

INSIDER
GUIDE

50 BEST NEW U.S. RESTAURANTS

TRAVEL + LEISURE

WHERE TO
GET AWAY
FROM IT ALL!

FREQUENT-FLIER SECRETS
HOW TO MAX
YOUR MILES

18 GREAT GADGETS
THAT WILL
CHANGE
THE WAY
YOU TRAVEL

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COSTA RICA
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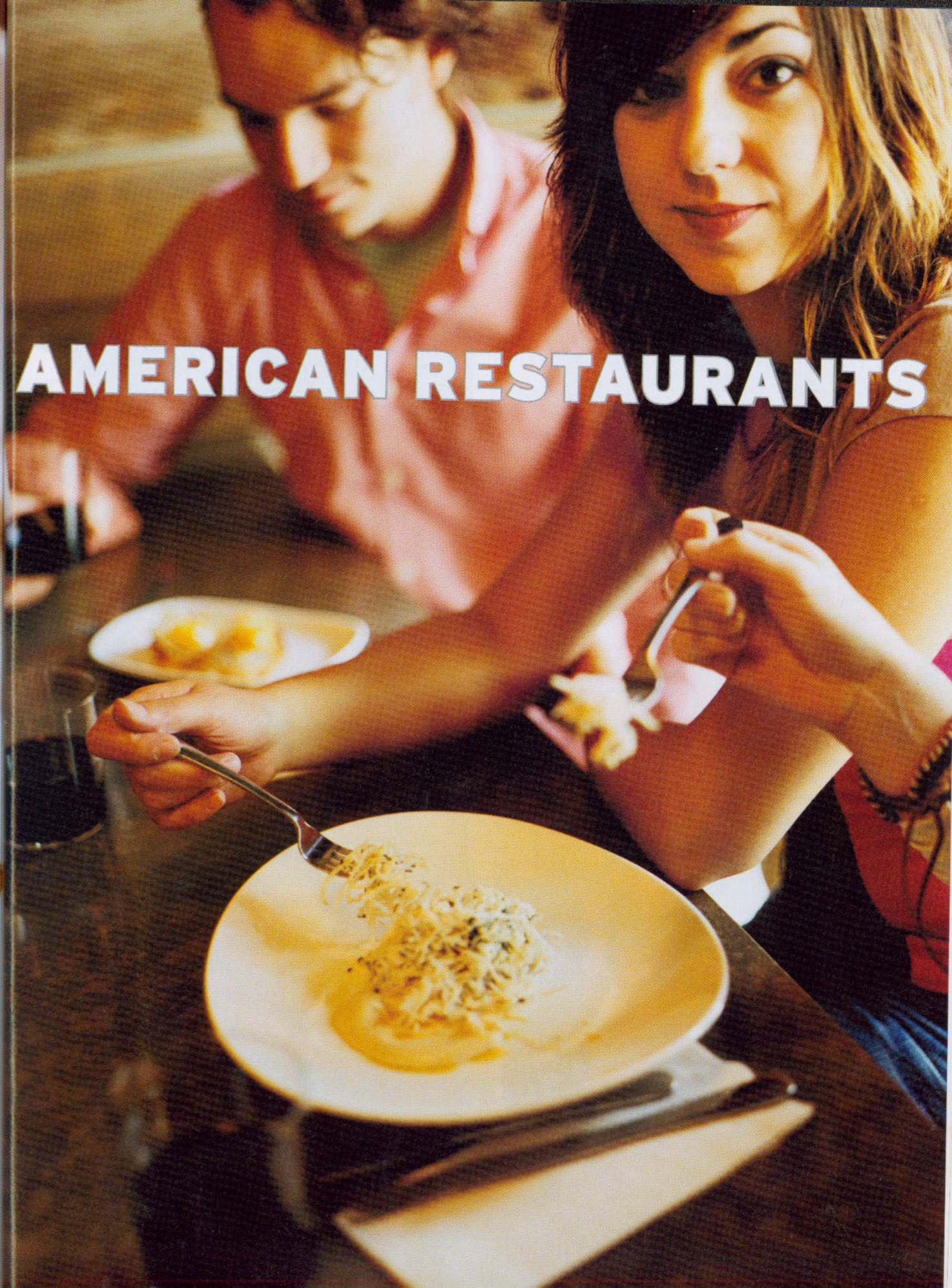


FROM ATLANTA TO SEATTLE, *TRAVEL + LEISURE* OFFERS
A DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO THE COUNTRY'S TOP
DINING EXPERIENCES—BIG AND SMALL. BY ANYA VON BREMZEN
PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAVID NICOLAS

THE 50 BEST NEW AMERICAN RESTAURANTS



A savory pumpkin tart at Perennial, in Chicago's Lincoln Park.
Opposite: Eating sautéed squid with sweet onion and
pine nut purée at New York City's Basque-inspired Txikito.



YOU KNOW THE PARADIGM IS SHIFTING WHEN COMMUNAL BENCHES become more desirable than leather banquettes. When humble kimchi is suddenly chic, and the words *local* and *seasonal* are recited as routinely as *fried* or *sautéed*. In this challenging year, we crisscrossed the country in search of outstanding new restaurants with a very different mind-set. We gravitated toward spots that offered us warmth and a sense of human connection. We greeted the opening of a neighborhood noodle parlor or artisanal sandwich shop with an enthusiasm formerly reserved for high-concept restaurants. And yet, for all the populist gastropubs and wood-fired-pizza parlors, a world without culinary ambition would be a sad one indeed. That's why we were grateful for serious new restaurants like Corton, in New York, or L2O, in Chicago, for keeping the magic of creative cooking alive. Will the current financial crisis turn us into wiser, gentler people? We hope so. Meanwhile, let's thank America's chefs for ensuring that in these uncertain times we are being more responsibly, affordably—and, yes, deliciously!—fed.

CHICAGO

There's just no stopping Chicago on its march toward the title of America's Dining Capital. As restaurants elsewhere flounder, the Windy City hits it out of the park in every category. No other city, for instance, has an opening to match the ambition of **L2O**, a neo-Modernist seafood temple where Laurent Gras proves that he might be the most commanding chef in the country. Think gracious, unstarthy service, a fine-tuned wine list, and a masterful tasting menu that weds Gallic rigor and opulence to Japanese skill with raw fish. Out come delicate morsels of *kinmedai* (big-eye snapper), lightly smoked over cherrywood and slicked with apricot oil. Then a voluptuous shrimp tartare under a scattering of pansies and edible gold dust. All this in a suave open space that would impress even Mies van der Rohe with its serene, plush geometries and attention to detail. If you're going to splurge on one grand meal this year, L2O is your place.

Dirt cheap but equally thrilling, **Urbanbelly** is already an obsession with local noodle and dumpling hounds. The hipster BYO nook with four communal tables sits in an Avondale strip mall between a laundromat and a dry cleaner owned by relatives of Korean-American chef Bill Kim. Asian street food? Yes, but as interpreted by a chef who spent years working under the likes of Charlie Trotter and David Bouley. Whether ethereal squash pockets laced with Kaffir lime and orange, or roasted duck purses scented with Vietnamese *pho* spices—Kim's complex dumplings deliver four-star bang for seven paltry bucks.

Is Kim's Korean kimchi stew, loaded with pork, hominy, and slippery rice cakes, the world's coolest comfort food? Or would that title go instead to the pink supple slices of duck breast at **Perennial**, stacked between fluffy wedges of savory bread pudding? Designed with slim tree trunks and a tented ceiling, this Lincoln Park room radiates breezy glamour,

>MORE TOP NEW RESTAURANTS

ATLANTA **Holeman and Finch Public House** 2277 Peachtree Rd.; 404/948-1175; dinner for two \$65. Somewhat British, a little Mediterranean, soulfully Southern, and wholly awesome, this offal-centric, cocktail-fueled gastropub gets you hooked on the pleasures of headcheese, crunchy fried pigs' ears, and bone-marrow gratin.

ATLANTIC CITY, NEW JERSEY

Izakaya at the Borgata One Borgata Way; 866/692-6742; dinner for two \$105. Having dazzled New Yorkers with his unexpectedly refined cooking at Buddakan, chef Michael Schulson now masterminds the Pan-Asian small-plates menu at this loungey casino restaurant. Follow shrimp dumplings in white-miso lobster broth with the addictive "kinki" chicken wings: braised in duck fat, crisp-fried, then slicked with spicy-sweet glaze.

BOSTON **Sportello** 348 Congress St.; 617/737-1234; dinner for two \$90. This Fort Point dining counter from Barbara Lynch serves streamlined versions of the opulent Italian dishes that made her famous at No. 9 Park. Make sure to stop at her downstairs Drink, which reinvents the art of mixology with scholarly cocktails custom-designed for every reveler.

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Hungry Mother 233 Cardinal Medeiros Ave.; 617/499-0090; dinner for two \$70. Even Boston's Brahmins >>

CHICAGO

L2O

2300 N. Lincoln Park W.;
773/868-0002; dinner for
two \$180.

PERENNIAL

1800 N. Lincoln Ave.;
312/981-7070; dinner for
two \$85.

THE PUBLICAN

837 W. Fulton Market;
312/733-9555; dinner
for two \$60.

URBANBELLY

3053 N. California Ave.;
773/583-0500; lunch for
two \$42.