



Where to Eat 2006

The Platt 101

New York's best restaurants from first to last.

By Adam Platt



Bellavitæ (No. 60)(Photo credit: Reinhard Hunger)

When I called my friend the Food Aristocrat with the news that the magazine was adopting a star system for the rating of restaurants, she let out a small, agitated sigh. “Boy, are you screwed,” she said. The Food Aristocrat, who not long ago moved to the peaceable hills of North Carolina to raise her child on a steady diet of biscuits and pork barbecue, had been a big-city restaurant critic herself once, so she knew the perils of the trade. Principal among these (after gout, choking, dyspepsia, and massive heart failure) was the peddling of objective certainty in what is, at its root, a highly subjective process. Unlike, say, movie critics, who watch the same film, or book critics, who read the same text, restaurant critics draw conclusions from a dining experience that can vary wildly not just day to day but hour to hour. Then there’s the whole question of perspective.

Isn’t a perfect one-star cheeseburger at least as delicious as a perfect four-star soufflé? “And what about all those crazy chefs?” asked the Food Aristocrat. “Did I mention they’ll all want to kill you no matter what you do?”

Too bad. We’re doing it anyway, from now on. And in a flight of reckless, possibly insane whimsy, we’ve decided to rank our favorite (okay, my favorite) restaurants in the city from 1 to 101. Why? Because people seem to enjoy this sort of thing. Among restaurateurs and diners, the concept of stars and rankings is beloved, despised, and also deeply ingrained, like some age-old caste system. When Michelin introduced its long-awaited guide to New York restaurants a couple of months ago, members of the city’s food cognoscenti gathered in a kind of lemminglike crush to see what the august Frenchmen had to say. Not much, it turned out. The book, everyone eagerly agreed, was quirky, off-

key, and almost comically Francophile. Three stars for Alain Ducasse?! “Ducasse is the Abba of haute cuisine,” one of my food-writer friends sniffed. According to Michelin, one of the very top brasseries in New York is an entrenched Madison Avenue establishment called La Goulue. “La Goulue,” said another incensed food friend of mine. “My grandmother doesn’t even go to La Goulue!”

As it happens, I revisited La Goulue not long ago. It was very good in a faux-Parisian, grandmotherly sort of way. Is it in our top 101? Not quite. And what about Monsieur Ducasse? Having run through his third chef in five years, he gets two stars and a ranking of 33. You will find several classic one-star restaurants (Mary’s Fish Camp, Bellavitæ) elevated in status, and a few classic multi-star restaurants downgraded, or disappeared altogether. The Michelin judges honored Danube with two stars, for instance, but when I showed up for dinner recently, I cooled my heels at the bar for nearly an hour before being served a warmed-over dinner. When I last visited the city’s sole remaining grande dame French establishment, La Grenouille, I paid \$47 for a plate of sad, vaguely rubberized pike quenelles, then watched as the pink light at our table blinked on and off before shorting out altogether. Was this belabored, archaic experience more satisfying than dining, say, on an excellent pan-seared pork-and-scallion sandwich (\$8) at a new chef’s hangout in the East Village called Momofuku Noodle Bar? The answer, of course, is no. Momofuku is No. 101 on our list, and La Grenouille does not appear at all.

You’ll find similar crotchety judgments and opinions sprinkled throughout these pages. They are the product of nearly 1,000 meals digested over the course of five bleary years as a professional restaurant critic. They’re informed by a whole grab bag of personal tastes (more crispy pork products, please) and prejudices (easy on the club music; don’t dress waiters up like ninjas; no wine pairings). Because this critic has an aversion to high-priced franchises and restaurant chains, several much-praised establishments, like BLT Fish (one Michelin star) and Nobu 57 (three stars from the Times), didn’t make this list. Because five years isn’t a long time, many of the restaurants listed here tend to be newer rather than older. There are plenty more I’ve neglected, and probably a few I’ve just plain forgotten. Are these the absolute best 101 restaurants in New York City? That depends, I suppose, on your point of view. Is this a better guide than, say, Michelin’s? Since it’s written by a New Yorker, for New Yorkers, we certainly think so. But for the sake of international harmony, let’s just say it’s different. Let’s just say we’re adding to the fun.

What the Stars Mean

Five Stars

Ethereal; almost perfect

Four Stars

Exceptional; consistently elite

Three Stars

Generally excellent

Two Stars

Very good

One Star

Good

In this issue and henceforth in the magazine, all restaurant reviews will be accompanied by stars, from five down to zero. Five stars is an ethereal, rarely used designation, the equivalent of foodie heaven. Four stars means that we consider the restaurant and its chef to be among the city's very best. Three stars means the restaurant is excellent, though not elite. A two-star rating is very good—though not necessarily so good for the many establishments in town that aspire to be a foodie heaven. Classically, one-star restaurants tend to be simple, more neighborly, and often more satisfying than their multi-star brethren, and that will often be the case here, although one star for a restaurant with elite aspirations is really not much better than no star at all. No stars on a review doesn't necessarily mean a restaurant is bad; it means our critics don't recommend you go out of your way to eat there. We chose to use five stars, instead of three or four, because the more levels of discrimination, or so the thinking goes, the more useful the list (a ranking isn't so helpful if everyone gets the same rank). Historically, star-wielding restaurant critics tend to focus on food, ambience, and service to make their decisions. All of these factors contribute to the great Zeitgeist stew that defines a restaurant, but the most important ingredient, we think, is the food. Except when we think otherwise, in which case we reserve the right to blatantly violate our own rules. The brief explanation of our thinking that's part of each review is meant to help diffuse the inevitable outrage and controversy systems like this one tend to provoke. Will people still be outraged? Of course they will. Bon appetit.



Mary's Fish Camp (No. 58)(Photo credit: Mark Peterson/Redux)

**1Le Bernardin**

The city is full of ornate restaurants, but none of them manages to exude the glamour and class of Manhattan the way this one does, without any overweening glitz. The impeccable French service is the best in the city. The wood-paneled room is grand, but in an oddly soothing way. And then there's the chef, Eric Ripert, who, unlike most super-chefs in town, tends to stay in his kitchen and cook. Go at dinner (when the room fills with suits at lunchtime, it looks like a corporate cafeteria). All the food is excellent—from uni sevice to barely cooked salmon with black truffles—but if it's on the menu, order Mr. Ripert's shrimp ravioli puddled in truffle sauce. Michel Couvreur is one of the great sommeliers in America—let him choose the wines.

2Masa

Masa Takayama, the illustrious sushi god from L.A., came to New York with a uniquely Japanese, if slightly insane proposition: that a meal of the highest quality is worth almost any price. It turns out he's right, but only under the most specific *Rashomon*-like conditions. Whatever you do, sit at the bar of this quirky, lavishly overpriced little restaurant (not at the dinky, dimly lit tables), preferably in front of Masa himself (not one of his acolytes). The ensuing spectacle, complete with risotto folded with uni and truffles, Kobe-beef sukiyaki, and slabs of foie gras cooked in a little shabu-shabu pot, is part nourishment, part entertainment, and part ancient performance art. It's not just a meal, it's an event—well worth the \$350 cost of a single omakase dinner (before the sakes are factored in), and as different from the average dining experience as a TV rerun is from a first-rate Broadway show.

Plates designed by James Victore(Photo credit: Davies + Starr)



Chikalicious (No. 99)(Photo credit: Mark Peterson/Redux)

**3Per Se**

Thomas Keller's extravagantly hyped establishment gets four stars instead of five because, well, it's not quite like dining at the French Laundry, his famous restaurant in Napa. It's a somewhat stogy version of the prototype, which means the whole scene feels vaguely solemn, like a studious California version of what a first-class New York restaurant should be. There's nothing solemn about the food, however. Keller has a special facility with luxury items like caviar—try his famous "Oysters and Pearls"—and lobster tails, which he paints with vermouth, or beets, or vanilla essence. If you get caught up in one of his prolific tasting dinners, you may struggle at first, but in the end, all resistance is futile.

4WD-50

In cooking, as in the other arts, New York is an international bazaar, a place where great chefs come from around the world to display their skills. Wylie Dufresne is that rare thing on the New York cooking scene—a home-grown talent. In his industrious culinary atelier down on Clinton Street, he produces some of the most cutting-edge cooking in New York or anywhere else. Who knew mayonnaise could be fried in little sugar-cube squares, or that the deep scarlet color of venison complements the soft, creamy green of edamame ice cream? The room and location don't necessarily merit four-star status, but factor in the cost of a meal—a nine-course tasting costs less than a third of what you'll pay at Masa—and you have the best, and certainly most interesting, multi-star deal in town.

5Craft

Tom Colicchio is a fanatic for the integrity of fresh ingredients and simplicity in cooking, and this much-discussed, much-imitated restaurant is the extreme, almost priestly expression of his views. You may not like the conceit of building your meal one spare ingredient at a time (many food aristocrats I know actively hate it), but there's no denying the quality of Colicchio's sweet day-boat scallops or bluefoot mushrooms lovingly foraged in the piney forests of Oregon. Craft gets four stars for its huge influence on the way restaurant meals are conceived, presented, and eaten in this new Greenmarket era, and also for Karen Demasco's impeccable desserts—toffee-steamed pudding bombed with fresh-made rum-raisin ice cream—which, for my money, are the best in town.

6Babbo

Mario Batali's great achievement, among many, has been to turn animal viscera into the epitome of haute cuisine. Is this enough to make Babbo the sixth- best restaurant in all New York? Well, why not? Even after repeated, feverish tastings, I'm still not tired of his lamb's-tongue vinaigrette, or crispy pig's-foot Milanese, with its soothing thatch of arugula on the side. Batali has eclipsed most of the country's effete French chefs in terms of notoriety, influence, and glossy-cookbook sales. After a glass of grappa or three, it's even possible to argue that he is the Escoffier of our messy, Rabelaisian era. Despite an influx of celebrity diners from around the globe, Babbo still manages to achieve that elusive combination of style and comfort better than any restaurant in town.

7Jean Georges

The boss is rarely home these days, but somehow the flagship establishment of Jean-Georges Vongerichten's ever-expanding restaurant cosmos manages to retain its sense of magic and haute-fusion exceptionalism. On a recent visit to the gleaming, glass dining room, the table next to mine was occupied by a prosperous gentleman from Brooklyn. Watching your humble critic with a napkin tucked into his collar, devouring an order of foie gras brûlé, among other extravagant Jean-Georges creations, he observed: "You eat like my friends back in the old neighborhood." You might take this as an insult. I take it as a sign that the great chef can still cook.

8Daniel

The overwrought, Vegas-like space is too big, and if you're not recognized as a regular, you may find yourself, as I did not long ago, sitting by the kitchen doors, gazing from the mezzanine over the balding heads of the assembled fat cats. But Daniel is still one of the city's great cooking polymaths, a master of refined French technique, and also a great innovator. Dishes like roast squab and black sea bass en paupiette remain classics, and his braised pork belly is still the gold standard in a city obsessed with such things. On a recent visit, I enjoyed a lamb chop of such ethereal quality—crusted with a Middle Eastern seasoning called zaatar, and flavored with yogurt—that I put down my fork and offered up a little prayer of thanksgiving.

9Aquavit

It's true that Marcus Samuelsson's new home, on the ground floor of an anonymous midtown skyscraper, looks like the first-class waiting lounge of a new and prosperous Scandinavian airline. But the high-minded interpretations of Scandinavian cuisine that issue from his kitchen—order the duck breast, which is cured in lemons, or the salmon, sealed in a light brioche crust—are as excellent as ever. The bland new setting comes perilously close to knocking off a star, but addle yourself with glasses of esoteric aquavit and you'll hardly notice.



The Modern (No. 14)(Photo credit: Mark Peterson/Redux)



10Blue Hill

This may be the best low-profile restaurant in town. Dan Barber is a master of the gentle arts of poaching and braising, and much of his best material—pasture-raised turkeys, non-stressed Berkshire hogs—comes from the biodynamic farm and restaurant he and his brother run at an old Rockefeller complex upstate called Stone Barns. Although not as extreme or innovative as Craft, Blue Hill is the city's other seminal Greenmarket haven, so expect a certain amount of hushed reverence here, a certain amount of ecstatic whispering about the quality of the summer peas.

11Gotham Bar and Grill

If Jean-Georges is the multitalented Willie Mays, and Batali is Babe Ruth, then Alfred Portale is the Lou Gehrig of the city's dining world. While other chefs have branded themselves out of existence or wiggled out and gone to Vegas, the innovator of toppling vertical cuisine delivers the same, steady performance day after day, year after year, decade after decade. His food may not be as varied or flashy as some other diva chefs in town, but we give him a star each for quality, longevity, and overall class.

12Wallsé

This modest, neighborly restaurant is named for the Austrian hometown of its chef and owner, Kurt Gutenbrunner. It's possible that in this mountain hamlet you can obtain slow-cooked lobster with your spaetzle, or light, improbably flaky strudels stuffed with portions of perfectly cooked salmon, though I doubt it. Austrian fare? No. 12 on the list? People forget that the Austrians had their own empire once, and their cuisine has a diverse lightness and sophistication to it. If you're tired of France, like everyone else, and searching for classic cooking in a great European tradition, this is the place to find it.

13Chanterelle

In a town where chefs wander the culinary landscape like Japanese ronin, David and Karen Waltuck have made a virtue out of constancy, quality, and general good sense. The pretentious, hand-scripted menu has a fusty, decades-old feel, and the room looks like it was last decorated around 1932. But the Waltucks earn three stars for their cooking, which is still pleasing in an opulent, old-fashioned way. If you don't believe me, order the duck, or the oysters, which are touched with caviar and sauerkraut, and finished with a spoonful of the sweetest country cream.

14 The Modern

In the great Danny Meyer tradition, this new restaurant built into the newly renovated MoMA manages to be all things to all people, almost all of the time. Dinner in the main dining room, looking out at all the expensive modernist statuary, gets multiple stars for pageantry and ambition alone. Then there's the food: clean, modernist dishes like roast duck with black-truffle marmalade and cod crusted with little rounds of chorizo. For something less high-toned, visit the bar room. That's where the Alsatian chef, Gabriel Kreuther, loosens his collar a little and experiments with the comfort foods of his youth, like baekeoffe stew, a delicious tarte flambée, and braised pork cheeks with sauerkraut.

15Sushi of Gari (East Side)

Sushi snobs are an imperious bunch, but mention the name Masatoshi "Gari" Sugio in their midst and they begin squealing like a bunch of boy-band groupies. At this small, uniquely Japanese establishment on the Upper East Side, Gari marinates his raw fish in sake, spikes it with creamy tofu mayonnaise, and singes it with his trusty butane blowtorch. Such three-star innovations are widely imitated these days but rarely equaled. When you've finished your sushi, do what I do and indulge in a bowl of tempura-fried ice cream.

16Union Square Café

Yes, the rooms are a little cramped, and after twenty years, those scrawled murals on the wall look like some early Martha Stewart experiment gone horribly awry. But consistency and good cheer are the keys to Danny Meyer's perennially popular, Zagat-approved restaurant. Great dishes like

Michael Romano's lobster shepherd's pie also help. I know patrons who've committed his blue-plate specials to memory (Monday is the lobster-shepherd's-pie day) the way devout nuns memorize the Stations of the Cross.

17Café Boulud

Although longtime chef Andrew Carmellini recently departed, this remains the most intimate restaurant in the continually expanding Daniel Boulud empire, and arguably the most enjoyable. The multi-sectioned menu veers around the globe (you can enjoy Hungarian goulash with your lobster "Chiang Mai"), but for the best results, do what Mrs. Astor and the rest of the locals no doubt do. Begin with the foie gras terrine sweetened with port, proceed to the duck, which is glazed with honey, and conclude, for dessert, with the chocolate soufflé.

18 Oust

Why the high rank for this glorified neighborhood joint? Because Tom Valenti's cooking is an almost perfect marriage between elegant style and messy trencherman goodness. Because it's the only place in town where you can watch a ball game at the bar while you enjoy a decent bowl of tripe. Because if I had to choose one restaurant to have around the corner from my home, it would be this one.

19 Balthazar

Three stars for a *faux*-French brasserie? It is the dominant restaurant genre of our era, after all, and despite the unceasing and bitter attacks by Keith McNally's many detractors, the world headquarters of McNally-land is the best brasserie in town. The mood in the manic, glittering room changes by the hour, so pick your spots. Our favorite is late at night, for a helping of duck shepherd's pie or the impressive boudin noir, or early in the morning, for a serene breakfast croissant and a fishbowl-size dose of restorative café au lait.

20Esca

Before David Pasternack set up shop near this barren, restaurant-challenged stretch of Ninth Avenue, the average New Yorker's conception of Italian seafood was a stuffed clam and a serving of rubbery calamari. Now, thanks to Pasternack, we can enjoy densely rich branzino, which arrives at the table caked in its famous crust of salt, or linguine tossed with clams, hot-pepper flakes, and bits of pancetta. And then there's the crudi, of course. Thanks to some strange alchemy, and Pasternack's obsessive quest for perfect fish, raw fluke seems to taste better here than anywhere else.

21Town

The tall, windowless room here has a chameleon-like quality, which makes it equally pleasant for a starchy business lunch, clubby late-night dining, or an early-morning breakfast. Chef Geoffrey Zakarian's flashy, seemingly effortless cooking achieves a similar effect. Our perfect day might begin with a wheel of lobster hash for brunch (or, if we're feeling reckless, coddled eggs with crisped short ribs), lobster bisque and a bite of crisped skate wing for lunch, and for dinner the chef's signature escargot risotto. The chocolat beignets—filled with molten chocolate and served with white-chocolate ice cream—is one of the city's great desserts.

22Café Gray

Of all the self-important dining establishments populating the arid upscale food court at the Time Warner Center, this one is probably the most fun. Gray Kunz's menu is chock-full of old Lespinasse-style favorites, like the lightly creamy lobster chowder, bowls of classically dense mushroom risotto, and tender, blocky short ribs braised down to their rich, beefy essence. But the star of the show is the room itself, with its panoramic views of Columbus Circle, and the great open kitchen, which stands before the rows of white-tops like a Broadway stage.

23Picholine

With its low-slung chandeliers and walls covered in musty pink linen, Terrance Brennan's flagship establishment looks 50 years older than it is. But don't let the frumpiness fool you. It's carefully calculated to appeal to the opera fanatics who have turned the restaurant, over the years, into their personal party venue. In fact, Brennan's menu is full of surprises. He flavors his John Dory with grapes and truffles, and serves wheels of panna cotta spiked with sea urchin and caviar, and if you order the snails Grenobloise, it comes with truffles and pleasing shavings of serrano ham. As you pat your tummy, call for the famous cheese cart, which, as any opera nut can tell you, is worth an extra star all by itself.

24Cru

The "wine portfolio" contains an astonishing 80,000 bottles, which is why Cru has become the latest gathering spot for the city's ever-growing population of wine geeks. But if you're wise, you'll save some of your money to spend on the food. Shea Gallante is a refined, painstaking chef who builds flavors on the plate with a kind of painterly precision. His crudi are models of that overworked genre; he cooks sturgeon (with black-truffle sauce), duck (with braised onions and Swiss chard), and pike quenelles with equal facility. If you're looking for just the right something to go with your \$1,100 bottle of '00 Coche-Dury Grand Crû, try the lobster, flavored with barely perceptible nuggets of pork belly.

25Oceana

By nature, I've observed, seafood chefs tend to be subtle, retiring types, but Cornelius Gallagher seems to be the exact opposite. Since taking over the kitchen of this venerable expense-account fish house, the young Bronx-born chef has indulged in all kinds of madcap experimentation—halibut soaked in pork juice, caramelized scallops spritzed with apple cider. Some dishes work better than others, but we give him three stars for bringing talent and imagination to the stolid gray-suit world of midtown dining.

26L'Impero

Beefy, rustic grub is the rage in Italian circles these days, but at Scott Conant's well-appointed, consciously highbrow establishment in Tudor City, you'll find lobster scented with rosemary, mini-pillows of sweetbreads set over bows of farfalle, and agnolotti stuffed with braised duck and foie gras. Conant is one of the city's most talented young chefs, and here he demonstrates his trademark style—taking strong, heavy flavors and infusing them with a kind of delicate grandeur.

27Annisa

The small, tastefully appointed room here is conducive to all sorts of intimacies. A variety of sweet champagne-based cocktails are available at the bar, along with a selection of wines by female vintners. No wonder certain women I know consider Annisa to be a restaurant calibrated almost exactly to their tastes. It helps that the Asian-fusion menu, produced by co-owner and chef Anita Lo, contains some of the most consistently interesting food in the city, including Shanghai soup dumplings stuffed, in high New York style, with foie gras.

28Dévi

The Indian chef duo Hemant Mathur and Suvir Saran have a habit of changing kitchens every year or two. But wherever they go, the city's Indian-food aesthetes follow. At this gauzily decorated restaurant in the Flatiron district, they cook up a whole smorgasbord of regional Indian delicacies, like jellied veal brains scrambled with quail eggs and green chiles (a Muslim breakfast treat), halibut cooked Parsi-style in coconut sauce, and delicious Manchurian cauliflower, which resembles a crispy vegetarian version of sweet-and-sour pork.

29Sushi Yasuda

The room looks like the interior of a giant bamboo bento box, but the sushi here is of the highest quality and prepared by-the-book. The fish is flown in daily from faraway places like Alaska, Nova Scotia, and the Sea of Japan, and the freshest items are marked on the menu in the chef's own hand. It's possible to enjoy four varieties of yellowtail in one sitting, and eel prepared five different ways, and on good days chef Naomichi Yasuda's highest-grade o-toro tuna belly has a pale bubblegum pinkness to it, and leaves a pleasing slick of richness on your tongue.

30Veritas

The city's original wine-geek club has only 3,000 bottles on its list. But compared with the aggressively refined Cru, it's an amiable, even cozy place, where the excellent clubhouse cook, Scott Bryan, churns out a dependable roster of wine-friendly food like well-braised short ribs, a good deconstructed rabbit ravioli, and delicious pork belly in wintertime. Plant yourself at the bar, where you can fritter away your cash on glasses of the house Burgundy, while sucking up to the assembled wine millionaires swilling down their bottles of Comtes Lafon. If you're lucky, one of them might give you a sip.

31David Burke & Donatella

If Wylie Dufresne is the earnest downtown artist toiling in his studio, then David Burke is his expansive uptown counterpart, a chef who spikes his spicy Cajun lobster on flower holders, slathers pieces of salmon with fishy Cantonese XO sauce, and infuses his foie gras terrine with kumquats. It's all on display at this theatrical little restaurant down the street from Bloomingdale's, where it's a pleasure to watch the restaurant's staid Upper East Side clientele gawk at Burke's decorative and generally delicious creations as they go by, like spectators at some loony Dr. Seuss fashion show.

32Tabla and Tabla Bread Bar

Floyd Cardoz does for Indian cuisine what Yo-Yo Ma does for aged Chinese folk ballads. Or something like that. Aside from the obvious quality of the cooking—lobster rolled in a coating of puffy rice, cones of frozen condensed-milk kulfi tipped with gold leaf—the key here is the downstairs Bread Bar, with its attendant tandoori grill. As a result, Tabla is one of the few haute cuisine establishments I know that actually smells like good food.



33Alaine Ducasse at the Essex House

Tony Esnault is the restaurant's third chef in five years, and although his clean, very Continental cooking hovers well above two-star status, you can't help but think that Mr. Ducasse's New York adventure is doomed. The room is gloomy and overwrought, the flowery menu feels suddenly dated, and the prices are, frankly, insane. Still, with grand French cooking in decline all over town, this is one of the few places where you can still obtain a proper soufflé or a shellfish veloute so rich and refined it seems to have been beamed straight from one of the chef's more famous kitchens on the Côte d'Azur.

34Gramercy Tavern

In a world divided between those who prefer Gramercy Tavern and those who prefer the Union Square Cafe, put me in the latter group. But Gramercy's menu—roasted sweetbreads with bacon, braised-lamb-shoulder minestrone—remains impressive in its breadth, and occasionally inspired, even while chef Tom Colicchio is off tending his Craft empire. Yet I don't necessarily like the nineties-era haute—Pottery Barn décor in the back room, and why do all the people eating out front, in the Tavern itself, seem to be having so much more fun?

35Asiate

Usually I'm averse to glittering, showy restaurants on the upper floors of aggressively pricey hotels. But at Asiate, the drama of the setting, atop the new Mandarin Oriental overlooking the vast greenness of Central Park, is worth multiple stars all by itself. Then there's chef Noriyuki Sugie's first-class fusion cooking: smoked black cod with foie gras miso sauce, suckling pig pressed in a crackly, square pancake. Dine slowly, so you can watch the lights of the city twinkle below your shoe tops.

36Alto

At this high-minded new establishment in midtown, Scott Conant serves his specialized brand of Italian food in grand, obsessive style. The performance can be so high-minded that it's sometimes hard to know whether it's Italian at all. It helps to know that the restaurant is named for Alto Adige, an obscure, dumpling-rich region in northern Italy. Focus on the dumplings—like crisped ravioli filled with Swiss chard, or pouches of veal-stuffed agnolotti wreathed in Parmesan foam—and the food's provenance will be the last thing on your mind.

37Casa Mono

This is the place the town's discerning trenchermen are all fighting to get into. Chef Andy Nasser, who served apprenticeships at Babbo and Po, has a fondness for robust, elemental flavors, which he shuffles together in deliciously ingenious ways. Duck eggs make regular appearances on the tapas-style menu, as does grilled steak with a nutty romesco sauce, and sweetbreads seized in a thick crust. There are tables in the tiny submariner's space, but sit at the bar to experience Spanish food cooked "à la plancha," or on the grill, in all its smoky glory.

38Jovia

This is the new uptown home of the young chef Josh DeChellis, who earned his reputation dabbling with effete fusion techniques at a West Village restaurant called Sumile. The room doesn't merit three stars, but the food certainly does. DeChellis produces superior gourmet iterations of fat-man delicacies like braised short ribs, char-grilled bluefin tuna cheeks, and delicious little terrines of potted suckling pig. All he needs now is a larger stage.

39Fleur De Sel

The walls of this thrifty, unpretentious restaurant in the Flatiron District are exposed brick, and the lighting is a little spotty. But \$25 at lunchtime buys parsnip soup (floating with a ravioli stuffed with chestnuts and white truffles), a lozenge of perfectly poached halibut in red-wine sauce, and a white-chocolate-and-caramel ganache for dessert. The chef, Cyril Renaud, has the pedigree and skills of a three-star chef. If he were in a more elaborate (and pretentious) venue uptown, that's exactly what he'd be.

40Nobu

This hallowed establishment still ranks among the 40 top restaurants in town in our estimation, but not by much. The great fusion chef Nobu Matsuhisa has done enough innovating to span several culinary lifetimes, and, more than most things cooked up during the nineties, his miso-marinated black cod, rock shrimp with spicy mayonnaise, and tuna tartare with a bed of crushed avocado all have stood the test of time. But the sushi has never been great, and with twelve Nobu outlets now scattered around the globe, it's becoming clear that franchising has its costs.

41Bouley and Bouley Upstairs

Some of the food here is still worth the high price of admission, but like a faded rock icon, David Bouley keeps returning, perhaps too often, to the fusion-mad eighties of his youth. For a more dynamic experience, cross the street to the great chef's newest restaurant, Bouley Upstairs. There you can pay \$38 for a bite or two of Bouley's poached lobster (in a reduction of porcini mushrooms, red wine, and paprika), and perhaps even catch a glimpse of the master himself, clattering his pots and pans in the tiny open kitchen amid a cloud of steam.

42Spice Market

Considering its location (in the middle of meatpacking-district hell), its ridiculous size (as big as a bus depot), and its strange hothouse décor (like the palace of an arriviste Balinese drug lord), it's a wonder this restaurant works at all. But Jean-Georges's take on the street foods of Southeast Asia works to surprising effect, and despite its eccentricities, Spice Market is just plain fun. If you can't get a table (and even if you can), sit at the cantilevered bar upstairs, where it's a pleasure to dine on chicken wings drizzled in a sticky-sweet chile sauce, or bowls of curried duck, or the short ribs, which are softened in a mass of onion and green chiles, and watch the party unfold.

43Peter Luger

When I asked Masa Takayama to name his favorite restaurant in New York, he grinned and said, "Peetah Lughah." This is still New York City's greatest chop house, in the same way that the Met is our greatest museum. Lunch is the time to visit. The waiters are more genial, and you can order a hamburger. Or you have all afternoon to digest the fifteen slices of porterhouse you just devoured.

44DB Bistro Moderne

The home of Daniel Boulud's celebrated \$29 foie gras burger also happens to be the home of other less well-publicized delicacies. If we gave out stars for satisfaction alone, we might rate this restaurant above the more showy Boulud establishments uptown. If it's Friday, treat yourself to the bouillabaisse, which is as condensed and aromatic as any fish soup west of Marseille.

45Jewel Bako

The glittering interior is probably worth the hike to the East Village (the name means "jewel box"), and despite the constant migration of sushi chefs, Jack and Grace Lamb's unlikely restaurant remains the consensus choice among sushi snobs for the best sushi downtown. I tend to agree, even though it's often impossible to find a space at the packed sushi bar.

46Applewood

David and Laura Shea run a mom-and-pop shop for the new millennium, complete with organic suppliers, a shiny modern kitchen, and their young preschoolers scampering around the room. In the winter, there's a crackling fire; in warm weather, café tables spill out, in posh Park Slope fashion, onto the tree-lined street. On a good night, gourmet staples like short ribs, crunchy-topped cauliflower, or a creamy lobster soup are as good as anything in midtown.

47Cesca

Like Ovest, which earned Tom Valenti the eternal gratitude of serious eaters all over the Upper West Side, this hearty Italian establishment is designed to convey equal parts elegance, bonhomie, and sheer bulk. The stromboli served in the bar is the best in the city, and it's always amusing to watch local celebrities like Yoko Ono wrestle with dishes like the formidable Valenti pork shank, a leviathan haunch of meat braised in flagons of wine.

48 Perry Street

The most consistently excellent items at Jean-Georges's understated new personal canteen (he owns a condo upstairs in the all-glass Richard Meier building in the far West Village) tend to be simple favorites like country lamb chops, roast chicken, and very tender beef tenderloin smothered in a spinach-and-Gruyère sauce. Given the ornate quality of the chef's recent productions, there's something to be said for slight, subtle flavors and a dose of Zen-like calm.

49Lupa

I know plenty of pasta hounds who consider this perpetually mobbed Batali/ Bastianich trattoria to be the best restaurant in town. If you go on a weekday, at lunchtime, it just might be. That's when the restaurant turns into an old-style neighborhood joint and you can enjoy your perfectly

pitched, perfectly Roman bowl of spaghetti alla carbonara without being elbowed, New York style, in the nose.

50Hearth

Chef Marco Canora learned all about the sanctity of seasonal ingredients from Tom Colicchio during his time at Craft. At Hearth, in the East Village, Canora puts his own Italianate spin on this kind of highly mannered, Greenmarket cooking. The worst thing you can say about it is that it's a kind of cut-rate version of Craft itself, which isn't such a bad thing at all.

51Abboccato

The menu's loaded with baroque-sounding dishes, and the dim dining room looks uncannily like an overpriced and not very promising Chinese restaurant. But the reined, hearty food—suckling pig simmered in milk, salty, lightly eggy carbonara—at this Italian branch of the Livanos-family restaurant empire is always interesting, and often exceptional.

52The Spotted Pig

This gastro-pub, which improbably received a Michelin star, is the only such place I know where you can get a plate of duck eggs at the bar, feathered with tuna bottarga. The gnudi are as good as everyone's been telling you, and if you're searching for an unusual chowder during these wintry months, they have an excellent one made with smoked haddock. Enjoy it before 6 p.m. After that, the mobs arrive and the wait staff turns brusquely efficient, like bouncers at a nightclub.

53Mas (Farmhouse)

This is one of those mannered, dainty West Village restaurants that seem to send a certain type of discerning female diner into paroxysms of delight. The room is small and beautifully appointed, and the talented Bouley-trained chef, Galen Zamorra, turns out delicious high-organic recipes like steamed-razor-clam chowder, and squab baked in little pots of clay. Best of all, this is the only restaurant in town where you can procure Kumimoto oysters splashed with rosé champagne at 3 a.m.

545 Ninth

In the Disneyland environment of the meatpacking district, this townhouse restaurant seems almost quaintly discreet. But there's nothing quiet about Zak Pelaccio, a young fusion chef with a big, Rabelaisian style. Pelaccio combines a knack for old-fashioned goodness (he's a wizard with pork belly) with an instinct for eye-catching combinations using ingredients from far-off destinations like Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur.

55Jojo

The most intimate of all the Jean-Georges restaurants underwent a controversial makeover a few years ago and now looks like the interior of a stylish mortician's home. This dents only slightly the pleasures of time-honored Jean-Georges chestnuts like roast chicken smothered in green olives, with the signature stack of chickpea fries.

56The Four Seasons

There may be better places to eat in New York City, but this is the single greatest room. We specify the Grill Room, of course, and at lunchtime, not dinner. That's when members of the town's power menagerie gather along the banquettes like sea lions on a rock. Everything on the extravagant menu—\$50 for a steak, \$38 for crab cakes—tastes much better when you're on an expense account. When in doubt, order the dependably sturdy bison burger (\$36) and a Bloody Mary or two, then sit back and enjoy the spectacle.

57Sparks Steak House

The prices are extreme here, too, and on a busy night (which is most nights) diners get pushed through the joint like pigs through a gate. But thanks to the quality of the New York strip, and the ghost of Paul Castellano hovering over the room, Sparks achieves that delicate balance between tradition and big-city chic better than any big-volume steakhouse in Manhattan.

58Mary's Fish Camp

Two stars for this haute Village fish shack because, well, the food's just awfully good. The seafood soups and stews are uniformly nourishing, and the estimable lobster roll is so bulky (it's accompanied by a thatch of straw fries) it looks like it should be defused rather than eaten. Possibly Mary's isn't quite as good as Pearl's, as many grizzled old salts in the Village insist. Then again, maybe it's better.

59Pearl Oyster Bar

This much-emulated restaurant expanded from its original confines to the space next door. So now twice as many people can elbow up to the bar on a bleak winter's day and slobber down restorative bowls of clam chowder made with country cream and double-cured bacon. Then there's the famous lobster roll. It may not have been quite as good as Mary's the last time we checked, but it's twice the size of anything you'll find on the coast of Maine and, dare we say, twice as delicious.

60Bellavitæ

Is this sophisticated, modestly priced little Italian joint in the West Village on the same two-star level as Monsieur Ducasse? Well, not really. Factoring in cost, satisfaction, and overall fun, you could argue that it's an awful lot better. The kitchen produces the kind of straightforward, unfussy food that, if encountered at a trattoria in the hills of the Veneto, would send the average jaded New Yorker into paroxysms of tourist glee.

61Otto Enoteca Pizzeria

The front room is designed to evoke an Italian train station, a place where you can stand at long marble counters and sip a glass of Barolo or an espresso. Inside, you can nibble wedges of Mario Batali's lardo pie, or tuck into pastas like linguini with speck and toasted garlic or spaghetti Siciliani tossed with mint, chiles, and bottarga. The gelati—olive-oil, caramel, pistachio—are superb. If my daughters could name their personal five-star restaurant in New York, this would be it.

62Pampano

The notion of elevated Mexican seafood may come as a shock to New Yorkers who have subsisted for decades on a meager diet of margaritas and warmed-over nachos. A visit to Richard Sandoval's establishment in Turtle Bay will set you straight. Two stars for the seafood meatballs (albondigas), which are served in a creamy orange sauce with a trace of truffles, and for the fish tacos, and for the fat, messy-bottomed tortas sold at the Pampano Taqueria, in the atrium of a nameless office tower next door, which are the best in town.

63Artisanal Fromagerie and Bistro

I thought Terrance Brennan's cheese-centric brasserie was contrived when I first reviewed it. Since then, Brennan and his cheese nerds have conquered the world, so I've made my peace. The cheeses come in endless forms and varieties—puffy cheese gougères, endless fondues, and rich tastings of Berkswell, Bitto, and Shelbourne blue. The classic brasserie menu has grown more assured over time, and the restaurant is my mother's favorite place in town for a festive family brunch with her gaggle of grandchildren.

64Brasserie LCB

Jean-Jacques Rachou's solution to the death of grand French cooking was to rewire La Côte Basque with mirrors, potted palms, and a new brasserie menu. Luckily, this new menu contains an impressive roster of old-world dishes like calf's-liver Lyonnaise, a crispy-fat version of roast duck, and tripe à l'Armagnac served with the respect it deserves, under a great silver warmer. There are older, more refined bistros on the Upper East Side, but for this kind of rustic Burgundian cooking, Brasserie LCB is the best place in town.

65Thor

This clubby, increasingly raucous establishment, on the ground floor of the Rivington Hotel on the Lower East Side, is Kurt Gutenbrunner's aggressive play for downtown hipness. The ambience can be loud and contrived, but Gutenbrunner is a first-class chef, and dishes like monkfish wrapped in Christo-like blankets of crunchy potato skin, or gently poached lobster with béarnaise sauce, are much more interesting than anything you'll find at nearby Gus's Pickles.

66Danube

The elaborate Klimtian setting is still one of the prettiest restaurant dining venues in town, and it no doubt had an intoxicating effect on the Michelin judges, who honored David Bouley's Austrian restaurant with two stars. So did the unquestionable quality of J. D. Hilburn's near-perfect schnitzel. But the worn, unchanging menu, the spotty service, and the perennially drab expense-account crowd make the whole production feel frozen in time, like some dated bull-market Valhalla.

67Matsuri

This is the most tasteful of the big new Japanese dining palaces that began their assault on the city a couple of years ago. The ceiling looks like the hull of an upturned samurai ship, and the bar is as long as a city block. You'd expect chef Tadashi Ono's cooking to be elaborate and showy, but in fact it's solid, sensible, and faithfully Japanese.

68BLT Steak

Laurent Tourondel made his considerable reputation several years ago at a great though now defunct seafood restaurant called Cello. So it's no surprise that he manages, at this original member of his ever-expanding BLT chain, to freshen the tired old steakhouse formula with all sorts of artful touches, like nine different steak sauces and every imaginable side. The beef is generally excellent, but Tourondel's signature dish is the roast chicken, which is tender and crispy, with deposits of bread crumbs and rosemary stuffed under its crackly skin.

69Bar Americain

This midtown enterprise is staid by Bobby Flay's flamboyant standards, but if you're searching for a decent place for a power lunch, you could do an awful lot worse. The Iron Chef traveled around the country looking for regional specialties, and came up with squash blossoms stuffed with pulled pork, tastings of artisanal ham, and shooters of cold crab salad with sweet corn and coconut. Do go at lunch, however. That's when Flay rolls out his excellent version of the Kentucky hot brown, composed of French toast, slabs of baked turkey, thick strips of bacon, and a wedge of tomato, all drowned in a rich, cheesy, cream sauce.

70Teodora

Sit at the bar here and you may encounter groups of hungry priests from Emilia-Romagna or pasta-starved fashion buyers in town on junkets from Milan. The proprietors are from Ravenna, and although they've opened other successful restaurants around town in recent years, the original midtown establishment remains the showcase for their satisfying, eminently traditional brand of home cooking.

71Fiamme Osteria

There are all sorts of restaurants to choose from in Steve Hanson's sprawling fine-dining empire (Blue Water Grill, Ruby Foo's, Dos Caminos), but this high-style Soho Italian osteria is probably the best. Chef Michael White earned three stars from the Times and one from Michelin for Fiamma's little raviolini stuffed with braised rabbit, prosciutto-laced garganelli bombed with truffle butter, and wine-braised short ribs on pillows of celery purée. With its glass elevator and rows and rows of tangerine lampshades, it feels like a twenty-first century version of an Italian speakeasy run happily amok.

72Oriental Garden

The staples of the classic Chinatown experience are all on display at this venerable Elizabeth Street establishment. You'll find the standard menus, big round tables set with pink tablecloths, and milky fish tanks filled with dazed-looking fish. The usual arcane Cantonese dishes are available, but order from chef Wong Wong's specialties— notably, the cracked lobster with eggs and scallions—and you can't go wrong.

73Payard Patisserie and Bistro

François Payard's polished Lexington Avenue establishment could be twenty spots higher, I suppose, but this critic doesn't live on the Upper East

Side, and he doesn't eat many chocolate operas anymore. If you're feeling wistful about the old French traditions, this is a good place to find them. Payard's restaurant also excels in the vanishing art of high afternoon tea.

74 Swifty's

The Upper East Side party set still congregates in the tiny dining rooms here, and by the looks of things, they're having a much better time than they used to back at Mortimer's. If Wasps can be said to have their own ethnic cuisine, you'll find it here: chicken hash, cheese soufflés, and chicken curry cooked in the pallid, retro-British manner, of course.

75 Mermaid Inn

Any one of Jimmy Bradley and Dan Abrams's engaging, popular restaurants (the Red Cat, the Harrison) could make an arbitrary top-100 list like this one. At this East Village branch of their bistro empire, seafood trends high (arctic-char tartare) and low (fried clams, fish chowder) mingle in a happy, even artful way. Sit in the front if you can; the back room looks like a chowder house in some forgotten suburb of Boston.

76 Kittichai

At this swank establishment in Soho, the Bangkok chef Ian Chalermkittichai produces fusion delicacies like "chocolate-back ribs," as well as old Thai favorites like white tuna buried in fragrant piles of coriander and basil. Their enjoyment is enhanced by a variety of feng shui-approved features, like live goldfish by the bar and a pond with floating candles in the middle of the dining room. This is Thai food elevated to multi-star level.

77 Peasant

Rustic and brick oven are overused terms in Italian-food circles, but if you wish to trace them back to their roots, this bunker-like Nolita establishment is a good place to start. Everything comes out of the wood-burning ovens, and late at night, as the ovens roar, the pots clatter down on the table, and the food is passed to and fro, it feels like you're taking part in a communal gourmet bacchanal.

78 Beppe

The genial Tuscan chef Cesare Casella has made a reputation over the years as a kind of poor man's Mario Batali. No wonder the best place to eat at this solid establishment is the capacious oak bar. This is a space designed for the serious, solitary consumption of hearty, unhealthful specialties like grilled sausages, messy Tuscan ribs, and the pleasingly greasy lemon-fried chicken, served over a mound of very un-Tuscan fried green tomatoes.

79 Blue Ribbon

I still recall, with a kind of eerie, adolescent clarity, my first taste of marrow bones at this groundbreaking bistro many years ago. Here was simple food raised to the highest level; artistic after-hours cooking for unfussy gourmands who love to eat. The Bromberg brothers have expanded the franchise in recent years, and their formula has been widely imitated, but as long as marrow bones remain on the menu, the charms of this seminal restaurant will endure.



80 Tía Pol

This diminutive Chelsea tapas bar is possibly the best traditional Spanish restaurant in a town curiously devoid of such things. The food is Basque, to be precise, and includes crunchy, creamy croquettes (which change daily), skewers of lamb marinated in garlic, little pyramids of batter-fried shark, and endless varieties of cod. Everything is modestly priced and modestly sized, so if you don't like one dish, do what the tapeadores do and order three others.

81 Barbuto

The Italians, those geniuses of casual comfort food, haven't quite mastered the kind of elegant bistro dining practiced by the French. Leave it to Jonathan Waxman, that well-traveled savant, to do it for them. He's created a relaxed French-style café, with enviable pastas and risottos and comfortable Italianate amenities like a cappuccino machine and a wood-

burning brick pizza oven thrown in.

82 Mainland

Chinese fusion was one of the more unfortunate restaurant trends of 2005. Thankfully, the really good dishes at this new Upper East Side restaurant are reliable old Chinese favorites like crispy-bottomed potstickers, messy Cantonese egg noodles stacked with cracked lobster, and wood-cooked Peking duck carved at your table by actual Peking-duck chefs from Peking.

83 Taboon

The name means "oven" in Arabic, specifically the ancient stone contraptions used to bake toasty flat bread. The Middle Eastern fusion menu is satisfying and refined (excellent meze, beef cheeks braised with chickpeas, oxtails rolled in little cigars), but the bread, which is piping hot and pooled with oil, is reason enough to visit what is arguably the best restaurant in Hell's Kitchen.

84 Pure Food and Wine

This high vegan establishment smells vaguely of pulped cabbage, and the wistful glossy pictures of happy ducks and smiling sheep induce annoying pangs of guilt in carnivores like myself. But chef Scott Winegard's recipes—zucchini-and-yellow-tomato lasagne, trumpet-mushroom "calamari"—win two stars for innovation alone. Even more surprising, they're generally delicious.

85 Onera

If you're wandering around the Upper West Side and crave a really good helping of braised-goat moussaka, you'll find it here. The self-taught chef and owner, Michael Psilakis, also stuffs his traditional Greek manti dumplings with puréed chestnuts and a hint of bone marrow. If anything, the desserts are even more extreme—a good thing in a neighborhood not generally known for culinary experimentation.

86Bao 111

Among the hipsters and lounge lizards who frequent this glitzy little establishment on Avenue C, you'll often find serious food professionals commenting on the authentic qualities of the pho or Michael Huynh's iron-pot chicken. Huynh peppers his traditional recipes with all kinds of inventive touches, like fattened short ribs wrapped around sticks of lemongrass, and cubes of filet mignon prepared Saigon style with frizzled shallots, garlic, and peppercorn sauce for dipping.

87Nice Matin

Andy D'Amico's beef daube is made with giant Americanized short ribs (sweetened with a whiff of oranges), and the locally famous "five-napkin burger" comes topped with aioli instead of ketchup. It isn't quite Nice, but for a traffic-clogged corner of West 79th Street, it will do.

88360

For reasons known only to himself, Arnaud Erhart located this classic artisanal brasserie on Van Brunt Street, in the wilds of Red Hook, Brooklyn, next to an old funeral parlor. This does not affect the pleasures of his prix fixe menu, however, which is dotted with excellent examples of classic French dishes—steak tartare, fresh oysters, charcuterie—and costs just \$25.

89 iCi

The proprietor of this excellent Brooklyn bistro is Laurent Saillard, a veteran of Balthazar, among other places. His chicken-liver schnitzel is the best in Fort Greene, or anywhere else, for that matter. If you're looking for an excuse to explore the glories of DeKalb Avenue, it's worth a special trip.

90Prune

Gabrielle Hamilton's insight was to find her own tiny, out-of-the-way space and to cook for her customers the kind of straightforward, generally delicious food she preferred to cook for herself—soft-shell crabs in season, fried sweetbreads with capers, grilled rib eye doused with butter. So started a trend among accomplished chefs, which continues to this day from Clinton Street to Fort Greene. The bar food—deviled eggs, shrimp toast—is some of the best in town.

91August

Tony Liu, formerly of Babbo, has a knack for lightening inherently rustic dishes while preserving their essential goodness. The tarte flambée here has a kind of elevated creaminess to it, glazed pork shank comes with a sprinkling of healthful pea shoots, and the excellent orata is grilled whole and doused with a melting mixture of citrus, olive oil, and fresh herbs, just like they do on the coast of Sicily.

92Al Di Là

Anna Klinger and her husband, Emiliano Coppa, bring a touch of the Veneto to their perpetually mobbed restaurant in Park Slope. If you manage to fight your way through the door, pay special attention to dishes like braised rabbit with black olives and polenta; fat Venetian malfatti (Swiss-chard gnocchi); and the hanger steak, which is tinged with balsamic. Klinger's desserts, especially the gelati, are the best in this increasingly restaurant-happy corner of Brooklyn.

93Gennaro

Gennaro Picone's industrious enterprise on the upper reaches of Amsterdam Avenue has morphed over time into the de facto Italian neighborhood joint for the entire Upper West Side. This is good, honest food, fairly priced. Be prepared to pay cash for your stinco di agnello (lamb shank braised in red-wine sauce) or your fresh gnocchi drenched in cream and basil, and to smile indulgently as other people's children roll about under your knees.

94The Grocery

If you wish to chart the beginnings of haute Brooklyn cuisine, this is the place to begin. The Greenmarket menu—country sausages with apricot mustard, blinis with smoked trout—is straightforward and satisfying. But, sadly, the prices don't feel like Smith Street anymore; they feel like Soho.

95'Inoteca

This casual, generally mobbed restaurant on Rivington Street is the Lower East Side capital of small-plate dining, Italian style. There are antipasti, tramezzini (a kind of Viennese equivalent of small plates), bruschetti (or something close to it—try the one hollowed in the middle, like a toad in the hole, and filled with egg, truffles, and Fontina cheese), and, of course, panini of all kinds. If you can secure a table, you'll have a front-row seat on the nightly promenade up and down Rivington.

96Landmarc

Marc Murphy's Tribeca bistro seems designed, perhaps a little too ambitiously, to be a steakhouse, a trattoria, and a late-night brasserie rolled into one. But the wines are only marked up roughly 30 percent above cost (instead of 100 percent), and the boudin noir is a world-class example of that vanishing specialty.

97Franny's

Any self-respecting New York restaurant ranking must include a pizza parlor. At this excellent Flatbush Avenue establishment, you can peruse the pedigrees of the various toppings (oregano from Stokes Farms in Old Tappan, basil from Claverack, etc.) while waiting for your delicious and rigorously organic pie to arrive.

98Grand Sichuan Eastern (Second Avenue)

The popular Grand Sichuan empire is a shadowy land characterized by many restaurants of varying quality and rotating cast of chefs. The famous West Side outlet on Ninth Avenue is highly regarded, but word is the most accomplished of the newly arrived Sichuan chefs now resides here. Try the formidable Chungking pepper chicken, chunks of spicy chicken wreathed in a crown of chile peppers.

99Chikalicious

The specialty at this popular, ingeniously realized niche restaurant is dessert and dessert only. Most of the action takes place behind the bar, where the pastry chef and co-owner, Chika Tillman, and her assistants whip up their creations—sorbet floating in sparkling wine, melting wheels of fromage blanc “cheesecake” on great blocks of ice—with the diligent intensity of world-class sushi chefs. On weekend nights, the line can snake out the door and down the block.

100Café Sabarsky

It's easy to forget, in this era of plastic cups and lattes to go, that coffee is a luxurious, old-world drink. A single cup at this high-minded Viennese café on upper Fifth Avenue costs \$5 and comes to the table on a silver tray. There are excellent Viennese specialties like sausages, goulash, and a whole selection of strudels and chocolate tortes, but the coffee's stimulating effects will stay with you throughout the day.

101Momofuku Noodle Bar

A plate of pork dumplings costs \$6, and the steamed Chinese buns cost \$7 or \$8, depending on whether they're stuffed with roast chicken, shiitakes, or sweet slabs of pan-seared Berkshire pork belly. Ask the off-duty chefs lined along the bar whether they'd trade these dishes for an haute cuisine dinner uptown, and they'll do what I do when I repair to this great East Village restaurant after too many rich, expensive meals in too many fancy restaurants. They'll call for another plate of pork buns, and tell you to get lost.

Find this article at:

<http://www.newyorkmetro.com/restaurants/wheretoeat/2006/15437/index.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.