

Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

Written by Melissa Larsen

As a member of the AZFoothills.com and *Arizona Foothills Magazine* team, getting to dine at the Valley's top restaurants is part of the job (pretty great, huh?) The Valley is chock-full of amazing restaurants and James Beard Award winners and nominees. And we feel many of these eateries and chefs deserve a special shout-out, so AZFoothills.com presents the third-annual roundup of our favorite Valley restaurants—plus a few delectable out-of-towners. Featuring updates on many of last year's faves (you might even spy a few who are going on their third-year mention!) and several new must-tries, we present 50 of Arizona's best and brightest (in no particular order) with a little help from our foodie friends. (If there is a restaurant you think we should consider for the 2013 list, please let us know at editorial@azfoothills.com. We'd love to hear from you.)



Noca

Even though the Phoenix strip-mall treasure is on its third chef, NOCA still churns out some of the Valley's most delectable dishes. To cap the weekend, stop by the classy yet comfortable establishment (a restaurant can be sleek even if its next-door to grocery store) for its low-key Sunday Simple Supper. The last Sunday of the month welcomes NOCA's much-adored Fried Chicken Night. www.restaurantnoca.com.



The Mission

If a margarita's what you're craving, swing by The Mission in Old Town Scottsdale for some of the Valley's tastiest and most inventive varieties—and oh-so much more. The portions may be small but the taste is mighty large. Try the Mission fries alongside any of the restaurant's delicious tacos. Better yet, stop by for Sunday brunch for endless pork-shoulder tacos. The Mission is also home to one of the Valley's most adorable patios, to boot. www.themissionaz.com.



Quiescence

Many restaurants say that their menu is ever-changing—but few are quite as revolving that of Quiescence at the Farm at South Mountain. The

Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

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Phoenix restaurant switches up its bill of fare every day to coincide with what is most fresh and flavorful. Quiescence also offers quite the escape from busy Valley life: the interior will remind you of your great aunt's charming house (right down to the creaking floors) while twinkle lights and sky-high trees welcome diners outdoors. www.quiescencerestaurant.com.



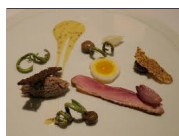
House of Tricks

With one of the Valley's most gorgeous and cozy outdoor dining spots (accented by white twinkle lights, of course), Tempe's House of Tricks could simply be one of the restaurants that thrives solely on ambience—but it doesn't. The 25-year-old restaurant dishes up contemporary American cuisine that is dressed to impress with its high-end ingredients and mouthwatering presentations. www.houseoftricks.com.



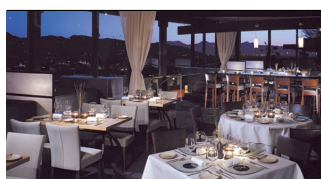
The Herb Box

Femme and fun dining spaces are only part of the allure of Scottsdale's The Herb Box. (There are locations at Scottsdale Southbridge and Market Street on DC Ranch.) Crispy sweet potato chips, unique iced teas, healthful wraps and salads and amazing butternut squash enchiladas make this one of the top spots for a leisurely lunch. www.theherbbox.com.



Binkley's Restaurant

Headed up by James Beard-nominated chef and Arizona Foothills Magazine's Top Chef 2012, Kevin Binkley, Binkley's Restaurant in Cave Creek is one of the Valley's show-stopping dining destinations. Chef Binkley thrives on tasting menus consisting of small, fresh and flavorful plates. www.binkleysrestaurant.com.



elements

You've seen Chef Beau MacMillan on Food Network during his run on "Iron Chef America" and as host of "Worst Cooks in America." And Valley dwellers have the pleasure of getting to enjoy his contemporary American-meets-Asian fare at elements restaurant at Sanctuary on Camelback Mountain. For a truly special treat, book a dinner at the private dining space, XII, to catch the chef in action. www.sanctuaryoncamelback.com.



Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

Written by Melissa Larsen



Lon's

Lon's at the Hermosa Inn has long provided the Valley with one of the most amazing alfresco dining experiences and incredible locally inspired cuisine. Need proof? Just sink your fork into Lon's truffle goat cheese macaroni, delectable seafood dishes and mmm-inducing short ribs. www.hermosainn.com/lons.



Pizzeria Bianco

You might have to wait two hours for a table at Pizzeria Bianco, but two hours is a barely any time to wait for some of the nation's best 'za. Chris Bianco has made headlines throughout America for his amazing pizza—even Martha Stewart is a fan. Get the Wiseguy crowned with wood-roasted onion, house-smoked mozzarella and fennel sausage. www.pizzeriabianco.com.



Christopher's Restaurant

Whether you're feasting on foie gras and escargot or a big heap of truffle fries, a meal at Christopher's/Crush Lounge will be one to remember. It doesn't hurt that the Biltmore Fashion Park eatery boasts of the sleekest dining spaces in the Valley—and a cool bathroom, to boot. www.christophersaz.com.



Bourbon Steak

Chef Michael Mina is known around the globe for his amazing, high-end eateries—and Fairmont Scottsdale Princess' Bourbon Steak is no exception. The sumptuous steakhouse dishes up some of the most wallet-busting menu items, but the price is right for this kind of quality. For a real treat, let the American wagyu with a side of duck-fat fries melt in your mouth. www.scottsdaleprincess.com/bourbonsteak.



Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

Written by Melissa Larsen



La Hacienda

Boy, were we glad when La Hacienda at Fairmont Scottsdale Princess brought La Hacienda back from the dead—and better than ever. La Ha impresses with modern Mexican fare with the pièce de résistance being the super-flavorful filet a la parilla and delectable desserts.

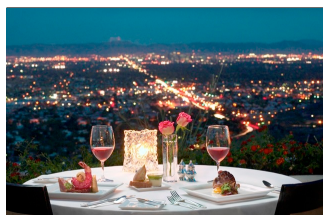
www.scottsdaleprincess.com/lahacienda.



Rancho Pinot Grille

With a menu of seasonal and local fare, one of the Valley's most respected chefs, Chrysa Robertson, impresses with Scottsdale's Rancho Pinot Grille. Even though the restaurant is nearly 20 years old, it keeps things fresh with a frequently changing menu of Arizona-inspired comfort food.

www.ranchopinot.com.



Different Pointe of View

Different Pointe of View of Pointe Hilton Tapatio Cliffs is the epitome of elegant dining. From the impeccable city and mountain views to the super-scrumptious bill of fare (the lobster bisque on the appetizer menu might be the best in the Valley), DPOV makes a first-class date night.

www.tapatiocliffshilton.com.



Liberty Market

Though not the fanciest restaurant on the list, this Gilbert mainstay from Joe Johnston (the Joe behind two other Valley greats, Joe's Farm Grill and Joe's Real BBQ) is hip, happenin' and, most importantly, dishes up the good stuff. And we dare your mouth not to water at the sight of the desserts flaunted in Liberty Market's display case.

www.libertymarket.com.

Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

Written by Melissa Larsen



Sassi

Romance is in the air and a perfect caprese salad is on the plate at North Scottsdale's Sassi restaurant. Diners stop by to feel like they were transported to Italy thanks to Sassi's breathtaking interiors and patio and its A-plus Italian fare. In addition to the caprese, the Orecchiette con Salsiccia is a must-order. www.sassi.biz.



Windsor/Churn

OK, we cheated. Though side-by-side and brought to us from the group that created Postino (another local winner), Windsor and Churn are technically two separate restaurants in Phoenix. But you can't go to one without stopping by the other, too. Though far from glam, the mixed quinoa salad will knock off your socks while at Churn, an artisan ice scream shop, get a scoop of peanut butter ice cream atop a pretzel cone. www.windsoraz.com; www.churnaz.com.



La Grande Orange Grocery and Pizzeria

Apart from stocking wickedly cute gifts and novelty items, Arcadia's La Grande Orange Grocery and Pizzeria has divine pastries and breakfast items for the a.m. and one amazing avocado pizza to share at lunch. Overall, LGO is a great place to linger for the afternoon. www.lagrandeorangegrocery.com.



Andreoli Italian Grocery

There's nothing quite as heart-warming and taste bud-pleasing as authentic Italian fare at a restaurant that makes you feel like family. Such is the case at Scottsdale's Andreoli Italian Grocery. Do yourself a favor and take a bite of Chef Giovanni's porchetta sandwich or one of his delectable pizzas. And leave room for dessert—there are plenty of tempting treats to choose from. www.andreoli-grocer.com.

Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

Written by Melissa Larsen



True Food Kitchen

Yes, True Food Kitchen serves up healthy, good-for-you fare. But it is so yummy, you'll forget that the quinoa, kale and salmon you're scarfing down is actually doing your body good. With locations at Scottsdale Quarter and Biltmore Fashion Park, both True Food Kitchens are some of the best looking restaurants in the Valley. www.truefoodkitchen.com.



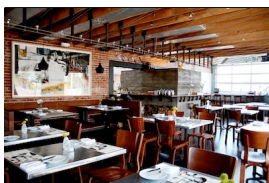
Matt's Big Breakfast

From-scratch griddlecakes. Salami scrambled eggs. Belgian waffles with sweet cream butter. Whatever morning craving you have, Matt's Big Breakfast in Phoenix will satisfy it with its short but sweet breakfast menu. Not an a.m. eater? Matt's lunch menu is just as yummy. www.mattsbigbreakfast.com.



T. Cook's

Though T. Cook's, of Royal Palms Resort and Spa, is a romantic dinnertime destination (there is a lot to love about the menu and atmosphere), it is Chef Lee Hillson's roasted turkey club, available on the lunch menu, that we can't get enough of. www.royalpalmsotel.com.



St. Francis

Though the food at Phoenix's St. Francis might look too pretty eat, you'll definitely want to dig in to Chef Aaron Chamberlin's seasonal cuisine. Try the corn soup, sticky toffee pudding and salmon superfood entrée. Plus, the historic building is mighty cool and kids 10 and under eat free. www.stfrancisaz.com.

Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

Written by Melissa Larsen



Petite Maison

High-end French fare in a quaint, charming atmosphere is the name of the game at Scottsdale's Petite Maison. Diners indulge in the likes of foie gras, escargot, cheese plates and one irresistible Nutella crème brûlée. The restaurant's fab Champagne brunch is also not to be missed on Sundays. www.petitemaisonaz.com.



Frank & Albert's

The talented team of Todd Sicolo and Conor Favre head the kitchen at Frank & Albert's, which dishes up comfort food with an Arizona twist at Arizona Biltmore. Cheese, Mac and the Chicken is a customer favorite, and the tableside s'mores is a simple yet memorable dessert experience. www.frankandalberts.com.



Roka Akor

Whether diners are digging into one of the Roka Akor's award-winning sushi selections, the melt-in-your-mouth black cod or a rice hotpot, they are consistently impressed by the Scottsdale restaurant's unique flavors and modern presentation. Roka Akor's shochu and cocktail list also make it a popular stop for the after-work crowd. www.rokaakor.com.



FnB

Though Old Town's FnB is a small, charming restaurant, the flavors on its menu are big, big, big. The bill of fare focuses on Arizona ingredients, as well as local wines. Diners are invited into the warm and welcoming atmosphere for lamb tenderloin, assorted small plates and a

Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

Written by Melissa Larsen

heaven-sent butterscotch pudding. www.fnbrestaurant.com.



J&G Steakhouse

The brainchild of Jean-Georges Vongerichten, J&G Steakhouse at The Phoenician boasts super-sleek dining rooms and some of the Valley's most jaw-dropping views. What's more—and most important—the fare is fab, from the cooked-to-perfection steaks, traditional sides and perfect cheesecake. www.jgsteakhousescottsdale.com.



Gallo Blanco

With from-scratch fare and ingredients that have been sourced locally, Phoenix's Gallo Blanco simply knows fresh and flavorful Southwest fare. Stop by in the a.m. for a unique breakfast spread; for lunch or dinner, enjoy some of the Valley's tastiest tacos, burritos, tortas and more. www.galloblancocafe.com.



Talavera

Boasting a modern—and much more colorful—take on the traditional steakhouse, Talavera at Four Seasons Scottsdale at Troon North is known for incredible steak and seafood dishes, a great wine list and eye-popping panoramas of the Valley. We love the sides; get the lobster macaroni and cheese. www.talaverarestaurant.com.



Kai

Five Stars and Five Diamonds certainly can't lie, and Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa's Kai is the only restaurant in the state to have

Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

Written by Melissa Larsen

both honors. The memory-making menu pays homage to the area's history and heritage by utilizing locally farmed ingredients from the Gila River Indian Community. www.wildhorsepassresort.com.



Tarbell's

Since it opened in the 1990's, Tarbell's has made Chef Mark Tarbell a household name in foodie households. The highly respected chef tempts local taste buds with his amazing pasta and seafood dishes that are served in a restaurant that is high-end and classy yet cozy and comfortable. www.tarbells.com.



Cork

This Chandler eatery has been making waves with its menu of small plates since opening its doors in 2008. The atmosphere at Cork is comfortable and the food is approachable while still being fine dining. Wine fan? There are more than 400 bottles to choose from. www.corkrestaurant.net.



Vincent on Camelback

For more than 25 years, Vincent on Camelback has been a standout fine dining destination thanks to chef extraordinaire Vincent Guerithault. Though Vincent on Camelback has been around since the 1980's, it is still keeping things fresh with the recent addition of, Bleu, the "happy hour" lounge/bar located inside the Phoenix restaurant.



Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

Written by Melissa Larsen

Michael Dominick's Lincoln Avenue Prime Steakhouse

Inspired by the classy steakhouses of New York City, Dominick's, a recent addition to Scottsdale Quarter, is one of the Valley's most luxurious places to celebrate a special occasion. You've got to see the colossal chilled shrimp appetizer to believe it, and the hearty steaks and traditional family-style sides make for a memorable night on the town. www.dominickssteakhouse.com.



POSH

Scottsdale's POSH is one of the Valley's most unique dining concepts: improvisational cuisine. Diners can never be sure what they might get during a visit to POSH (maybe popcorn soup or melt-in-your-mouth kangaroo?)—except that the food will be dynamite. www.poshscottsdale.com.



Nobuo at Teeter House

James Beard Award winner Nobuo Fukuda heads up the kitchen at Nobuo at Teeter House in Phoenix. During the day, visitors stop in for an Asian-inspired teahouse. At night, Japanese classics, with a modern American spin, impress Valley foodies. While you can't go wrong by ordering from the dinner menu, go all out and let Fukuda do the choosing with the tasting menu. www.nobuofukuda.com.



The Parlor

Pizzas at The Parlor in Phoenix include such mmm-inducing incarnations as the roasted corn, spicy barbecue chicken and zucca with squash blossoms. Pastas, salads and sandwiches are also on the menu as is The Parlor's sweet corn zeppoles. www.theparlor.us.



Fogo de Chao

Fifteen varieties of meat under one roof? Sign us up. Apart from melt-in-your-mouth beef, bacon-wrapped chicken and sausages, Scottsdale's Fogo de Chao, a Brazilian steakhouse, dishes up a jam-packed salad bar, tempting cocktails and cheesy bread. (Warning: Once you starting popping those dough balls in your mouth, you can't stop.) www.fogodechao.com.



Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

Written by Melissa Larsen



Los Sombreros

Los Sombreros, in Scottsdale, has impressed local taste buds with its authentic Mexican fare since 1994. Though you should save room for the impeccable flan, dig into the award-winning lamb adobo and piled-high fresh guacamole. And lucky for us, Los Sombreros recently started serving lunch for the first time ever. www.lossombreros.com.



Mabel's on Main

Though Mabel's on Main is aces in our book for its old-timey atmosphere and laidback vibe, Chef Aaron May's restaurant/bar is reason to go back again and again. Caviar-topped deviled eggs, tasty soft pretzels and some of the best cocktails in Old Town are on the menu at Mabel's. www.mabelsonmain.com.



BLT Steak

Scottsdale's BLT Steak offers steakhouse fare at its finest. Visit the Camelback Inn restaurant for wagyu or kobe beef dishes and be pleased as punch before the steak even hits the plate—thanks to BLT's wowza popovers. For dessert, dig into the delish cheesecake. And the views of Camelback Mountain certainly don't hurt. www.bltscottsdale.com.



Jalapeno Inferno

This family-owned and –operated eatery in Scottsdale has long provided Mexican food lovers with some of the Valley's most authentic and delish fare. Don't forget to pair your meal with a tasty margarita and stop by during happy hour for can't-beat specials. www.jalapenoinferno.com.

Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

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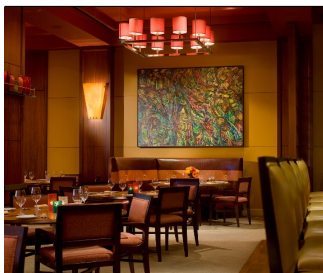
Zinc Bistro

Zinc Bistro, located at Scottsdale's Kierland Commons and brought to us by Chef Matt Carter (he is also behind Old Town's The Mission), proves that French fare doesn't have to be stuck-up. While foie gras and truffles fill the menu, don't miss the crowd-pleasing onion soup. www.zincbistroaz.com.



Mastro's Ocean Club

Seafoodies flock to Mastro's Ocean Club at Kierland Commons for a selection of divine under-the-sea faves. Dig into the vanilla-battered shrimp, lobster mac and cheese and, of course, Mastro's infamous butter cake, sided with a pile of freshly whipped cream, for dessert. www.mastrosrestaurants.com.



Deseo

Deseo at Westin Kierland Resort & Spa puts the spotlight on a menu and concept fashioned by James Beard Award-winning Chef Douglas Rodriguez, known as the inventor of Nuevo Latino cuisine. Fresh and flavor-packed ceviche is a favorite starter. Be sure to wash it all down with one of the restaurant's famous fruit- and herb-packed muddled drinks. www.kierlandresort.com.



Eddie's House

Voted Most Influential in Valley Food for the 2012 Best of Our Valley, Eddie Matney, of Scottsdale's Eddie's House, has long impressed diners with his knack for creating jaw-dropping comfort foods. Matney's bacon-infused meatloaf and What's in This Steak? are among Eddie's House's most beloved dishes. www.eddieshouseaz.com.



Arizona's 50 Best Restaurants 2012

Written by Melissa Larsen



Sedona: L'Auberge Restaurant on Oak Creek

Sedona's super-elegant L'Auberge Restaurant on Oak Creek was named "One of the Top 10 Restaurants in the Southwest" by Condé Nast Traveler—and we're not arguing. Diners are invited to enjoy a three- or four-course tasting menu, giving them the chance to enjoy the restaurant's silky lobster bisque, short ribs, scallops and more. www.lauberge.com.



Tucson/Marana: CORE Kitchen & Wine Bar

Located at The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain in Southern Arizona, CORE Kitchen & Wine Bar doles out some of the state's most divine Southwest-inspired cuisine. The chilled corn soup, chili-lacquered New York steak and s'mores ice cream sundae makes mouths water. www.ritzcarlton.com.



Flagstaff: Criolle Latin Kitchen

Using locally grown ingredients, Criolle Latin Kitchen churns out some of Flagstaff's finest fare. Meat lovers and seafoodies alike have plenty of tempting menu items to choose from with standouts being the salmon tostada and pork belly tacos. Thanks to Flagstaff's fab weather, dine on the quaint outdoor patio even in the dead of summer. criollolatinkitchen.com.