIS PAGE: COURTESY OSTERIA IL MURO



“We treat this like a house party.”

— Scott Girling





The cozy location sets the tone at Scott Girling’s restaurant, where handmade pasta and a welcoming atmosphere share the spotlight.

your own recipes when you’ve never really created recipes, it’s always a wild time,” he says.

Shortly after his family moved to Texas, he worried his parents by leaving college for The Culinary School of Fort Worth. (They’re not worried anymore; “proud” and “happy” are the current adjectives.) He studied next at the Italian Culinary Institute in Calabria.

But his professional work took a winding path to Italian cuisine. Girling’s earliest hospitality jobs were in college bars. In restaurants, he worked his way up from line cook to sous chef; he was at Local Pint, a Flower Mound gastro pub, when he got the chance to bring his Italian heritage to the table.

Girling started a weekly fresh pasta pop-up that soon had customers lining up. He offered the special as to-go fare during the pandemic, and by the time diners were ready to be back in restaurants, he was on his way to opening Osteria il Muro.

His team is like family, minus any drama. “I’ve never worked in a restaurant like this before,” Girling says. Many of his staff have been with him since the beginning. “They’ve taken a lot off my plate, no pun intended. They’ve all made my job a lot easier.”

His reservations-only restaurant seats 26 inside and another 12 on the patio when the weather is cooperative. Girling regularly gets asked about plans to go bigger. There are none.

He also gets frequent questions about the size of the menu. It’s small, too, and also staying that way. Diners can choose from a handful of antipasti selections, five or six pastas and risottos, and a nightly special.

The menu always includes authentic Italian dishes, plus a few with seasonal, Texas twists. You’ll find Calabrian pastas such as fileja, which Girling hand rolls for better texture. In fact, everything but the cheese is made in-house, in a residential-size kitchen with two regular refrigerators.

Behind the restaurant is a garden with 18 varieties of tomatoes, plus herbs, melons, squash, cauliflower and more. Girling likes his younger cooks to see the work that goes into growing produce. His junior sous chef has unofficially become assistant gardener. The lead gardener? That’s Girling. Owner, chef, gardener. “And plumber and contractor,” he says, laughing.

Back in January, when the James Beard Award semifinalists were announced, Girling woke to a phone blowing up with vague messages: “Way to go” and “Congratulations.” He wondered if an influencer had visited the restaurant and the video went viral. (It’s happened before.)

Finally, a fellow chef sent a clarifying text that went something like this: “North Texas. James Beard. Incredible.”

For more information or reservations, visit osteriamuro.com. Note that dining is by reservation only.

COURTESY OSTERIA IL MURO



PORTRAIT: TAILYR IRVINE/THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS; DESSERTS: COURTESY MAGGIE HUFF

“There’s something very satisfying about taking a bunch of raw ingredients and turning it into something magnificent.”

— Maggie Huff





At Lucia, Maggie Huff’s desserts are the perfect finishing touch to a memorable meal.

Maggie Huff

Pastry chef, Lucia

A heads-up: If you invite Huff to a potluck, she’s likely to bring anything but dessert.

“I like to make people happy,” Huff says. “I feed them delicious things with carbs and sugar.” But even a James Beard-nominated pastry chef needs to mix it up sometimes.

This was Huff’s third nomination, but her first time to reach the finals. “I’m not comfortable with attention, so I just try to ignore it,” she admits.

Huff’s mother taught her how to read a recipe, how to stir and mix and preheat an oven. But scratch any rosy glow from the mental image. “The cooks in my family were terrible,” she laughs, adding both grandmothers to the indictment along with her mother.

She and her brother learned to do better as an act of self-preservation. They were young when their parents divorced, and Huff, older by two years, stepped up to help watch him. “I needed to keep him in the same room with me,” she says. Cooking together made that possible. “He and I learned side by side.”

It was the ’70s, and “everything was made with mayonnaise and whatever ‘cream of’ soup you had.” Huff’s favorite childhood meal was pork chops smothered in cream of mushroom soup and rice.

At 16, she started scooping ice cream at the Häagen-Dazs that was then located on Knox Street. She’s waited tables, made pasta and created desserts in her home kitchen. “I’ve just always loved it,” she says.

(A timer goes off in the middle of our call and Huff puts the phone down. She’s baking sourdough in cast-iron pots, and it’s time for the lids to come off.)

It wasn’t until 2005 that Huff went to the French Culinary Institute — now the Institute of Culinary Education — in New York. By then, “I knew what I was doing,” she says. But she wanted to hone her skills and come home with training that would open restaurant doors.

Huff worked as part of a team at some jobs. At Lucia, where she’s been for three years, she’s a one-woman show, responsible for all the restaurant’s breads, pastries and desserts.

“There’s something very satisfying about taking a bunch of raw ingredients and turning it into something magnificent,” she reflects. On the stovetop, there are opportunities to correct and adjust. With baking, “it has to be right when you put it in the oven.”

Huff loves the science and the precision of baking. But she also loves the creativity of it. “I have a point of view,” she says. “I like to show people that dessert can be something that’s more than just sweets. Some of my desserts are just cleverly disguised cheese plates.”

A current customer favorite is her roasted-corn bombolone, an Italian doughnut. Huff fries brioche dough, fills it with a roasted-corn chocolate cream and serves it with milk chocolate ice cream and dark caramel sauce.

The same mind that developed that decadence still has trouble accepting that the James Beard Foundation considers her one of the best in her field. “Out of the whole country? Are you kidding?” she says. “I’m at a loss for words.”

She hopes the attention the awards generate will benefit the entire Dallas culinary community. “There are great chefs in this town who all deserve recognition,” Huff says.

For more information or reservations, visit luciadallas.com.



How five bakers navigated the pandemic and Texas' cottage food laws to reshape the Dallas-area food scene.

LITTLE BAKERIES GO BIG

BY **NANCY NICHOLS**

When COVID-19 hit in 2020, the North Texas restaurant scene was left reeling. Layoffs were swift, restaurants shut down and many people — food industry veterans and novices alike — began turning to their home kitchens to create an income. The challenges were numerous, from sourcing supplies to figuring out how to market, let alone deliver, their goods in the weird and new "no-contact" era.

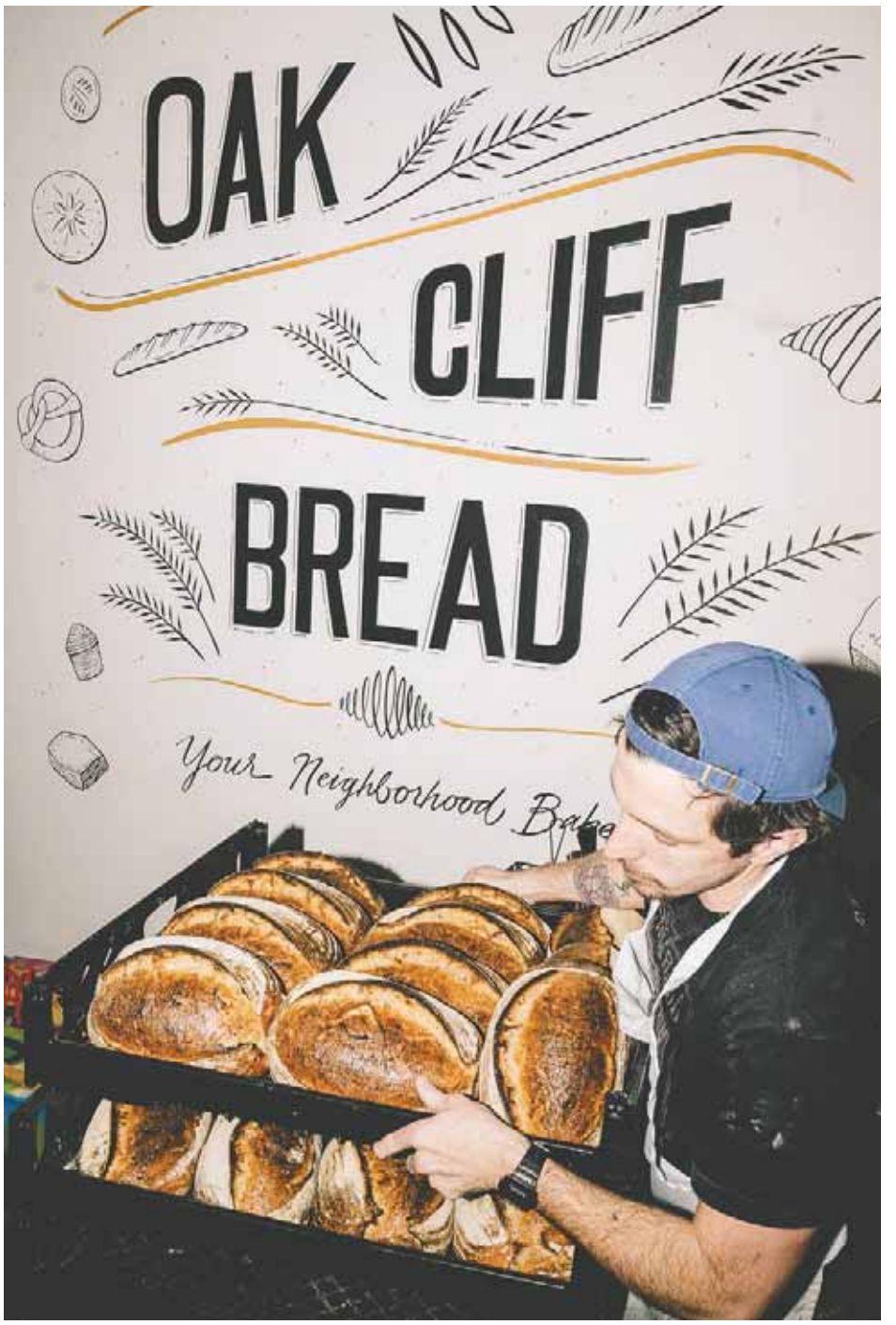
Tyler Rooney, who lost his job as head baker of the trendy Bishop Arts restaurant Macellaio when it closed, remembers those early days well. "We had to just use our cast-iron skillets to get started during the pandemic," he says. "There was a six-month waiting time for the standard oven for cottage bakers at the time."

Home-based food businesses in Texas have long been restricted by what are known as cottage food laws, which initially made it illegal to sell food made in a home kitchen unless it was a bread, jam or herb mix. In an act of serendipity, though, by 2019, the state had opened things up so that bakers and cooks could sell a wider variety of foods, as long as they adhered to labeling and safety requirements (e.g., nonperishable foods that didn't require refrigeration) and kept their annual sales below $50,000.

With the relaxation of these laws, during the pandemic, home bakers in North Texas began swapping sourdough starters like family heirlooms, and images of crusty brown loaves of pure comfort flooded social media. Dallas' surge in home baking gained national attention. Not just because there was a huge spike in home baking, but also because of how quickly the hobbyists — armed with Instagram, Venmo and word-of-mouth marketing — emerged as successful entrepreneurs. They were baking, and people were buying.

But it was five Dallas-area bakers in particular who emerged to play a significant role in redefining what a successful bakery can be. They navigated the restrictive cottage food laws to create a hyperlocal food economy where neighbors bought from neighbors, and they provided a framework that served as a doorway into business ownership.

AFTER ROONEY LOST HIS JOB as Macellaio's head baker, he and his wife, Chayanne, turned the uncertainty they faced into an opportunity. He quickly got out his cast-iron skillets and began



What started as home-baked loaves has risen into a full-fledged business. Today, Tyler Rooney churns out artisanal sourdough by the armful from his bakery at the Tyler Street DART station.

JUSTIN DOHERTY



“It was incredibly validating to be nominated for [a James Beard Award]. … We were the first cottage bakery in the country to ever be nominated.”

— Stephanie Leichtle-Chalklen



Kuluntu recently opened a location in Oak Cliff, where you can snag melt-in-your-mouth cinnamon rolls and other favorites.

HALEY HILL

baking bread in small batches at home. He tagged his home business Oak Cliff Bread.

Rooney’s reputation as a baker with a devotion to Texas-grown grains and slow fermentation techniques was respected by local food lovers. Luckily, he was able to maintain industry relationships that provided his preferred ingredients. “We would drive to Chefs’ Produce, pull up to the loading dock with our Prius, and pick up Plugra butter and any produce needed for the week,” Rooney says. “Barton Springs Mill also delivered flour to our doorstep.”

He worked hard to refine his craft and create a variety of inspired items. “I was baking something like 50 loaves of sourdough a week for the neighborhood,” Rooney says. “We offered sourdough loaves, baguettes and croissants for doorstep delivery.” His croissants caught the public’s attention, and the emails, texts and online orders increased.

Rooney’s revenue was eventually reinvested in the purchase of a Rofco B40 professional oven. “It now sits in the laundry room of our house,” he says with a nostalgic sigh. “It reminds us of how we survived the pandemic.”

In October 2023, the Rooneys left their home kitchen and moved Oak Cliff Bread into a spot at the Tyler Street DART station in Oak Cliff. Now customers flock there, especially on weekends, lining up in hopes of snagging a loaf of artisanal sourdough, puffy focaccia with olive oil on top or a raspberry vanilla cruffin.

A FEW MILES AWAY FROM THE ROONEYS, Stephanie Leichtle-Chalklen and her husband, Warren, have built something different. After years of working in the restaurant industry in New York, Stephanie stepped away from a system she found grueling and inequitable. The couple relocated to Cape Town, South Africa, for several months (Warren is a native of Johannesburg), and while there, Stephanie found herself returning to baking — not as a career move, but as a way to connect with the community. The couple were welcomed by a culture dedicated to sharing what little they had with new neighbors.

When they decided to move to Stephanie’s hometown of Dallas in 2018, they transported this experience with them and launched Kuluntu (which means “community” in the South African language of Xhosa), a nonprofit, community-driven bakery they operated out of their Oak Cliff home. When COVID-19 hit, the bakery really began to take off, thanks in part to everyone’s obsession with, yes, sourdough bread. Stephanie began offering free loaves to her neighbors, holding no-contact social gatherings in her backyard, conducting baking classes over Zoom and organizing porch pickups for her customers.

As the couple’s work caught the community’s

“I returned to Belarus every summer to visit my grandma’s house. … She taught [us] about baking using the traditional Eastern European methods, natural fermentation, you know, real sourdough bread.”

— Tatiana Stark

attention, they expanded into something larger: a bakery rooted in social impact. “After taking a course about women’s issues on a global scale, I homed in on finding ways to help women working in professional bakeries,” she says. “It helped us create a profound mission statement.” Their project became a space dedicated to empowering women and nonbinary individuals in the food industry, fostering inclusivity, and creating opportunities for education and connection.

And connect they did: Kuluntu Bakery was a James Beard Awards finalist in the Outstanding Bakery category in 2023. The nomination provided a huge boost to growing their business and promoting their mission. “It was incredibly validating to be nominated for such a prestigious award,” Stephanie says. “We were still baking in our house, and we were the first cottage bakery in the country to ever be nominated.”

This past June, they opened a brick-and-mortar retail space in Oak Cliff’s East Dock, a former ice storage and manufacturing building from 1915 that is being revived as a mixed-use complex. From Thursdays through Sundays, you can stop by for its signature granola, salted-rye chocolate chip cookies, cinnamon rolls, and pastries such as the almond-and-lemon croissant and the cheesy artichoke galette.

YURY AND TATIANA STARK, immigrants from Belarus, also brought a deeply personal history to their passion for baking. Both were raised in a culture where great bread was part of every meal. “After I moved to the States in 2000, [I] realized how different the products are here,” Tatiana says. “I returned to Belarus every summer to visit my grandma’s house, where she was baking all the time. She taught [us] about baking using the traditional Eastern European methods, natural fermentation, you know, real sourdough bread.”

Since they struggled to find that same quality stateside, the couple combined their entrepreneurial spirit with Yury’s experience of working in a pizza restaurant in Belarus, and began making the products that they craved.

They started baking at home to perfect their recipes before eventually renting an old warehouse in Plano, and Bread Street Boys was born (and so







Eastern European baking techniques are behind Bread Street Boys’ flour-dusted loaves, pizzas and sandwiches. Owners Yury and Tatiana Stark learned the traditional methods from her grandmother in Belarus.

COURTESY BREAD STREET BOYS







Home-based microbakery Humble Bread evolved into Carina Pizzeria, a buzzed-about spot in Preston Center.

were two children, along the way). Slowly, they began sharing their traditional Eastern European breads and pastries with their friends and gathered feedback. It didn't take long for their German thin-crust wheat rye, traditional rye and pumpernickel breads to gain a loyal following. This gave them the confidence to expand their offerings to include sourdough, ciabatta and focaccia, as well as sourdough pizzas and sandwiches. They also now sell wholesale to grocery stores and restaurants.

EUGENE PLYAKO'S JOURNEY to the United States began in 1991 and followed an arc similar to the Starks'. A refugee from Ukraine, Plyako worked as an executive at a computer wholesale company before he was laid off during the pandemic. So he decided to take advantage of his reputation as a great home cook, baker and party thrower, and embark on a new career.

He formed Humble Bread, a one-man microbakery, in his tiny Dallas apartment. He turned out artisanal sourdough loaves, ciabatta, pastries and bagels. As his small-batch approach and slow-rise sourdough bread captured the attention of the local foodie scene, his reputation grew. He was also a hit on social media (still is) and began offering his baked goods via curbside service. Near the end of the pandemic, he began selling sourdough pizzas to his loyal customers, and he couldn't keep up with the demand.

Eventually, Plyako outgrew his home kitchen and went big time. He closed Humble Bread and, in late 2023, he opened Carina Pizzeria, a 750-square-foot spot in Preston Center. "I thought about opening a bakery after Humble Bread," Plyako admits. "But when I looked at how much more money it cost to open a bakery than a pizza restaurant, I made my decision."

He recruited his staff from the small but tight-knit Ukrainian population in Dallas. "I wanted to help my community, and I reached out to them as employees," Plyako says. "It works because they are European-trained workers. Very disciplined and passionate."

His Pizza al Taglio, featuring a focaccia-like crust and served in squares, and the circular Pizza Tonda, with a crispy crust, are currently the talk of this pizza-obsessed town.

COURTESY CARINA PIZZERIA

“We were constantly looking for better products, especially sweets. I said, ‘Let’s just try to make them and see if we can make them good.’ And we did.”

— Chelsea Gannon



Ruby’s Baking Co. offers gluten-free products that don’t feel like alternatives — just delicious treats.

AS TRADITIONAL BREAD AND PIZZA BUSINESSES emerged past the pandemic in North Texas, baker Chelsea Gannon took a different path to winning over devoted customers. Gannon had changed her family’s diet because both she and her daughter, Brooklyn, were diagnosed with gluten sensitivities. They were frustrated by the lack of baked goods available to people with compromised immune systems or allergies.

“We were constantly looking for better products, especially sweets,” Gannon says. “I said, ‘Let’s just try to make them and see if we can make them good.’ And we did, and then I quickly realized how many other people were in the same boat as us.”

Chelsea and her then-13-year-old daughter used their time during the pandemic to create high-quality alternatives for people avoiding gluten, managing nut allergies and/or following a vegan diet. They started by selling from home, but “we were hindered by the food laws at the time,” Gannon says. “We couldn’t make things that needed to be refrigerated, and we had to list our address on all the packaging.” Despite that, they endured, and also began selling at local farmers markets.

Thanks to a robust social media presence, demand for her baked goods in this underrepresented niche surged. Gannon opened Ruby Baking Co. in a 1,200-square-foot space in Rockwall in 2024. The cases are full of colorful cupcakes, cookies, cinnamon rolls (traditional and strawberry), brownies and cakes.

WHAT BEGAN AS A PANDEMIC-ERA WORKAROUND has become an increasingly important aspect of Texas’ food landscape. Due in no small part to the efforts of these five entrepreneurs, as well as the many others who followed suit, microbakeries are now a thriving industry here, and across the state. So much so, that in 2025, lawmakers expanded the state’s cottage food laws, raising the annual sales cap from $50,000 to $150,000 and allowing wholesale sales (for non-refrigerated items) — a sign of just how quickly this industry has matured. And, as we’ve seen, cottage food businesses often serve as a launchpad for larger ventures that reach even more customers.

“At first, I didn’t consider my business [would] make a difference,” Plyako says. “But my now-busy business is certainly a proof of concept. It was never meant to even succeed, but somehow it ended up being great.”

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT: CORY DOGGETT; COURTESY CARINA PIZZERIA; JUSTIN DOHERTY

The Details

Bread Street Boys Pizza and Bakery
2710 S. Rigsbee Drive, Suite A
Plano
855-825-0777
breadstreetboys.com

Carina Pizzeria
6005 Berkshire Lane
Dallas
214-774-9747
carina.pizza



Kuluntu Bakery
900 E. Clarendon Drive #165
Dallas
469-933-4960
kuluntubakery.org

Oak Cliff Bread
1300 S. Polk St. #230
Dallas
682-439-5319
oakcliffbread.com



Ruby Bakery Co.
811 E. Yellow Jacket Lane #122
Rockwall
469-560-7689
rubybakingco.com

DESTINATION DINING

STORY BY **NANCY NICHOLS** ILLUSTRATION BY **ROB WILSON**

Venturing to a nearby town for a meal is about more than just the food. It's an opportunity to slow down and take a mini-break from everyday life. After all, who doesn't benefit from a long, luxurious brunch with friends or family in a quaint locale ripe for exploring? With that in mind, we've selected five restaurants worthy of the trip. Because a change of scenery and a sense of discovery can turn an outstanding meal into a memorable adventure.



Dayne's Craft Barbecue

ALEDO

It's no secret that several properties in Aledo were used in the filming of Taylor Sheridan's *Landman*, including one that portrays the home of Billy Bob Thornton's character, Tommy Norris. So it makes sense that crew members have feasted at the much-talked-about Dayne's Craft Barbecue, with its covered outdoor dining area that overlooks the valley and the big open sky. The menu ventures outside the norm for a North Texas barbecue joint, with the likes of bacon brisket, flaming hot cheese corn and Frito pie. And the tiny cocktail bar makes a mean bloody mary.

daynescraftbarbecue.com



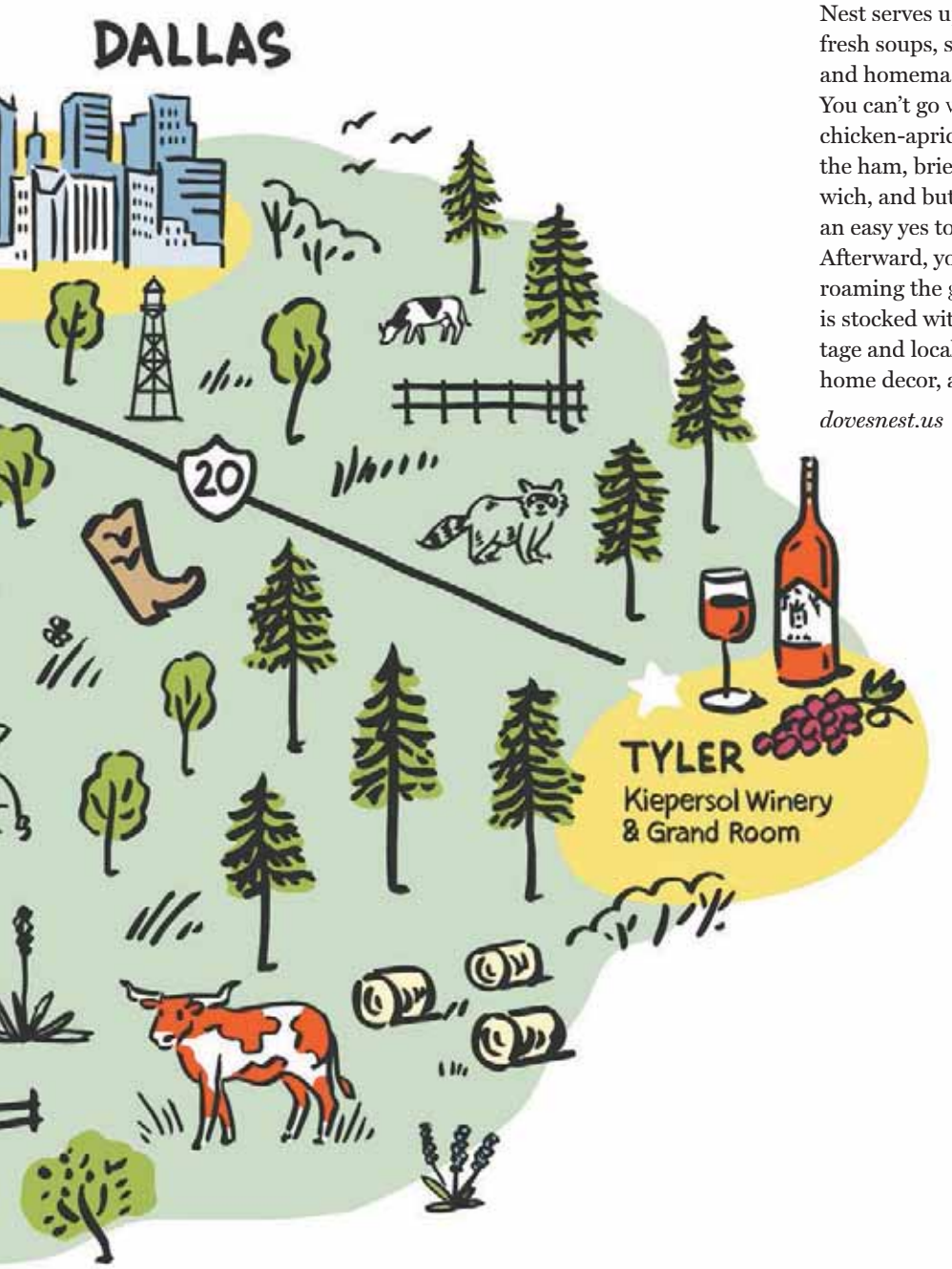
Christina's American Table

GRANBURY

This stylish restaurant is a go-to for foodies who love a big-city menu and small-town prices. The lunch menu's Prime Rib Dip, with shaved prime rib, provolone and creamy horseradish, should be considered a national treasure. The sophisticated spot —on the first floor of the Nutt House Hotel, which has been in operation since 1916 — also features French throwbacks like beef bourguignon and duck a l'orange. Granbury is a great weekend getaway, but if you only have one day, go during the week so you can wander around the town's historic square and tour the iconic Brazos limestone courthouse. It's the first courthouse square in Texas to make it onto the National Register of Historic Places.

christinasamericantable.com







The Doves Nest

WAXAHACHIE

A beautifully restored historic building on Waxahachie's redbrick town square houses a longtime favorite lunch stop. Known for its Southern-inspired cuisine, The Doves Nest serves up a variety of fresh soups, salads, sandwiches and homemade desserts. You can't go wrong with the chicken-apricot salad or the ham, brie and jam sandwich, and buttermilk pie is an easy yes to end your meal. Afterward, you can spend time roaming the gift shop, which is stocked with stationery, vintage and locally crafted items, home decor, and gourmet food.

dovesnest.us



Cafe Homestead

WACO

This popular cafe has been offering memorable meals for over 30 years. It's located within Homestead Heritage, a church community that values simplicity and embraces a pre-industrialization way of life. The cafe is known for its fresh-baked breads, house-made sauces, local cheeses and farm-to-table cooking (the farm is right next door). You'll find all of your favorite classic Texas lunches (chicken-fried steak!) and dinners (chicken-fried steak!). After your meal, enjoy the surrounding artisan workshops and gardens, or take a hayride to a spot overlooking the Brazos River. And whatever you do, don't miss the legendary cinnamon roll.

cafehomestead.com



Kiepersol Winery & Grand Room

TYLER

Nestled just south of Tyler, Kiepersol Winery & Restaurant is a hidden gem in the rolling East Texas countryside. Some of the finest Texas wines are produced from the on-site 63-acre vineyard. The family-run business has grown to include a lunch bistro, the perfect spot to rest after sampling any of the 26 estate wines in the Grand Room. If you're coming for dinner, book a table at the fine-dining steakhouse that features hand-cut steaks paired with wine.

kiepersol.com

Snack Attack

These four healthy, make-ahead snack recipes will satisfy all your cravings.

RECIPES BY **TINA DANZE**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KATHY TRAN**



It's far too easy to fall into the processed (or, worse, ultraprocessed) food trap when packing a lunch or grabbing a quick snack, whether for yourself or your kids. But those bags of chips and high-fructose snacks can't compete with our addictive, make-ahead options. Boosted with protein, fiber, antioxidants and other good-for-you ingredients, these recipes pack a nutritional punch. The best part? They're delicious and more filling than junk food.

If you're craving something sweet and savory, our Healthy Trail Mix delivers. It calls for no-sugar-added dried fruit and keeps half the nuts salt-free and raw, making it a healthier alternative to prepackaged versions. Buying ingredients from the bulk bins makes it easy to choose a variety of wholesome ingredients. We're partial to almonds, cashews, apricots and raisins, but you can use our recipe as a template for your ideal mix. For extra crunch, we added Snyder's mini pretzels — they're free of saturated fats and lower in sodium than most popular pretzel brands.

Healthy Trail Mix

Makes 5 cups (20 servings)

- ⅔ cup dried apricots (with no added sugar), diced
- ⅔ cup raisins (with no added sugar)
- 1 cup raw, unsalted cashews
- 1 cup roasted and salted almonds
- ½ cup roasted and salted pumpkin seeds (or substitute sunflower seeds)
- ½ cup unsweetened coconut flakes (optional)
- ⅔ cup Snyder's of Hanover mini pretzels (roughly broken if desired)

Combine dried fruit, nuts, pumpkin seeds, coconut flakes and pretzels in a mixing bowl. Store in an airtight container, where it can keep for weeks. Feel free to use peanuts, walnuts, pistachios, pecans or pine nuts in place of the cashews and almonds. Diced dried cherries, mangos and figs are good fruit options, too.



This Strawberry Smoothie can be prepared ahead of time and stored in the fridge. Thanks to the gelatinous nature of soaked chia seeds — a nutritional powerhouse that thickens the drink — there's no need for last-minute pureeing with ice or frozen fruit. In addition to fiber, our smoothie sneaks in calcium and probiotics via yogurt.

Make-Ahead Strawberry Smoothie

3 servings, 11 to 12 ounces each

- 2 tablespoons raw chia seeds (soak in advance per recipe instructions, below, for 20 minutes or overnight)
- ½ cup milk
- 14 ounces (about 3 ½ cups) strawberries (fresh or frozen and partially defrosted)
- 1 ½ cups whole-milk yogurt
- 3 to 4 tablespoons agave syrup or honey (depending on how sweet the berries are)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- Pinch or two of salt

To soak chia seeds, place in a small jar or bowl with ½ cup very warm water. Stir to evenly distribute seeds and let sit for 20 minutes (or refrigerate, covered, overnight). After 10 minutes of soaking, stir seeds again to hydrate evenly and prevent clumping.

If using frozen strawberries, let them sit at room temperature for 10 minutes or so to at least partially defrost so that you don't overwork your blender.

Place milk and half the strawberries in a blender and puree until smooth. Add remaining strawberries (and accumulated juices, if defrosted) and puree. Add chia mixture, yogurt, agave syrup or honey, vanilla and salt. Blend on high for about a minute, or until smooth.

Refrigerate, covered to chill; just before serving, give it a good shake or stir, as the mixture may separate as it sits. If toting for lunch, pour chilled smoothie into a thermos and shake just before opening. If freezing, store in freezer-safe containers, leaving an inch of space for expanding; defrost overnight in the fridge.

These No-Bake Oatmeal Peanut Butter Bars are chock-full of protein and fiber — old-fashioned oats, nuts, dried fruit and chia seeds — but taste like a bakery treat.

No-Bake Oatmeal Peanut Butter Bars

Makes 4 servings

- 1 cup pecans, almonds or walnuts
- 1 cup old-fashioned oats (rolled oats)
- ⅓ cup dark chocolate chips, roughly chopped
- ⅓ cup raisins
- 2 tablespoons chia seeds
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup unsweetened, all-natural peanut butter (stir before measuring if oil has separated)
- ⅓ cup honey
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ¼ cup Grape Nuts cereal (for a nice crunch)

In a food processor, pulse nuts until finely chopped (they won't be uniform in size; you'll have some chopped, some granular or pulverized). Add oats, chocolate chips, raisins, chia seeds, salt, peanut butter, honey, vanilla and Grape Nuts; pulse to blend the mixture, scraping the bowl once or twice. Press into an 8-inch square baking pan. Cover surface of the mixture with wax paper, and cover the pan tightly with plastic wrap or foil, before storing in refrigerator (they are firmer when chilled). Cut into 20 rectangular bars. For lunch-packing or freezing, wrap bars individually in plastic wrap.



Fans of ranch dressing will enjoy our creamy Cottage Cheese Ranch Dip. It's filled with far more protein — and lower in fat — than the traditional version. Serve it with raw veggies or Triscuits for a quick fiber fix, or go all out and make our Baked Zucchini Chips to go with it.

Cottage Cheese Ranch Dip

1	cup cottage cheese (for creamiest texture, use 4% milk fat)
2	tablespoons plain yogurt
1	tablespoon ranch seasoning (we used Trader Joe's version)
1 or 2	teaspoons lemon juice
	Pinch of salt

In a blender, combine cottage cheese, yogurt, ranch seasoning and 1 teaspoon lemon juice. Puree until smooth. Taste before adding salt and more lemon juice, as needed. Serve with sliced raw vegetables, Triscuit crackers or Baked Zucchini Chips (recipe follows). If packing for lunch, use an insulated lunch tote and include a small ice pack.

Zucchini Chips: Preheat oven to 240 F (230 F if your oven runs hot). Using a mandoline, V-slicer or food processor with the slicing attachment, cut zucchini into ⅛-inch-thick rounds. Arrange zucchini on kitchen towels and sprinkle lightly with salt, to help draw out the water. Place another towel on top followed by a baking sheet weighted with cast iron cookware, a heavy cutting board or canned goods. Let sit for 20 minutes so that the towels absorb the zucchini's moisture.

Place zucchini in a bowl and drizzle with enough olive oil to coat (1 tablespoon is enough for 2 zucchini); use clean hands to toss until evenly coated. Line a large baking sheet (or two) with parchment paper and arrange zucchini in a single layer. Bake for 1 ½ to 2 hours, until crisp and browned. If some chips crisp before others, remove them and continue baking the rest. Place crisped zucchini on paper towels to cool. Store in an airtight container or zip-close bag for several days at room temperature. If the chips start to lose their crispness, reheat in a 200 F oven for 10 minutes.

THE BEST

BIRRIA
CAESAR SALAD
FRENCH FRIES
RAMEN
GELATO

IN DALLAS

THESE AREA RESTAURANTS ARE SERVING UP DELICIOUS,
BUZZY FOODS READY FOR YOUR NEXT TASTE TEST.

BY ***EATDRINKDFW*** **EDITORS**

If your Instagram or TikTok algorithm knows you live in Dallas — and, we assure you, it does — then you've probably been served up countless videos where someone claims to have found the best [insert food here] in the city. We'll let you decide if those alarmingly close-to-home recommendations make you feel like Big Brother is watching or like a friend is guiding you to the best dining experience. (Maybe a little of both?)

However you take it, it's clear there's no shortage of foodies, chefs and average joes ready to tell you that this, and only this, is the best place to eat your favorite whatever in Dallas. Case in point: Cookbook author and food blogger Alex Snodgrass and Dallas influencer Chris James Kahle recently took to TikTok to rank the best chicken salads in the city from a list of recommendations sent in by social media followers. (If you're curious, The Cottage Grocery in the Knox District took home the gold.) Hundreds of voices chirped up in the comments to affirm the selection or voice their dissent.

But aside from really good chicken salad, Dallas restaurants have lots to offer, so we decided to jump on the trend and make our own list of spots to grab some of our favorite dishes — from the most authentic birria to the best ramen and most perfect Caesar salad to pair with a crisp Diet Coke and french fries (IYKYK).

FROM TOP: STEVE NURENBERG/THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS; JUAN FIGUEROA/THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS; ALL OTHER IMAGES COURTESY THE BUSINESSES UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED



Michelin-recommended birria:
Birrieria y Taqueria Cortez

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

A glowing Recommended rating from Michelin is enough of a case to drive to Fort Worth and try the beef birria tacos from Birrieria y Taqueria Cortez. What started as a food truck has turned into an internationally recognized taco spot that also serves birria plates, flautas, tortas, burritos and quesabirrias — a fried hybrid of a taco and a quesadilla. "Birrieria Cortez not only serves the best quesabirrias with broth ... but it's also constantly innovating with new dishes to attract nontraditional customers, such as the birria sliders or their keto taco," says Garcia.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BIRRIA

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Birria is a beloved Mexican stew that features goat, beef or even lamb. The dish is a mainstay of traditional cuisine south of the border, but recently it has become popular in the D-FW food scene — especially as one food-truck-turned-restaurant (see above) earned international acclaim for its authentic, flavorful recipe.

"What makes the birria in these places special is that it's made using recipes that have been passed down through generations in the owners' families," says Imelda Garcia, our resident food writer who headed up a series exploring authentic Mexican dishes in North Texas. "These two businesses have thrived because they've managed to preserve the flavor of authentic Mexican birria."

A generations-old recipe:
Birrieria Aguinaga

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The lamb birria recipe used at Birrieria Aguinaga has been passed down for decades. The restaurant, which has nine locations across D-FW, serves classic birria tacos as well as other variations on the dish, like quesabirrias, birria ramen, pizza birria and birria Texas toast. But according to Garcia, "The star is their lamb birria, which is the most authentic dish served in Jalisco, the Mexican state where birria was born."





For a traditional take:
D.L. Mack's

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The old-school Americana vibes at D.L. Mack's, which has three locations in Dallas, make the restaurant perfectly suited for a glitzy girls' night out. We especially love the cornbread croutons (let's be honest, a crouton can make or break a salad), and while the house-made dressing follows the classic recipe, it's not overly fishy. To really take the salad to the next level, though, add the crispy chicken, a tempura-style fried chicken that's light and fluffy and has just the right amount of crunch.



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

CAESAR SALAD

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Did you know that the Caesar salad was invented in Tijuana, Mexico, in the 1920s (by an Italian American chef, no less)? While the original recipe uses romaine lettuce, croutons, Parmesan cheese and a dressing made with anchovies, egg yolks, garlic, mustard, lemon, and salt and pepper, there are as many iterations on the classic as the day is long. The combination of this salad with a side of french fries and a crisp Diet Coke has earned an internet reputation as the ultimate "girl dinner."



National buzz:
Carbone

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

For Caesar and a show, head to Carbone, where the salad is made tableside with all of the flair and drama the restaurant is known for. It's a somewhat outrageous (read: $36!) take on the classic dish, and fair warning, it's heavy on the anchovies. (The salad even features whole anchovies, so, if you don't want your dinner staring back at you, make sure to request it without.)



D.L. MACK'S: COURTESY VANDELAY COMPANIES; CARBONE: COURTESY MAJOR FOOD GROUP

FRENCH FRIES

French fry fanatics often find themselves in camps based on the shape of the fry: thin, thick, curly, waffle. It's a divisive debate, but we're all united by a love for salty, snacky potato perfection because, with that combo, how could you go wrong? French fries aren't typically a stand-alone meal (though we don't hate the idea), but we decided to round up the options that are so good that they're worth driving across town just to order this side dish.

Thin, crispy and classic: Hudson House

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

If thin, crispy, shoestring-like fries are your jam, look no further than the classic American fare at Hudson House, where you can order the skinniest of skinny fries. (If you're truffle inclined, try the truffle Parmesan variation.) Pair them with any manner of favorites on the restaurant's menu, from the burger (also one of the best in Dallas) to the sous vide French chicken or the chicken Parm. All three dishes are editors' picks.



For a chunky, well-seasoned fry: Manhattan Project Beer Company

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Manhattan Project Beer Company's taproom in West Dallas has an excellent menu in addition to the revered brewer's long list of beers on tap. Its french fries — thick, crispy and served with aioli — are a standout on the menu. Order them regular style, with salt and topped with fresh herbs, or try the truffle version if you're feeling fancy.



HUDSON HOUSE: COURTESY VANDELAY COMPANIES



Meet in the middle: La Bodega Rotisserie and Goods

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Restaurant owner Skye McDaniel literally built the concept for her Oak Cliff restaurant around the pairing of french fries and roast chicken, so you know this one must be good. Somewhere in the middle between thick and thin — Aristotle would be delighted by this golden mean french fry — the fries are topped in La Bodega's proprietary spice blend, which is some kind of magic, and served with a lemon tahini yogurt dipping sauce.



Truly authentic:
Ichigoh Ramen Lounge

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

While Ten Ramen in West Dallas is often cited as the OG Dallas ramen shop (which we won't argue with), Ichigoh in Deep Ellum takes home our top ranking. The noodles are imported from Sapporo, Japan, a region credited with developing the miso variation of ramen broth. All the broths are made from scratch, yielding rich and deep flavor profiles. The menu has seven core ramen dishes, with specials added on a regular basis. If you like a bit of heat, try the Spicy Soboro Shoyu or the Ichigoh Special Spicy Miso.



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

RAMEN

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Steeped in centuries of culinary tradition, ramen is an icon of Japanese cuisine, born when a Chinese noodle dish first made its way to Japan, where it then evolved into the rich, flavorful, brothy dish we know today. Five foundational elements make up ramen: noodles, of course, soup stock, sauce, incorporated ingredients like vegetables or eggs or cubed meats, and fat or oil. There are many types of ramen — miso, shoyu (soy sauce), shio (salt) and tonkotsu (pork bone) — and plenty of regional variations and styles beyond those. Our favorites include an authentic version, and then one with a more unique twist.



Wild card:
Kintaro Ramen

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Four-star sushi chef Jesus Garcia turned his talents to ramen and was the founder and original head chef of Oni Ramen in Deep Ellum, before opening Kintaro Ramen in Arlington. This spot offers twists on the comforting Japanese dish — and plenty of classics — that reference the chef's Mexican roots. Try options like Menudo Ramen with guajillo-puya beef broth and tortilla strips, or Pozole Verde Ramen with jalapeno-tomatillo pork broth, avocado and hominy.





In a class of its own:
Botolino Gelato Artigianale

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

We aren't alone in our love for Botolino — it's also ranked on Yelp as one of the best ice cream spots in the U.S. The ever-rotating menu of flavors means there's always something new to try at one of the four metroplex locations. All the creations are made from scratch using natural ingredients imported from the world over, and there are no preservatives, artificial flavorings or colors. Sarah Blaskovich, our senior restaurant reporter, takes her two daughters to Botolino on the first and last days of school every year. "I love fig and mascarpone, and my husband gets the stracciatella. My younger daughter orders gianduia, a word she trips over pronouncing, though she knows that it means 'chocolate and hazelnuts' … my older daughter gets one scoop of dulce de leche and one of white coffee."



★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

GELATO

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Froyo may have taken over the market more than a decade ago, but an influx of gelato shops and spots has brought the Italian dessert to the forefront of North Texas diners' minds. Gelato is softer than ice cream, and has less fat and air, which yields that rich, velvety texture and taste. Across the metroplex (and the state) artisan makers are taking centuries-old techniques and applying them to new, imaginative flavors. The results are refreshing — in more ways than one.



TEO GELATO: MARY GRACE GRANADOS/THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS; CENTRAL MARKET: LOLA GOMEZ/THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

For a Texas twist:
Teo Gelato, available at Central Market

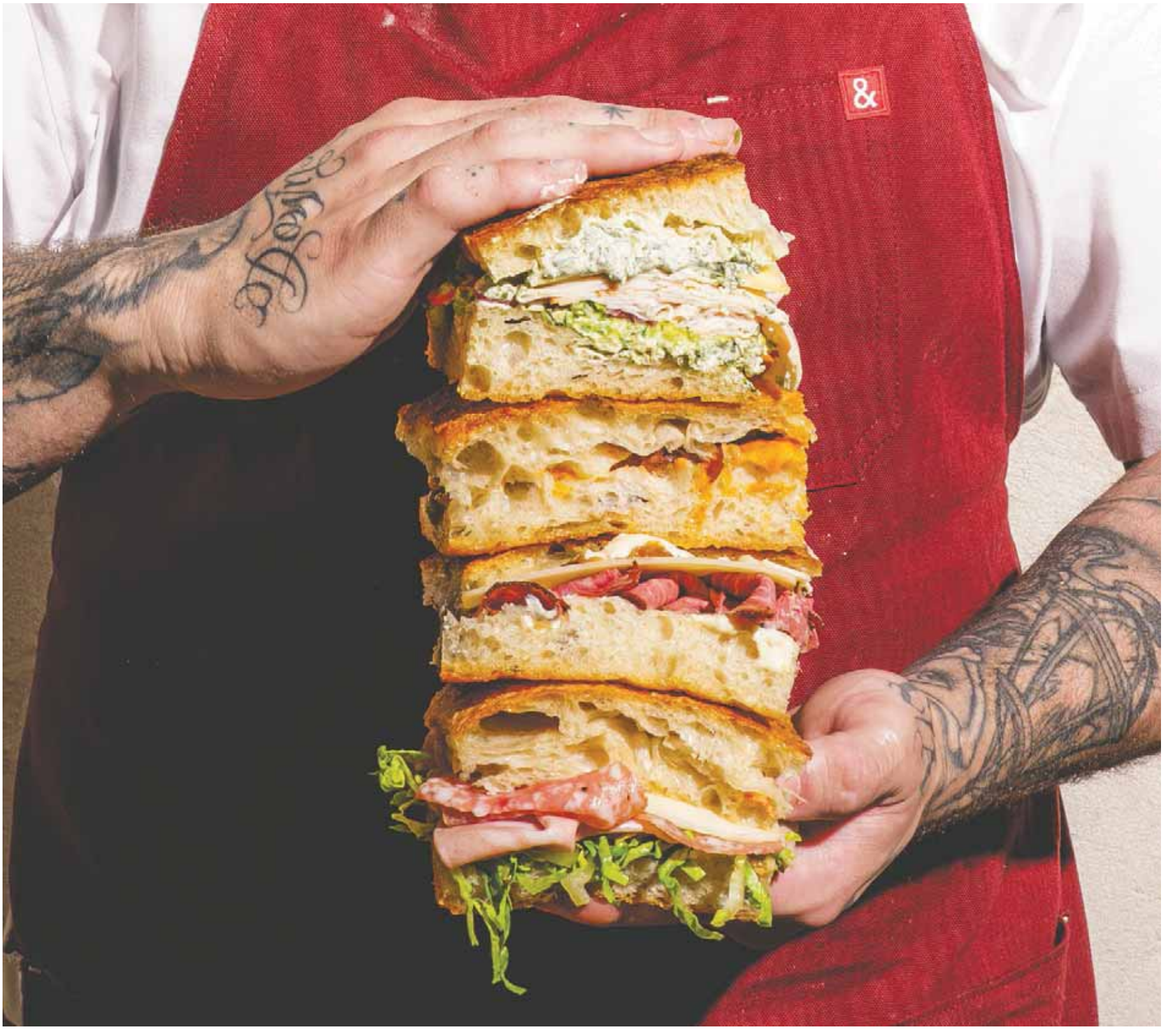
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Austin-made Teo Gelato is stocked at Central Market and H-E-B across the city, and you can pick up pints of the decadent dessert to stock your freezer. Though made with truly Italian techniques, you can see the Texan influence in some of the flavors, such as Texas Pecans & Bourbon Chocolate, Texas Pecan Sundae or Texican Vanilla. Coffee Chocolate Chip comes highly recommended by one of our editors.



THE APPEAL OF THE GOURMET GROCER

With a new generation of specialty markets opening alongside Dallas institutions like Jimmy's and Kuby's, artisanal food stores are more popular than ever. This is why.



DACOGE MEDIA

Walkers', a new specialty market on Greenville Avenue, serves up sandwiches on house-made focaccia bread during the day and then turns into a wine bar at night.

BY **MARY GRACE GRANADOS**

At Walkers' on Greenville Avenue, shelves are lined with Vietnamese chocolates, house-made Marcona almonds, massive tins of potato chips from Spain, and a selection of oils, vinegars and spices to transform the most basic of pantries into a culinary treasure trove. Rosemary Walker-Greene, who opened the deli/restaurant earlier this summer alongside her brother, Russell Walker, even drove to Austin to pick up jams, honey and hot sauces from a Texas brand she loves, to make sure they'd arrive in time for the shop's June opening.

The sit-down restaurant side of the dual-concept spot features a small menu of New American cuisine. On the other side, a sandwich shop and market opens at 11 a.m. Wednesday through Sunday; it converts to a wine bar in the evening. Walkers' refrigerators are stocked with chef-made dishes, including some of the sandwiches from the deli menu; grocery staples like eggs and butter, cheese and charcuterie; and a curated selection of wines — all ready for shoppers to grab and go. "I wanted to be that place in the neighborhood where people don't feel like they have to … navigate the grocery store [when they] just need something in a pinch," says Walker-Greene.

Walkers' joins the ranks of many beloved Dallas specialty food shops, each of which sits at the intersection of neighborhood institution and cultural destination. There's Italian market Jimmy's Food Store, which turns 60 this year and where the sandwich counter is something of a rite of passage for professionals on their lunch break. The shelves are lined with a curated selection of wine, pasta and sauces, and the store is especially loved for its house-made sausage. Multiple restaurants, including Cane Rosso, feature it in their dishes.

Across town in Snider Plaza, Kuby's Sausage House has brought German cuisine and European goodies to Dallasites for 65 years. Eatzi's Market & Bakery, which revolutionized the concept of grab-and-go food 30 years ago, makes it onto



"In specialty food stores, you see these items that help you connect with the outside world."

— Rosemary Walker-Greene





Co-owner and sommelier Rosemary Walker-Greene hand-selected each of the wines for sale in the market. LEFT: On the restaurant side of Walkers', a 20-ounce wagyu rib-eye is served with onion rings and "Lulu's Salad," a dish named after the owners' mother.

CLOCKWISE: ROB HOFFMAN; DACOGE MEDIA; JENNY LAWSON PHOTOGRAPHY

“[Customers] want to be able to come in and say, ‘Hey Karl, how you doing?’”

— Karl Kuby II

nearly every foodie’s list of favorite sandwich spots and is the OG for creating a theatrical shopping excursion. A slew of relative newcomers, such as Berkley’s Market and Ari’s Pantry, provide even more places to find some variety of cookie, cheese or snack you’ve never seen before.

The real common thread, though, is the delight of discovering something unexpected.

KARL KUBY II, WHO GREW UP in his father’s Snider Plaza shop and has since taken it over, says he’s noticed that his customers have a renewed interest in cooking and, in turn, buying quality, interesting ingredients. Social media has introduced a wider audience to inventive recipes and exotic cuisines. “I’m very happy that people are exploring and cooking more, because they’re understanding [the value],” he says. Cooking brings people — families and friends — together. It builds connections, much like the experience of shopping in these specialty stores.

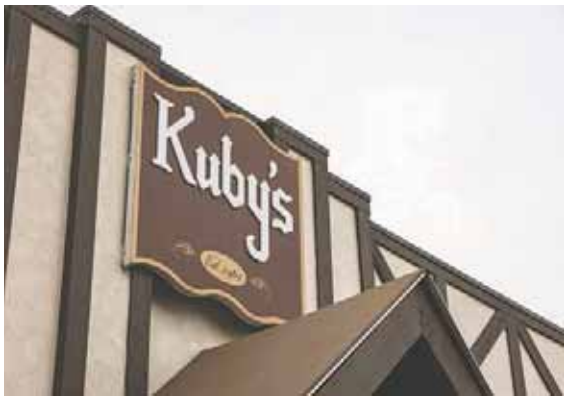
Sure, you can click a button and have dinner delivered — contact free — to your doorstep. Or you can use ChatGPT to write a recipe using only the ingredients in your fridge and pantry. (We’ve all been there.) But convenience doesn’t satisfy our craving for connection.

“[Customers] want to be able to come in and say, ‘Hey Karl, how you doing?’” says Kuby.

For Walker-Greene, who shopped at smaller markets as a child growing up in Oklahoma City and on family trips to France, that sense of connection resonates. “Every time I go to a specialty market, I feel like the hospitality you receive, that one-on-one attention [is so valuable]. … I love that interaction with the human that is helping guide you in picking out those items,” she says.

Of course, the items themselves matter, too. Walker-Greene, who spent years as a sommelier, personally selected the wines in her store. “Every single bottle on this shelf has a story,” she says of the collection. And those stories make every meal more meaningful. “In specialty food stores, you see these items that help you connect with the outside world,” Walker notes. “It makes me feel connected to those individuals who are making those items.”

Before Karl Kuby Sr. opened Kuby’s Sausage House in the 1960s, cities like New York and Chicago were already pioneering the imported







Kuby’s Sausage House has served customers from its iconically designed location in Snider Plaza since 1961. Over the years, the meat market expanded to add a sit-down restaurant and a European grocery.





foods scene. “My dad wanted something like that down here,” Kuby says. The shop attracted both native Dallasites as well as European immigrants, who would come in and ask the Kuby family to find ingredients or items they remembered from their homelands. “[My dad] would search and find [the requested food] … and then he would bring it in and call the customer and say, ‘Hey, look, guess what I got in?’” Kuby’s wife, Liesl Kuby, now heads up the selections, regularly scouring the internet for interesting ingredients and treats. And the store still takes requests and searches for items on behalf of its customers — perhaps even more frequently than in the business’s early days.

CUSTOMERS MAY BE DRAWN INTO specialty food stores by their uniqueness, but retailers stay in business by getting the fundamentals right. “If you’re trying to develop a [food] concept, theater is great — it’s the icing on the cake,” says Eatzi’s CEO Adam Romo. “It cannot be the most important thing in your concept.” (And Eatzi’s knows a thing or two about “theater” — one of its signature features is the opera music that plays as customers shop, creating an atmosphere that feels both cultured and luxurious.)

Learning to stay relevant in a world that manages to find a new obsession at least once a day is no small feat. Yet, Eatzi’s has managed it for over three decades, due in part to its willingness to

LOLA GOMEZ/THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS; MEAT CASE: COURTESY KUBY'S

A trip to one of these stores is about turning an everyday, run-of-the-mill errand into an occasion.



One key tenet of Eatzi's success is "theater." You can see it in the abundant displays of food and hear it in the opera music that plays over the store's speakers.

continually test, refine and expand its offerings based on food industry trends, customer feedback and sales.

Romo has the data to tell you that the top-selling item across all markets is the three-cheese crusted chicken from the chef's case. He'll also tell you that when customers demanded more gluten-free food offerings, they tried it — only to find that the number of requests didn't correlate to actual sales. (Don't worry, they still offer plenty of gluten- and vegan-friendly menu items.)

None of these stores has the capacity, or intention, to stock every item every shopper could ever need to find. But that's never been the appeal. Kuby understands that his customers aren't shopping just at his store; he isn't either. "I get it, I understand it. I shop everywhere." That doesn't mean he isn't looking for ways to streamline their outings. Years ago, he added fresh produce and staples such as eggs and milk to his inventory, alongside prepared foods and artisan products, to make the trip more convenient. "If we can make it more of a one-stop shop, we're going to try to do that," he says.

Whether you're picking up ready-made meals, savoring a fresh-made sandwich or grabbing some ingredients for a mealtime masterpiece, a trip to one of these stores is about turning an everyday, run-of-the-mill errand into an occasion.

"It was absolutely part of our goal to create something that feels more elevated than a typical grocery store," says Walker-Greene. "We wanted Walkers' to feel like stepping into a beautiful neighborhood market in Europe ... [but] more than anything, we wanted it to feel personal."

"It's something that they remember," says Kuby of his cadre of customers who visited the shop as children and now come in as adults. Kuby's son, Karl Kuby III, is set to take over someday and is already building his own relationships that will no doubt carry on to the next generation.

In two years, the Kuby family will celebrate 300 years of owning and operating a food store somewhere on the planet — a legacy that stretches from a centuries-old meat shop in Germany to their current University Park market. That kind of longevity isn't built on groceries alone. It's built on traditions. Like stocking up on chicken salad and pimiento cheese at Kuby's. Queuing up at Jimmy's for a sandwich during the workday lunch rush. Or swinging into Eatzi's for a chicken pot pie and healthy helping of opera.

The food gets eaten. The memories stick around.

COURTESY EATZI'S; JIMMY'S: LYNDA GONZALEZ/THE DALLAS MORNING NEWS

The Details



Browse shelves of imported goods at Ari's Pantry, with locations in Dallas and Coppell.

Walkers' Bar & Market

Order the steak sandwich and see it made fresh at the sandwich counter — or pick up Chef Aldon Reyes' beets-and-berries quinoa salad in the grab-and-go section.

3016 Greenville Ave., Dallas; walkersbar-market.com

Kuby's Sausage House

Developed over years and under the direction of different chefs — and, eventually, perfected by Karl Kuby Sr. — "[both the] chicken salad and pimiento cheese are Kuby's specialty staples," says Karl Kuby II.

6601 Snider Plaza, Dallas; kubys.com

Eatzi's

The three-cheese crusted chicken, in the chef's case, is the No. 1 selling item in all of Eatzi's. The cinnamon roll in the bakery section is another all-time bestseller. And the chicken pot pie is out of this world.

Multiple locations; eatzis.com



Jimmy's Food Store

The award-winning muffuletta will make lunch at your desk feel like an occasion. You can also grab all the ingredients for homemade pizza, from the premade crusts in the freezer to Jimmy's own Italian sausage from the deli case. Other favorites include the frozen lasagna and frozen toasted ravioli.

4901 Bryan St., Dallas; jimmysfoodstore.com

Ari's Pantry

Try the chicken salad for lunch or take home an eggplant parmigiana for an easy dinner. The Italian lemon drop candies make the perfect addition to a candy jar.

Multiple locations; arispantry.com



“Who doesn’t want to tap into the memory of a carton-carrying kids meal?”

— Greg Katz



COURTESY CLIFTON CLUB; KETCHUP: T_KIMURA/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

The “kids meal” at this Dallas bar comes with a wagyu burger, a cocktail and a Lucky Strike cigarette.

Redefining the Happy Meal



BY **NICK RALLO**

It wasn’t long before McDonald’s corporate caught wind of Clifton Club’s happy, fire-truck-red carton. Dallas restaurateur and owner Greg Katz and his team called it a “happy meal,” tongue in cheek, because there’s nothing unpleasant about a little red carton that comes with a wagyu beef slider with a glossy bun, special sauce, a cocktail of your choosing and a single, real-as-1950s-admen cigarette. McDonald’s, not amused, requested that they, *pretty please*, not sell a “Happy Meal” with a cheeseburger and a cigarette.

Katz acquiesced, but “who doesn’t want to tap into the memory of a carton-carrying kids meal?” he asks. I know I wouldn’t turn down a single small cheeseburger and a new toy from the golden arches. I can taste the ghostly memory of cubed onions meeting the ketchup on my taste buds right now.

The idea came together the way the best ideas manifest: Katz and the management team were hanging out at Clifton Club, a cozy but swanky spot on Fitzhugh Avenue, talking, imagining that it might be nice for folks to just get a single wagyu slider to go from the bar. “What can we do in this lounge atmosphere?” Katz recalls them discussing. And then the phrase “let’s throw a cigarette in there” was uttered.

And then the phrase “let’s throw a cigarette in there” was uttered.

Maybe it’s the tough times or the steep prices of gas, but a glacier-cold martini with pickled onions (that’s a personal choice; you can also get a twist or a trio of glossy Castelvetrano olives), paired with a juicy wagyu burger, and a harsh, woody-sweet Lucky Strike at the end, sounds just like what the 1950s doctor ordered.

I don’t even smoke, and yet, strapped into the long Clifton Club bar, I crave cupping my hand around a cigarette after a cool sip of my martini, as if I were John Slattery as Roger Sterling, lamenting another divorce. (The dark, moody decor and midcentury vibe only help reinforce the feeling.) It’s not about the cigarette, though. The meal itself is a flash of nostalgia in a rapidly changing city. When restaurants come and go as fast as they do in Dallas, it’s the simple things — the comforting memories of great meals — that matter most.

The point is: It’s not a gimmick. It’s just fun and good. The cheeseburger is simple, wonderful and juicy — nothing but salt and pepper, Tillamook cheddar draped over the seared patty, and Clifton Club’s own punchy, house-made “special sauce” that will nudge out McDonald’s for at least a few weeks. Nathan’s sweet pickles cut the richness.

And a good time is exactly what it’s supposed to be. For twenty bucks, the whole thing is now called a “Kids Meal,” which is arguably more tongue-in-cheek than “Happy Meal.” And it was an instant hit. “We sell tons of them,” Katz says. “There are so many people who don’t want a traditional meal, especially in the neighborhood.”

They’re not the only bar throwing curveballs at happy hour. The Rodeo Bar, downtown on Commerce, serves a frozen swirl of Dr Pepper and whiskey that’s like a boozy, butterscotch soft serve in a big plastic cup. At Happiest Hour, you can get 36 wings — in three flavors — served in a mini, rotating “Ferris wheel” (three baskets attached to a wheel like an old water mill). The long-living icon of Deep Ellum, of course, is the Yoo-hoo Yeehaw, an insidious combo of vanilla vodka, coffee liqueur and Yoo-hoo, served at the Double Wide (it’s also available at its sister location, Single Wide, on Greenville Avenue). Reminder that Yoo-hoo is a combo of water, high-fructose corn syrup, cocoa and whey powder, so it can be shelf-stable past a nuclear war.

At Clifton Club, a few people have tried to light up at the bar. There’s no smoking indoors, of course, so Katz and crew have politely reminded guests that the Clifton Club Bar & Lounge isn’t Rick’s Cafe in *Casablanca*.

“It’s all been positive,” says Katz. “We don’t take ourselves so seriously. It’s a place to come let loose.”

Clifton Club Bar & Lounge is located at 3333 N. Fitzhugh Ave. in Dallas; cliftonclubdallas.com.

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