


COMFORT FOOD

KICKED UP

A NOTCH

*Feeling nostalgic for some home cooking this season?
Cozy up to these familiar dishes spruced up
with gourmet ingredients, yet still made with love.*



Since the recession hit in 2008, city restaurants have peppered their menus with stick-to-your-ribs specialties that remind us of home. It's food that not only nourishes bodies, but also feeds souls and brings back memories of family gatherings. Now, chefs are taking those quintessential meals and pumping them up with gourmet touches, like reinventing the classic BLT with pork belly, making meatballs with foie gras and serving fried cupcakes with cucumber-cilantro granita. Apologies to all the moms out there, but these dishes take home-cooked meals to a whole new level. And we have some that are sure to become your new favorites.

*By Sam Armstrong & Terry N. Martinez
Photographs by Jessica Attie*

BUENOS AIRES CAFE

Gnocchi quartet

A comfort-food option fit for vegetarians and carnivores alike? Buenos Aires Cafe has a winner with its gnocchi quartet, which features four varieties of pillowy dumplings: homey pumpkin-cinnamon, peppery sweet potato-chipotle, fresh cilantro-jalapeño and savory potato-herb. The four pastas are tossed together and sautéed in a reduction of olive oil, parsley-infused oil and balsamic vinegar and a medley of fresh veggies. Don't overthink this one, your taste buds are just going to have to jump in and enjoy. \$12.99. 1201 E. Sixth St., 382-1189, buenosairescafe.com

SECOND BAR + KITCHEN

Black truffle pommes frites

There is hardly anything more comforting than a hot, salty, crispy French fry. At Second Bar + Kitchen, a simple sliver of potato slips on

a sexier outfit and becomes a pomme frite when it's put just once through the frying process, sprinkled with nutty grana padano cheese, topped with a luxuriously fatty slice of seared foie gras and served with an aioli infused with the musky flavors of black truffle. Pair the pommes frites with one of Second's thoughtfully composed cocktails for a treat that is cozy yet sophisticated, uncomplicated and delectably sexy. \$20. 200 Congress Ave., 827-2750, congressaustin.com/second

HADDINGTONS AMERICAN TAVERN

Duck and foie gras meatballs

Haddingtons, with its homey interior of dark wood paneling and plaid wallpaper, easily carries its theme of comfort over to its dishes. The duck and foie gras meatballs combine two kinds of duck into moist orbs, which are placed on a creamy white bean puree and served with

a sweet plum mostarda that balances the richness of the small plate. Pair this dish with a duck fat Sazerac, the New Orleans classic whiskey cocktail that Haddingtons makes by infusing the libation with fat from the fowl. Have it served neat, if you are so inclined. \$10. 601 W. Sixth St., 992-0204, haddingtonsrestaurant.com

PERLA'S SEAFOOD AND OYSTER BAR

Crab Louie and cornmeal-fried green tomatoes

Perla's took on a challenge when it combined two classic American dishes in its Crab Louie and fried green tomatoes appetizer. Separately, these dishes are straightforward and rely on fresh, quality ingredients. But Perla's chef, Larry McGuire, played matchmaker and joined them together in an herb-filled crab salad with tart and crisp fried green tomatoes and tangy Russian dressing. The elements could compete, but

McGuire balances them so well that they shine together. \$14. 1400 S. Congress Ave., 291-7300, perlasaustin.com

CONTIGO

Rabbit and dumplings

The combination of Contigo's open-air dining area with cooler weather just begs for diners to order something comforting and warm, like its rabbit and dumplings, served in a cast-iron skillet. Even trepid diners will enjoy this rich stew of mildly flavored shredded rabbit with plenty of al dente carrots and cipolini onions, dotted with tender sage-infused dumplings. While it's not exactly a looker, the dish's flavors are enchanting enough to make you fall in love. \$13. 2027 Anchor Lane, 614-2260, contigotexas.com/austin

HANK'S GARAGE

Duck fat frites

When a place bills itself as a Belgian pub, ordering frites in addition to beer is typically a good idea, but when that place offers duck fat fries, ordering frites becomes a necessity. Hank's twice-fried versions are crisp and golden with a duck flavor that imbues the potato with a richness beyond regular fryer oil. Try out one of the eatery's nine dipping sauces, including spicy Sriracha mayo or the indulgently creamy and herbaceous béarnaise sauce. \$5. 115A San Jacinto Blvd., 520-8060, hanksgarageatx.com

ENOTECA VESPAIO

Suppli

Enoteca Vespaio, located in the trendy SoCo neighborhood, serves bistro-style food in a more causal setting than

BUENOS AIRES CAFE

