

Best Of Food & Wine

Written by Written by Melissa Larsen

From steak to sushi and everything in between, we present your faves in Food & Wine in the Valley.



Christopher's Restaurant & Crush Lounge pictured above

Best Cocktails, Best Wine Bar and Most Amazing Restaurant Interior Christopher's Restaurant & Crush Lounge

Winning in three impressive categories, it appears that Chef Christopher Gross and sommelier Paola Embry certainly didn't lose any fans when they closed Christopher's Fermier Brasserie & Paola's Wine Bar at Biltmore Fashion Park in 2008 and opened Christopher's Restaurant & Crush Lounge nearby shortly after. The contemporary, clean-lined interiors are decked in orange and brown hues, gorgeous banquettes, an exposed ceiling and supersexy photography. The restaurant's lengthy wine list and superior cocktails also get the heart racing. Embry's rotating wine selection features lesser-known bottles from around the globe and is broken into categories like "medium- to full-bodied rich dry whites" so it's easy for guests from all levels of wine expertise to pick a glass right for them. The cocktail list also features many adventurous sips like the shishito margarita with crushed shishito pepper and the refreshing Aperol cocktails. 602.522.2344, www.christophersaz.com.

Best Breakfast Orange Table Cafe

This Scottsdale Civic Center Plaza outpost is the spot to splurge in the a.m. Try the banana-nut pancakes and Mexican chocolate latte. 480.424.6819.

Best Burger BluBurger Grille

With four Valley locations (the most recent of which opened last month in Scottsdale) and prices that won't drain your purse, voters dig BluBurger Grille's build-your-own burgers. The bison patty is a favorite. www.bluburger.com.

Best Cup of Coffee Press Coffee Food Wine

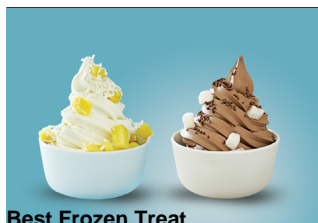
Voters can't get enough of the fresh, eco-friendly brews at this CityCenter of CityNorth coffee shop. Plus, the baristas at Press know how to impress with their eye-catching coffee art. 480.419.6221, www.presscfw.com.

Best Dessert Classic Cakes and Confections

This Scottsdale bakery is a Valley favorite due to its too-cute cakes, cupcakes and cookies. And with flavors like orange-chocolate cake and divinity white cake, we don't have to tell you how tasty the treats are. 602.795.9662, www.classiccakesandconfections.com.

Best Slice Streets of New York

Valley dwellers have learned that you don't have to buy a plane ticket to get a New York-style slice. The popular pizzeria started with a single Phoenix outpost in 1976 and has grown to more than 30 locations in the state. Voters are nuts about the New York Combo, the Pizza Primavera and the good ole pepperoni and cheese pizzas. www.streetsofnewyork.com.



Best Frozen Treat Yogurtology

It didn't take long for the sweet teeth of the Valley to fall in love with this newish self-serve fro yo shop. Yogurtology had nearly twice the number of votes as the second-place finisher, thanks to its changing flavor rotation and tasty toppings (think yogurt chips, cereal and fresh fruit). www.yogurtology.com.

Best Mexican Food Frank & Lupe's Old Mexico

For more than 25 years, Frank & Lupe's has served up New Mexican-style cuisine for those with a craving for something south of the border. This family-owned and -operated Old Town treasure spotlights a lovely patio and a scrumptious selection of burritos, enchiladas, tacos, chalupas, fajitas and much more. 480.990.9844, www.frankandlupes.com.

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Best Juicy Steak

BLT Steak

At BLT Steak, from chef extraordinaire Laurent Tourondel, diners get to choose from a variety of meaty cuts including American Wagyu and Japanese Kobe beef. The cowboy rib eye is a choice menu item among voters. www.bltscottsdale.com.

Best Sunday Brunch

Geordie's at The Wrigley Mansion

At the popular Sunday Champagne Brunch, diners can feast on made-to-order eats from the French toast and omelet stations, as well as house specialties like seafood pasta, slow-roasted prime rib and baby lamb chops. 602.955.4079, www.wrigleymansionclub.com.

Best Sunday Brunch (Runner-up)

Wright's at the Biltmore

Behind Geordie's by less than one percent, Wright's brunch is a winner in its own right thanks to its citrus-charred prawns and yummy Bloody Mary. 602.381.7632, www.arizonabiltmore.com.

Best Date Spot and Best Outdoor Dining

Sassi

Nothing's more romantic than a slice of Southern Italy in North Scottsdale. Couples fill Sassi's various dining rooms hoping for a "Lady and The Tramp" moment with Chef Peter DeRuvo's house-made pasta while sipping on their choice of more than 250 vino selections. Sassi's gorgeous city-light and mountain views that can be seen from the pretty patio only add to the amorous atmosphere, making it a winner in two categories. 480.502.9095, www.sassi.biz.

Best Asian Cuisine and Sushi

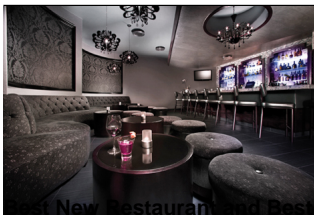
Ra Sushi Bar and Restaurant

The always-busy RA Sushi restaurants dish up quality sashimi and nigiri sushi, in addition to signature rolls like the popular Viva Las Vegas. For customers who crave something of the "turf" variety, the menu features noodle dishes and teriyaki bowls with chicken or beef to satisfy their hunger pangs. Plus, with five Valley locations, we don't have to travel far for our Tootsy Maki fix. www.rasushi.com.

Best Asian Cuisine and Sushi

Roka Akor

The Scottsdale hotspot specializes in robata-grilled delicacies (including the got-to-see-it-to-believe-it Wild Madagascan Tiger Prawn) and trailed RA Sushi by a mere percentage point. 480.306.8800, www.rokaakor.com.



Happy Hour

Avalon

Providing a feast for the eyes and taste buds, Scottsdale's new Avalon, a double award-winner according to our voters, dishes up Contemporary American Coastal cuisine in one of the city's most stylish dining rooms. Seafoodies and carnivores alike will find a dish to dig into like lobster ravioli, blue crab risotto, Colorado lamb osso bucco and bacon-wrapped pork tenderloins. Avalon's happy hour, especially, is something to write home about: Instead of greasy onion rings, the eatery's happy hour menu features Korean barbecue spare ribs, polenta-stuffed prawns and refreshing cocktails at petite prices. 480.656.0010, www.avalon-scottsdale.com.

Best Lunch Spot

The Herb Box

This adorable eatery/market, with two North Scottsdale locations, boasts a hearty yet healthy lunch selection of salads, wraps and sandwiches. Out-of-this-world eats that'll boost your midday mood include the coconut shrimp salad, the turkey, apple and Swiss cheese wrap, and the addicting sweet potato chips (you can even buy bags of these chips to go). www.herbboxcatering.com.

Most Glamorous Place to Party

Kasbah Pool Bar & Grille

Whether you want to nosh on a dozen types of fries with your sweetie or indulge in custom sips from the cocktail cart with a bunch of friends, Kasbah is a fun spot to unwind in sumptuous surroundings. 480.627.3200, www.icmontelucia.com.

Best Place to Watch the Big Game

Fox Sports Grill

With more than 50 TV's and bar food that includes Hawaiian poke and chipotle pork sliders, Valley sports fans like to stop by The Promenade to catch their favorite team in action. 480.368.0369, www.foxsportsgrill.com.

Best Cougar Bar

Blue Martini

The people who frequent this Phoenix-based martini bar are as sleek and sexy as the drinks, like the fruity The Good Life and Fly Me to the Moon. 480.638.2583, www.bluemartinilounge.com.

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Best Gay Bar

BS West

This Old Town club has long been a favorite in the Valley gay scene, thanks to amazing signature drinks and killer daily specials. Sunday- and Thursday-night karaoke is another big draw to this 22-year-old hotspot. 480.945.9028, www.bswest.com.