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Esquire's  
BEST NEW RESTAURANTS  
2008

Come inside for:  
Coast-to-coast picks  
The chef of the year  
The best table (and how to get it)  
Recipes you can make  
a cocktail  
And, of course, some bacon

Bar Blanc, New York ★ Bar Boulud, New York ★ Convivio, New York ★ Corbett's, Louisville ★ Distrito, Philadelphia ★ Kampuchea, New York ★ L20, Chicago (Restaurant of the Year) ★ Luce, San Francisco (Chef of the Year) ★ Mansion on Turtle Creek, Dallas ★ Mercat, Chicago ★ Pacific Time, Miami ★ Palate, Glendale, California ★ The Plumed Horse, Saratoga, California ★ Scampo, Boston ★ Scarpetta, New York ★ Spruce, San Francisco ★ Takashi, Chicago ★ Terra, Tesuque, New Mexico ★ Voice, Houston ★ Zahav, Philadelphia

By JOHN MARIANI  
Photograph by SETH SMOOT  
Illustration by LEIF PARSONS



# Esquire's BEST NEW RESTAURANTS

chi dumplings. Tesar had the unenviable task of stepping in for a legend. He pulled it off, and now Dallas can look forward to years of amiable crosstown competition between the two.

2821 Turtle Creek Boulevard; 469-559-2100; mansion-lecreek.com.

## MERCAT A LA PLANCHA CHICAGO

While the press dwells on Ferran Adrià and his acolytes, the real food of Spain is to be found in traditional restaurants whose chefs use the best Spanish ingredients—fragrant gold-green olive oil, the finest hams in the world, and a new abundance of seafood like turbot and red mullet. These are what you'll find at Mercat, a new Chicago restaurant specializing in cooking *a la plancha*, on the grill, to sear in flavors enhanced with paprika, garlic, and oil. The executive chef is Jose Garces,

whose new Mexican restaurant in Philadelphia, Distrito (page 94), also makes our list. In Chicago, chef de cuisine Michael Fiorello throws plenty onto that grill, from prawns and turbot to rack of lamb and morcillo sausage, though what he cooks off it is just as delicious—bonbon-like Serrano-ham croquettes, chile-spiked chicken-chorizo-rock-shrimp soup, and the *bocadillos*—sandwiches that come with smoked paprika fries. The big, two-level dining room has been as big a hit at lunch, when tapas, charcuterie, and cheeses are a great way to eat light, as at night, when the Latin music rises up and the sangria goes down easy.

638 South Michigan Avenue; 312-765-0524; mercatchicago.com.

## PACIFIC TIME MIAMI

Since much of the snap and good taste has left Miami

## A CHEF TO WATCH



James Campbell Caruso

AT THE CHEERY La Boca in Santa Fe, Caruso proves that small-plate eating is no fad. Dishes like cinnamon-rubbed shrimp with hearty blood sausage and a passion-fruit crema are small in serving size but big on idea. 72 West Marcy Street; 505-982-3433.

Beach, the burgeoning Design District can now claim some of Miami's most exciting new restaurants—Michael's Genuine Food, Brosia, Domo Japones, and the newest, Pacific Time. Chef Jonathan Eismann originally opened Pacific Time on the beach in 1993, but he got tired of the bandanna-wearing guests who couldn't pronounce *gnudi* without laughing, so he's relocated. Now, in a large, popular dining room with outdoor tables, things are still tropically casual, but Eismann's food has gained greater character and a stronger inflection of Asian flavors—skirt steak with Indonesian spices, fermented black beans, and braised bok choy; a marvelously crisp softshell-crab tempura; and addictive hot-and-sour popcorn shrimp with Thai vinaigrette. (You will regret

agreeing to share this dish.) Some of the original signature items are still on the menu, but the new Pacific Time shows how Eismann's cooking has evolved while so many restaurants back on the beach are still slapping down the same old grilled-chicken pizzas.

35 Northeast Fortieth Street; 305-722-7369; pacifictime-miami.com.

## PALATE FOOD + WINE GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA

I had never seen so many car dealerships in my life until I drove down Brand Boulevard in Glendale, which is not sufficient reason to drive out there. But in a year when it was hard to stifle a yawn over the new restaurants in L.A., Palate Food + Wine is worth the trip. A fairly simple dining room is housed in a 1920s warehouse, with a flattering pink glow, a friendly bar, black-and-white tile floors, an open kitchen, and big windows from which you can see hundreds of unsold SUVs. In the rear is a big family-style table and behind that a great communal room where you can feast on cheeses and wines in a sleek, industrial-style wine cellar. From the greeting and seating to the service and wine list, Palate hits every point of hospitality. Chef Octavio Bercerra, formerly with the Patina Group restaurants, starts you off with mason jars of salmon rilletes and potted Berkshire pork, then it's on to crawfish



The steak at Mercat.

sweet aioli for dipping crispy, salty fries (right).

### » BEST USE OF GOAT

At the Des Moines Farmer's Market, Bill Niman of Niman Ranch was recently overheard saying goat was on the verge. Let's hope. It's



lean and intensely flavorful—like a cross between mild lamb and pork. Chef George Formaro of the Gateway Market in Des Moines, whose recipes stretch the palates of the Plains, gets his from a herd

raised by his brother-in-law, a Niman rancher, and makes tacos: braised, fall-apart-tender meat folded into hand-patted tortillas that soften the blow of chipotle-pepper salsa.

—JENNIFER WILSON

### » MOST TOLERABLE EXAMPLE OF THE COMMUNAL-TABLE TREND

In the regional seasonal utopia that is Portland, Oregon, the community table is exactly that: a