

KITCHEN KNIFE ESSENTIALS

BEST PIES IN THE USA

December 2019

the bite

food & wine magazine

FUTURE FOODS

Must Try
Eateries in
L.A. Right Now



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The standard bearer for xiao long bao (soup dumplings), Din Tai Fung's impossibly thin wrappers have just enough transparency to show soup underneath while still packing a rich soup and meat filling. The restaurant in Arcadia is just one of many Asian food possibilities in San Gabriel Valley.



POOJA CHAUDHARY **the bite**

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BEST PLACES TO EAT

Bite off whatever you can chew, and enjoy, from the eateries in our list of top spots to eat in Los Angeles from ethnic spots to celebrity chef hangouts like Din Tai Fung pictured above.

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BEST PIES IN AMERICA

While the popularity of other sweets rise and fall, there's one dessert that never goes out of fashion: pie. It's the burger of the dessert world, a true stayer.

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TOP KITCHEN KNIVES

Chefs love them. So should you! Four knives that everyone should have in their kitchen include Bird's Beak, Chinese Cleaver, Serrated and Mezzaluna.

ON THE COVER: What may be one of LA's most well-known fork-and-knife burgers, Ludo Lefebvre's Big Mec, has landed in the Valley, with all of its cheesy, double patty, foie gras bordelaise glory photographed by Lidye Petit.

editor's letter

BACK TO FOODIE BASICS



WES FRAZIER **the bite**

of a cook named Fredo whom I worked alongside many years ago. Every day, he stood over his cutting board, a proud "Hecho en Mexico" tattoo on the back of his neck, making efficient work of his daily prep with the same model of \$15 cleaver. Fredo used that hulking 18-ounce knife for everything, from the heavy work of removing chicken backbones and cracking crab legs with the knife's spine to the more delicate work of mincing carrots and onions to make sofrito and thinly slicing mint leaves. It was the only knife he used.

Honing the edge on my own blade, I'm reminded that this kind of minimalism can be grounding. So is the therapeutic repetition of pushing a steel blade against wet stone. In this issue, we get back to basics with an ode to four unsung knives, including the workhorse cleaver. In "Super Bowls," we embrace the redeeming power of a great piece of pie, a mark of any good cook. Finally, in this age of the new and the next, we celebrate the best—in this case, the sustained excellence of new and old great food spots of Los Angeles.

So be good to yourselves. String together some small victories. Make some pie. Build a fire. Read a book. Keep it simple.

Hunter Lewis

the bite

food & wine magazine

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KRISTIAN RYAN-ALIMON **the bite**

THE PLACES THAT FELT LIKE THE FUTURE

Where to eat right now in Los Angeles

If you don't know, then ask somebody who does—is there another city in the United States that feels quite so switched on, just now? A team of staff writers set out to answer that question for you.

Sometimes, it feels as if everyone's moving here—for goodness' sake, even José Andrés is thinking about it. What they'll find: Los Angeles is one of those places that you never hope to understand completely, that's the whole point of living there, you're never finished, and there's no point even pretending.

Bite off whatever you can chew, quite literally, and enjoy, from the proliferation of exciting Filipino cooking, to the rise of modern Korean, to the vast ocean of possibilities in the San Gabriel Valley, plus every kind of regional Mexican and Central American cooking you've got your eye on, and some more you never even knew to look for.

Then there are the chefs ev-

eryone's talking about, too many to mention here, from promising young things like Jonathan Yao at Kato, to Brian Dunsmoor, whose seasonal Fuss & Feathers dinners at Hatchet Hall pay tribute to the past, in a most modern way, to Casey Lane, whose Viale dei Romani is perhaps the best restaurant in town right now, to Ludo Lefebyre's burger dive in the Valley and of course we can't forget pastry queen Nicole Rucker, and her new pie shop, Fiona.

What really gives Los Angeles its edge as one of the country's greatest food cities is just how much there remains to be discovered, in the places most of us aren't even looking—in neighborhood after neighborhood, from the unapologetically classic to the wonderfully specific, the mind-bogglingly obscure to the almost accidentally au courant, there's so much, too much, to eat. Better get started.

PHOTOS FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: The sweet potato pancake at Fiona bakery and restaurant in Los Angeles' Fairfax District by celebrity Chef Nicole Rucker / Fuss & Feathers is a modern American supper club inspired by the recipes of America's earlier days. It focuses on tasting menus, pictured, paired with beverage pairings for 12 guests / Genwa is part of a pack of places that serve higher quality beef, such as Soowon or Park's, but breaks ahead with its staggering array of consistently good banchan. Korean cuisine and eating, even at a BBQ restaurant, is more than just grilled meat. Kot sal (boneless short ribs) and tongue are especially recommended.

KNIFE FIGHT

STORY BY BETSY ANDREWS
PHOTO BY GREG DUPREE

Chefs love them. So should you. Unsung but essential, meet the four workhorse knives you need now.

without damaging the 'shrooms.”

—Michael Poiarkoff, The Osprey, NYC

Chinese cleaver

“I got my first all-purpose Chinese cleaver—a medium-weight one that can handle all sorts of jobs—years ago when I was living in Shanghai. Once I got comfortable with rocking the cleaver back and forth on a cutting board and positioning my free hand close to the blade, always with my knuckles tucked under to protect my fingertips, I found that it was excellent for all sorts of jobs. Take a dish with a lot of ingredients, like moo shu pork (recipe at right). I section the pork, hammer it flat, and julienne it with the cleaver. I slice the vegetables, and scoop and move them to the skillet. Chopping, hammering, scraping, and

KNIVES, CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

Bird's Beak Knife

“My team is spread out across five restaurants, and I can't carry all my knives to every one of them. So the front left pocket of my apron always holds a bird's beak knife—aka tourné knife or turning knife. French chefs use this hooked little tool to “turn” vegetables, making seven-sided football shapes that cook evenly. Though the tourné cut isn't so popular anymore, the knife is still the best for trimming beans, pitting stone fruit, hulling strawberries, or any job you do by turning fruit or vegetables in your palm. If I need to jump in on prep, I like to grab something that doesn't take up too much space and allows me to keep an eye on the crew. I generally go for a case of mushrooms. When making mushroom fricassee, with the curve of my blade, I can scrape grass off caps, peel skin from stems, and clean dirt out of gills

KNIVES: TOP KITCHEN PICKS FOR YOUR HOME

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carrying—it's the only tool I need.”

—Brandon Jew, Mister Jiu's, San Francisco

Mezzaluna

“I grew up in Turin, Italy, where the heart of our home was our old-fashioned kitchen: ancient stove, enamel sink, and my mother steadily rocking her mezzaluna, with its half-moon blade, back and forth on the cutting board. Now I own mom's mezzaluna, and I use it to dice onions, carrots, and celery for sofrito, the aromatic base of my white chicken ragù. My mezzaluna is tremendously effi-

cient. With its two-handed movement, the long blade can chop very fast. But rather than a machine-style uniformity, it also leaves some bits uneven and coarse. I like that rusticity. It feels like home.”

—Silvia Baldini, Strawberry and Sage, The Secret Ingredient Girls

Serrated Knife

“In Alsace, where I grew up, bread was a staple. But it didn't have to be fresh for us to enjoy it. We soaked slices of day-old bread in milk, fried them, and sprinkled on sugar and cinammon for pain perdu. We grated old bread for crumbs to coat schnitzel.

And we created croutons out of leftover baguette, rubbing the baked slices with garlic. Of course, you can't slice good bread without a good bread knife. Chef's knives grow dull if you use them on bread crust, and they tend to rip the loaf. Where I'm from, we respect a good baguette or boule, so we cut it with a knife that has teeth, sawing back and forth, rather than pressing down, to achieve a clean slice.”

—Gabriel Kreuther, Gabriel Kreuther Restaurant, NYC

PHOTO PREVIOUS PAGE: From left, the Chinese Cleaver, the Mezzaluna, the Bird's Beak Knife and the Serrated Knife.

BEHOLD THE TOP PIES IN AMERICA

There's one dessert that never goes out of fashion: pie. It's the burger of the dessert world, a true stayer. But, top bakers aren't taking it to the next level—they're gussying up fillings with homemade caramel, fusing classics into yummy new favorites according to pie expert Patty Lee.



Banana cream pie S.F.

Liz Prueitt and Chad Robertson's award-winning Tartine Bakery's pie ensures bitter-sweet chocolate, a flaky crust and the sweetness of the banana-studded pastry cream in every bite.



Salted apple pie Oregon

Speckled with vanilla sugar salt, the crust of Random Order's bestseller encases a mix of apples with house-made caramel—owner Tracy Olsen's decadent tribute to the candy apple.



Crack pie NYC

Christina Tosi's legendary salty-sweet creation from Momofuku Milk Bar is a giant crumbled oat cookie draped in a gooey butter filling shot with vanilla and—surprise ingredient—corn powder.



Key lime pie LA

Nicole Rucker's pie stands out. The tart Key lime juice slashes through the pie's condensed milk custard and the chef uses sour cream instead of sugar to for a saltiness in her graham cracker crust.



Apple pie in Chicago

Former fine-dining pastry chef Paula Haney opened a tiny, retro pie shop in West Town to sell her seasonal creations. The classic is expertly done here, with nicely sliced apples and perfectly flaky crust.

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&
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