

dining NEIGHBORHOOD

FOOD *in the* 'HOOD

WHERE TO FIND COZY NEIGHBORLY EATERIES ACROSS THE VALLEY

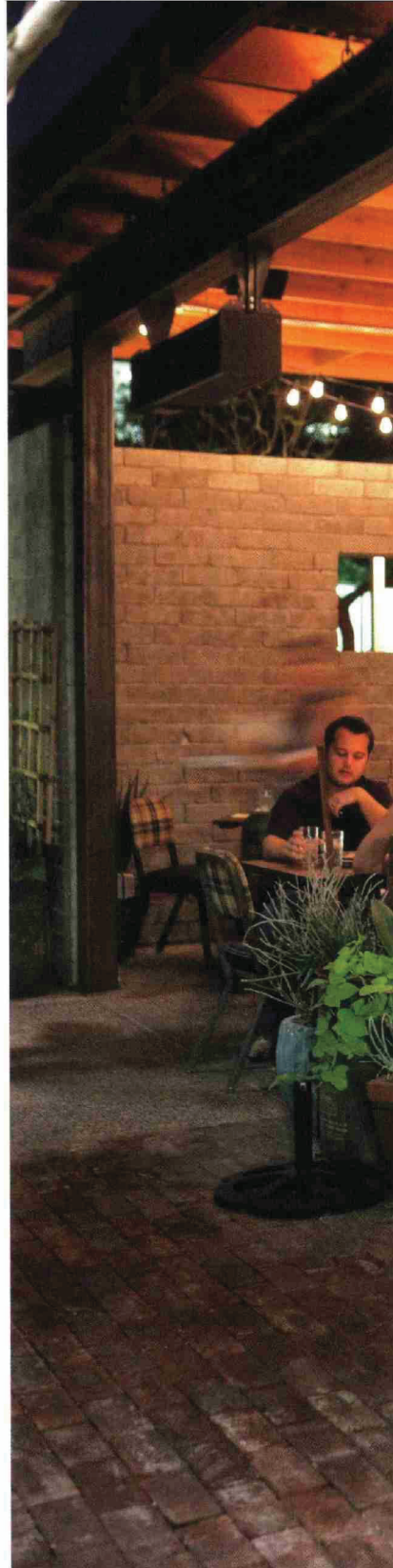
BY HOWARD SEFTEL



MR. ROGERS MAY NOT HAVE BEEN SINGING SPECIFICALLY about the Valley restaurant scene, but it's clear he had the sentiment right: "It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood. Won't you be my neighbor?"

That's because this town, despite its staggering number of chain restaurants (58 percent, compared with 45 percent nationally), still has neighborhood pockets whose residents support first-rate local eats. Most of these restaurants are not high-profile, destination-dining options. Rather, they're under-the-radar spots serving an appreciative neighborhood clientele, places to kick back on a weeknight when you're too pooped to cook or to linger inexpensively on a Saturday night.

Here are 10 Valley neighborhoods — east side, west side, all around the town — that are worth exploring, even if you don't live in them. Pancakes, hamburgers, chicken-fried steak, pizza, pasta, pierogi, spring rolls, tapas, pot roast, ice cream, tacos: Whatever your hankering, it can be handsomely satisfied.





NEIGHBORHOOD **dining**

Midtown Phoenix

1 Lux Central
 4402 N. Central Ave.
 602-696-9976, luxcoffee.com.
 This former coffee shop has tweaked its name, moved into a larger spot next door and turned into what owner Jeff Fischer calls a "beverage-driven pub." Yes, the coffee and pastries are still there, but now you can enjoy a cocktail and make a meal out of tapas, chicken pot pie, French-inspired terrines and a cheeseburger set on Yorkshire pudding.

2 Pane Bianco
 4404 N. Central Ave., 602-234-2100, pizzeriabianco.com.
 Thanks to expanded hours, James Beard Award winner Chris Bianco's sandwich shop (the mozzarella, tomato and basil is amazing) now offers a limited dinner menu. Right-hand man Claudio Urciuoli is overseeing the operation, and he's whipping up such dishes as antipasti, bean and escarole soup and sausage with polenta.

3 Maizie's Cafe & Bistro
 4750 N. Central Ave.
 602-274-2828, maiziescafe.com.
 This cute spot sends out a happy vibe, thanks to the talented kitchen. You can go international with starters like Thai lettuce wraps and grilled asparagus bruschetta. Then move on to all-American favorites like pizza, pasta and the first-rate "inside-out" burgers, which come stuffed, not topped, with the usual accessories.

4 St. Francis
 111 E. Camelback Road.
 602-200-8111, stfrancisaz.com.
 This strikingly designed place has more going for it than good looks. Chef Aaron Chamberlin uses his wood-burning oven to full advantage, with dishes like pork chile verde, roast vegetables, pot roast, roast chicken, killer flatbreads and Moroccan-spiced meatballs. Go ahead and fill up on the homemade bread, too — it may be the Valley's best.

WINDSOR/CHURN

dining NEIGHBORHOOD



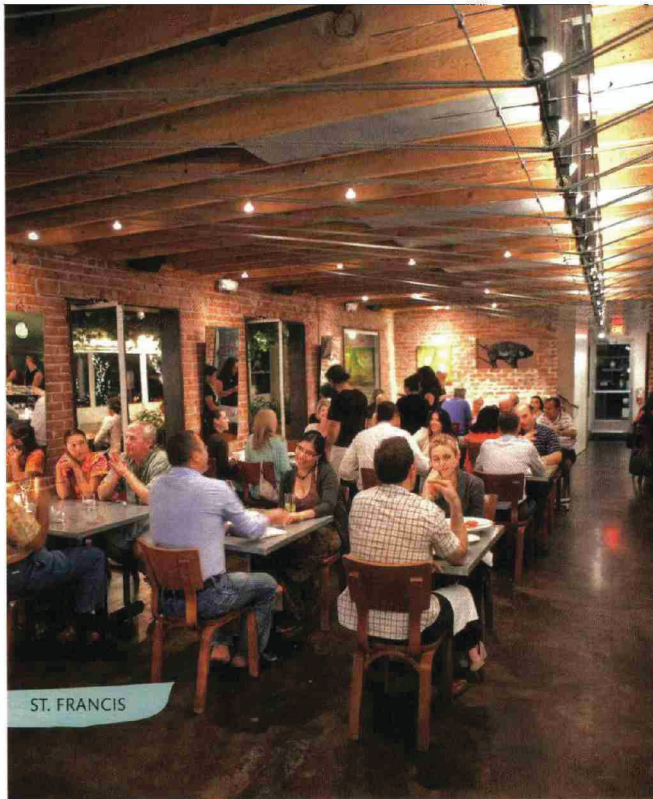
5 Windsor/Churn
 5223 N. Central Ave.
 602-279-1111 (Windsor);
 602-279-8024 (Churn).
 windsoraz.com, churnaz.com.
 Postino's Craig DeMarco has restored a 1940 building and installed two side-by-side neighborhood spots. Windsor offers inexpensive favorites like hot dogs, burgers, pot pies and casseroles. Churn is the ice-cream parlor with a self-consciously old-fashioned air, emphasizing basic flavors like vanilla, chocolate and butter pecan.

Coronado District — Seventh Street

6 America's Taco Shop
 2041 N. Seventh St.,
 Phoenix. 602-682-5627,
 americastacoshop.net.
 Friends and family urged school teacher America Corrales to open her own Mexican place, and we're the beneficiaries. The supporting cast features burritos, quesadillas and tortas, but the star performers are tacos, like the carne asada and tacos al pastor (rotisserie-spun pork) goosed up with guacamole and pineapple.

7 Coronado Cafe
 2201 N. Seventh St., Phoenix.
 602-258-5149, coronadocafe.com.
 It's a homey place, and the food makes you feel at home, too. Dig into pomegranate hummus or the crab-and-cream-cheese dip before moving on to wraps, burgers, flatbreads or tacos. Want something more substantial? Main dishes include pan-seared miso salmon, grilled pork porterhouse and meatloaf with green-chile cream sauce.

8 Rice Paper
 2221 N. Seventh St., Phoenix.
 602-252-3326, ricepapereatery.com.
 It's the Vietnamese version of a sushi bar, spotlighting an extensive grazing list of summer rolls. There are some 15 varieties, like the one filled with shrimp, pork and mint,



served with peanut hoisin sauce. Other menu highlights include salads, pho and main dishes, like lemongrass chicken and braised pork and quail eggs in a clay hot pot.

9 Humble Pie
 2333 N. Seventh St., Phoenix.
 602-229-1289, humblepieusa.com.
 You could come here for tempura-fried green beans, a pressed roast beef and Swiss sandwich or spaghetti and meatballs. But it would be a mistake not to order pizza, such as the goat cheese with peppers or prosciutto with gorgonzola and pear. But for a real thrill, try the roasted mushrooms with pancetta, green onion and mozzarella.

10 Main Ingredient Ale House & Cafe
 2337 N. Seventh St., Phoenix.
 602-843-6246, tmialehouse.com.
 The neighborhood comes to this budget-priced spot for nibbles, like the artichoke chile dip and antipasto platter, as well as salads, mac 'n' cheese and such hot sandwiches as the jive turkey, a baguette filled with house-roasted turkey supplemented

with jalapeño cream cheese. An extensive selection of beer and wine is another attraction.

16th Street Corridor — South

11 Pro's Ranch Market
 1602 E. Roosevelt St., Phoenix.
 602-254-6676, prosranch.com.
 This huge mercado offers a terrific assortment of ready-to-eat, south-of-the-border favorites. Grab a seat at one of the in-store picnic tables and linger over seafood cocktails, pollo asado, tamales and tacos made with right-off-the-press tortillas. Don't forget the beverages, which include some of the most refreshing aguas frescas around.

12 Mariscos Playa Hermosa
 1605 E. Garfield St., Phoenix.
 602-462-1563,
 mariscosplayahermosa.com.
 No, you're not actually hearing swooping seagulls screech around a pier. But the vibrant Mexican seafood here may transport you to a Mexican beach. The skilled kitchen does outstanding work,

MICHAEL MCNAMARA

Midtown Phoenix

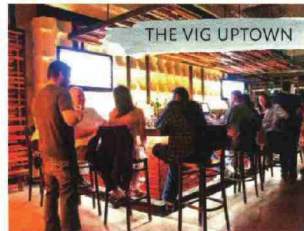
1. Pane Bianco
2. Lux Central
3. Maizie's Cafe & Bistro
4. St. Francis
5. Windsor/Churn



LA FRONTERA



RICE PAPER



THE VIG UPTOWN

NEIGHBORHOOD **dining**

17 The Vig Uptown
 6015 N. 16th St., Phoenix.
 602-633-1187, thevig.us

It's easy to hang out when the hangout makes you so comfortable. Relax over a cocktail, wine or beer, nibble on hot wings with honey-barbecue sauce, then enjoy everything from Persian chicken kebab and a prime-rib sandwich with fontina cheese to carne asada on a potato pancake and gumbo with chicken, shrimp, crab and sausage.

18 Texaz Grill
 6003 N. 16th St., Phoenix.
 602-248-7827, texazgrill.com

Grab an icy Lone Star, pardner, and get primed for the house specialty: chicken-fried steak. It's a beauty, a big slab of cubed beef steak, double-dipped, coated with peppery gravy and served with first-rate mashed potatoes, corn and a buttermilk biscuit. The kitchen has sent out more than 775,000 orders over the past 26 years.

19 Coup des Tartes
 4626 N. 16th St., Phoenix.
 602-212-1082, nicetartes.com

Pick out a good bottle from your cellar — this charming BYOB merits the good stuff. Start off with an onion tart with Gruyere and bacon. The main-dish specialty is Moroccan-style lamb shank with pearl couscous, but salmon with smoked pistachio pesto also beckons. And then there are those signature dessert tarts, like the chocolate s'more.

20 Gasper's
 4117 N. 16th St., Phoenix.
 602-265-0003, gasperspizza.com

The transplanted New York Italians behind this spot show off their Big Apple Italian know-how. Make a meal out of such appetizers as carpaccio and toasted ravioli, followed up by veal marsala, chicken parmigiana or osso buco. Pizza is the real deal, too. The Regina is outstanding, topped with prosciutto, arugula, mozzarella and Parmesan.

Coronado District — Seventh Street

- 6. [America's Taco Shop](#)
- 7. Coronado Cafe
- 8. Rice Paper
- 9. Humble Pie
- 10. Main Ingredient Ale House & Cafe



stuffed with nuts and fruit, coated with almond sauce; and the duck breast in tamarind chipotle sauce.

15 La Condesa
 1919 N. 16th St., Phoenix. 602-254-6330, lacondesatacoshop.com

The tacos here are as hefty as they are flavorful. It's hard to pick a favorite: You can make a strong case for the carne asada, black-mole chicken or cochinita pibil. An extensive salsa bar — about a dozen fresh varieties — can also paralyze you with indecision. Chile de arbol, peanut salsa and salsa rabano (horseradish) are among the temptations.

16th Street Corridor — North

16 Rokerij
 6335 N. 16th St., Phoenix. 602-287-8900, burningembersphoenix.com

Atmospheric Rokerij, run by the team behind Richardson's, hits the neighborhood sweet spot. What's the appeal? Small plates like chipotle ribs with dirty rice, bacon-wrapped scallops and steak tartare. Full-size entrees include chicken schnitzel, salt- and pepper-crusted prime rib and pork tenderloin glazed with chile jelly.

including the mixed seafood cocktail, seven-seas stew, crab enchilada and fish Veracruzana. Note to octopus fans: Don't miss the pulpo ranchero.

13 La Frontera
 16th and Van Buren streets (southeast corner), Phoenix

You can't get any more down-home: La Frontera is a truck parked on an empty downtown Phoenix lot. But the great, dirt-cheap tacos, served on corn tortillas with lime and sliced cucumber, will take your mind off the lack of scenery. Among the tasty options are carne asada, al pastor, carnitas, barbacoa, lengua and chicharron.

14 Barrio Cafe
 2814 N. 16th St., Phoenix. 602-636-0240, barriocafe.com

Since 2002, chef Silvana Salcido Esparza has been showing us the difference between Mexican food and Mexican cuisine. The proof? We can point to the astonishing cochinita pibil, a Yucatán specialty; chiles en nogada, poblano peppers

CHARLIE LEIGHT, MICHAEL McNAMARA, JEREMIAH TOLLER



16th Street Corridor — North

- 16. Rokerij
- 17. The Vig Uptown
- 18. Texaz Grill
- 19. Coup des Tartes
- 20. Gasper's

Downtown Phoenix

21 Pizzeria Bianco
 623 E. Adams St.
 (Heritage Square). 602-258-8300,
 pizzeriabianco.com.

Is what's been called the best pizza in America worth a two- or three-hour wait? We true believers think so. Chris Bianco is fanatical about quality, and his blistered wood-oven pizzas reflect his zeal. None is better than the Wiseguy, a heavenly blend of roasted onions, house-smoked mozzarella and fennel sausage.

22 Nobuo at Teeter House
 622 E. Adams St. (Heritage Square). 602-254-0600,
 nobuofukuda.com.

This gem, headed by James Beard Award winner Nobuo Fukuda, is a destination restaurant. Come for his brilliant, multicourse omakase (chef's choice) dinners, or nibble on affordable Japanese tavern fare such as coconut curry grilled lamb, pork belly buns and the knockout okonomiyaki, a Japanese crepe studded with pork and seafood.

23 The Breadfruit
 108 E. Pierce St. 602-267-1266, thebreadfruit.com.

Step out of the desert Southwest and into the tropical isles. This Caribbean oasis carries more than 100 kinds of rum and mixes a mean Kingston Rum Punch. The food is just as beguiling, from the mango fish rolls and jerk-rubbed, rum-glazed diver scallops to the Red Stripe curried prawns and skillet-seared escovitch fish of the day.

24 Sens Asian Tapas & Sake Bar
 705 N. First St. 602-340-9777,
 sensake.com.

This cool, urban spot draws a cool crowd. They're here for the hip, sake-driven cocktail list and expertly crafted fare. Among chef Johnny Chu's don't-miss pan-Asian small plates are fried quail, ginger mint duck salad, lime mint beef and the terrific soup



dumplings that are filled with pork, cabbage and broth. Try to keep them from spurting.

25 Matt's Big Breakfast
 801 N. First St. 602-254-1074, mattsbigbreakfast.com

Some folks do their best work in the morning. The kitchen team at Matt's Big Breakfast certainly does. There's often a line out the door waiting for the from-scratch breakfast fare, like the superb pancakes and Belgian waffles, served with real maple syrup. And the sides — thick-cut bacon, ham, home fries — are highest quality.



Downtown Glendale

26 La Piazza al Forno
 5803 W. Glendale Ave.
 623-847-3301, lapiazzaalforno.com.

Pizza-master Justin LaPiazza is certified by Verace Pizza Napoletana, an Italian association dedicated to preserving authentic Naples pizza traditions. You'll see his skill in the mouthwatering white pizza, topped with homemade mozzarella, ricotta and lots of garlic. Other good eats include lasagna, linguine with clams and Italian almond wine cake.

27 Touch of European Cafe
 7146 N. 57th Drive. 623-847-7119,
 atouchofeuropeancafe.com.

You don't have to be a homesick

Polish expatriate to fall for this charming BYOB spot. You just have to appreciate deliciously hearty, homemade Polish fare, like potato-cheese pierogi, stuffed cabbage, pork goulash and bigos, a stew of smoked kielbasa, noodles and sauerkraut. Finish up with cheese blintzes or flaky pastries called kolaczki.

28 Haus Murphy's
 5739 W. Glendale Ave.
 623-939-2480, hausmurphys.com.

From the tuba and accordion oom-pah-pah entertainment to the rib-sticking fare, this German restaurant whisks you to the homeland. Sausages, sauerbraten, beef roulade and schnitzels are superb, as are the side dishes, like red cabbage, spaetzle and potato salad. A deep list of German brews on tap adds to the festivity.

MICHAEL MCNAMARA

29 Little Saigon
 7016 N. 57th Ave.
 623-939-6136, littlesaigonaz.com.

This cute spot boasts some of the Valley's best Vietnamese dishes. The extensive menu makes it difficult to choose, but you'd be making a mistake if you don't zero in on the Vietnamese crepe called banh xeo, the marinated beef wrapped in grilled grape leaves, and the striking lotus-root salad mixed with pork, shrimp, pickled carrots and jicama.

30 Kiss the Cook
 4915 W. Glendale Ave.
 623-939-4663, kiss-the-cook.com.

It's easier to face the day when you start the morning off at this cheery breakfast place. It's filled with antiques, knickknacks and "How ya doin', hon?" servers. And those servers will bring you a complimentary muffin basket, as well as eye-opening omelets, waffles, French toast and some of the best buttermilk pancakes in town.

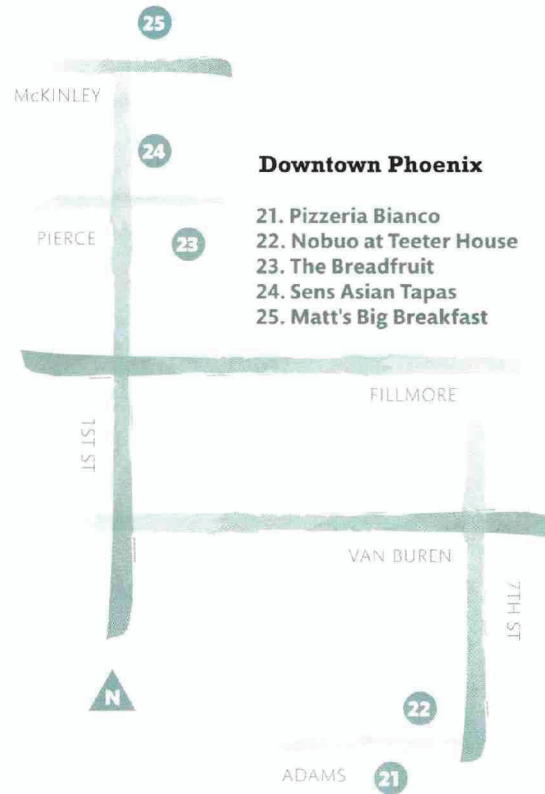
Old Town Scottsdale — Stetson Drive

31 Marcellino Ristorante
 7114 E. Stetson Drive. 480-990-9500, marcellinoreistorante.com.

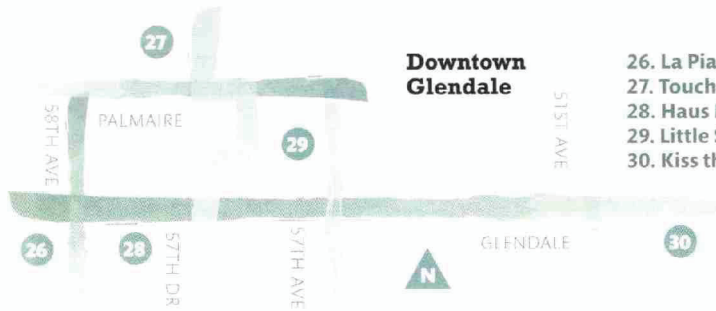
Marvelous as many dishes are, you're here for the stunning pasta. Chef Marcellino Verzino manhandles you with his bold Mediterranean flavors, like rosemary-infused pappardelle with wild-boar ragu. But for sheer lusciousness, nothing tops tortelloni stuffed with truffled filet and vegetables, coated in a lusty tomato sauce.

Downtown Phoenix

- 21. Pizzeria Bianco
- 22. Nobuo at Teeter House
- 23. The Breadfruit
- 24. Sens Asian Tapas
- 25. Matt's Big Breakfast

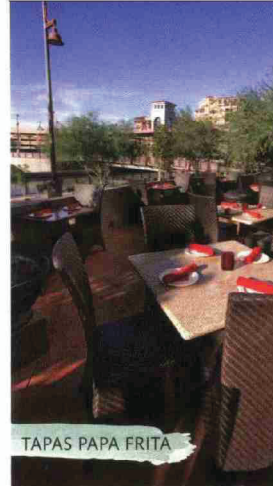


dining NEIGHBORHOOD



Downtown Glendale

- 26. La Piazza al Forno
- 27. Touch of European Cafe
- 28. Haus Murphy's
- 29. Little Saigon
- 30. Kiss the Cook



TAPAS PAPA FRITA



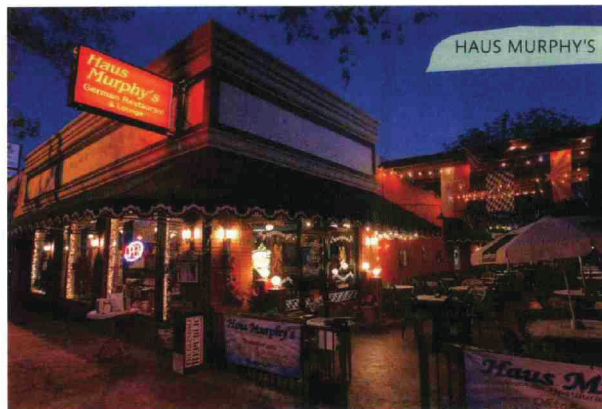
Old Town Scottsdale — Stetson Drive

- 31. Marcellino Ristorante
- 32. FnB
- 33. Kazimierz World Wine Bar
- 34. Lee's Cream Liqueur Ice Cream
- 35. Tapas Papa Frita

32 FnB
 7133 E. Stetson Drive. 480-425-9463, fnbrestaurant.com.
 Chef Charleen Badman is driven by what's fresh and seasonal, and you can confidently let her take the wheel. You might see a summer salad of nectarines, burrata, fennel and pistachios, or rabbit paté with roasted figs. Do try to time a visit to coincide with her spectacular braised leeks with mozzarella, fried egg and mustardy bread crumbs.

33 Kazimierz World Wine Bar
 7137 E. Stetson Drive. 480-946-3004, kazbar.net.
 This grottolike speakeasy — the unmarked entrance is around back — is the place to come for a late-night drink and snack. The best-in-town wine list (courtesy of Cowboy Ciao, its sister restaurant next door) is a big plus. The fare is also noteworthy, especially the flatbread handsomely topped with morels, shallots and Brie.

34 Lee's Cream Liqueur Ice Cream
 7137 E. Stetson Drive. 480-429-5337, leescreamliqueur.com.
 Fat. Sugar. Alcohol. At last, they're all combined in one deliciously refreshing package. That's the magic of Lee's, where premium homemade ice cream is infused with spirits. Look out for the Godfather, a mix of coffee ice cream and scotch. The Chocolate Swirl is swirled with Jack Daniel's. And bring ID — no kidding, you need to be 21.



HAUS MURPHY'S

35 Tapas Papa Frita
 7144 E. Stetson Drive. 480-699-5004, tapaspapafrita.com.
 A big hit during its run in the 1990s, Tapas Papa Frita has been resurrected by Joseph Gutierrez, the original chef/owner. He's still nailing the Spanish small-plate fare, whether it's Basque clams and white asparagus with sherry or chilled Galician seafood salad. There's also top-notch paella, wonderful sangria and a superb Spanish wine list.

course, the wicked sandwiches, including the open-faced pastrami made from Wagyu brisket.

37 The Grind
 3961 E. Camelback Road, Phoenix. 602-954-7463, the grindaz.com.
 This is not your mainstream hamburger joint. The hook here is the 1,000-degree coal-fired grill, which gives the burgers a char and sears in the juices. The Sweet & Spicy is remarkable, lined with candied jalapeños, fried ratatouille and watercress. Get a side of roasted organic vegetables or sweet-potato fries, and sip wine, draft beer or a cocktail.

Arcadia

36 Noca
 3118 E. Camelback Road, Phoenix. 602-956-6622, restaurantnoca.com.
 There's a new chef on board — Matt Taylor. But owner Eliot Wexler will make sure the restaurant retains its commitment to quality ingredients and kitchen craftsmanship. Expect to see the same pristine seafood, homemade pastas and, of

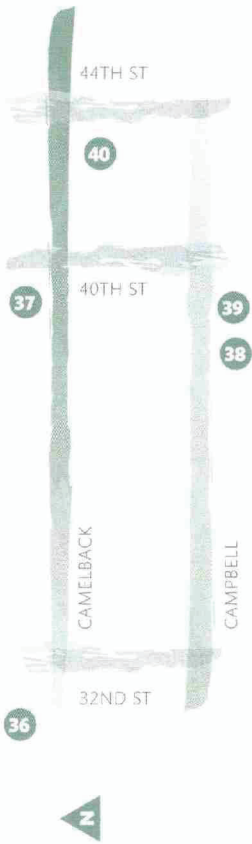
38 Postino Winecafe
 3939 E. Campbell Ave., Phoenix. 602-852-3939, postinowinecafe.com.
 The food is as lively as the setting, especially the best-in-town bruschetta. Among the beauties: prosciutto with figs and mascarpone; smoked salmon

MICHAEL McNAMARA, DAVID KADLUBOWSKI

dining NEIGHBORHOOD

Arcadia

- 36. Noca
- 37. The Grind
- 38. Postino
- 39. La Grande Orange
- 40. Havana Cafe



with pesto; and ricotta, dates and pistachios. But don't overlook sandwiches like the Nine Iron, stuffed with chicken, bacon, burrata and mozzarella. Lots of interesting boutique wines, too.

39 La Grande Orange Pizzeria

4410 N. 40th St.,
 Phoenix. 602-840-7777,
 lagrandeorangepizzeria.com.

Good luck finding a parking spot here — you can even wait for the valet. What's the attraction? The food Americans love, done just right. It could be an orange fennel salad with goat cheese and almonds. Or maybe the scrumptious green chile burger on homemade English muffin. Or the exceptional pizzas. A good beverage list, too.

40 Havana Cafe

4225 E. Camelback Road, Phoenix. 602-952-1991,
 havanacafe-az.com.

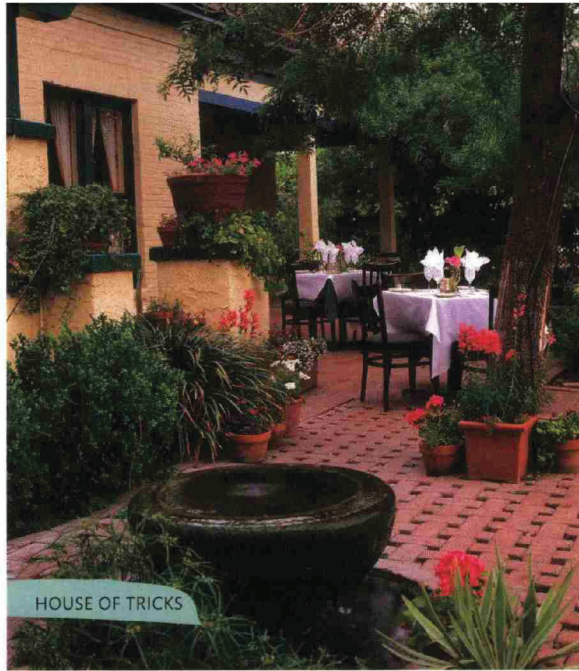
The dishes of Latin America and Spain are chef B. J. Hernandez's canvas, and she paints a tempting picture. You could make a meal out of small plates, like shrimp pancakes, salt cod fritters and empanadas. But then you'd regret not ordering main dishes, like Cuba's ropa vieja or chorizo-stuffed pot roast or one of the Valley's best paellas.

Tempe/ASU

41 Cafe Istanbul & Market

1310 E. Apache Blvd.
 480-731-9499,
 cafeistanbulandmarket.com.

You don't need a magic carpet to whisk you to the Middle East. Cafe Istanbul carries the standards, including hummus, babaghanouj, shawarma, kefta and lemon chicken. But you can get deeper into the culinary culture with dishes like lamb tongue, ful mudammas (mashed fava beans), ma'anek (Lebanese sausage) and lamb tartare.



HOUSE OF TRICKS



NOCA

42 House of Tricks

114 E. Seventh St.
 480-968-1114, houseoftricks.com.

This cozy bungalow boasts one of the Valley's prettiest patios, and the fare keeps pace with the setting. Imaginative starters include balsamic-glazed pork belly and harissa-spiced mussels, while the contemporary main dishes range through ancho-dusted duck breast, short ribs with chipotle-watermelon barbecue sauce and goat cheese lasagna.

44 Cafe Lalibela

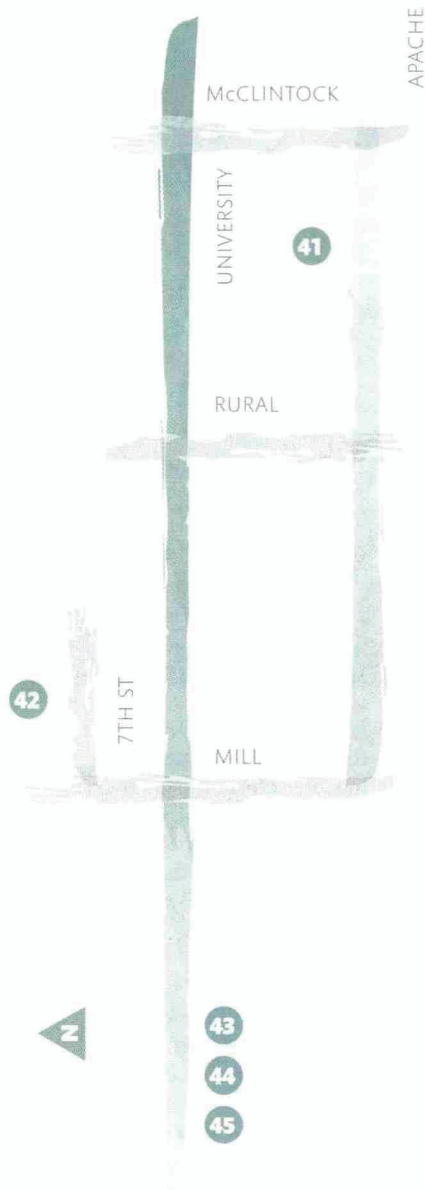
849 W. University Drive.
 480-829-1939, cafelalibela.com.

It doesn't get much funner than Ethiopian cuisine. No silverware — you scoop up everything with injera, a spongy bread. You'll be scooping up various stews seasoned with berbere, a subtle spice blend of chiles, garlic and ginger. Look for lots of vegetarian

HOUSE OF TRICKS: JILL RICHARDS

Tempe/ASU

- 41. Cafe Istanbul & Market**
- 42. House of Tricks**
- 43. Essence Bakery**
- 44. Cafe Lalibela**
- 45. Cornish Pasty Co.**



**Mesa/Chandler
 — Dobson Road
 Corridor**



- 46. Cyclo
- 47. C-Fu Gourmet
- 48. Shimogamo
- 49. Lee's Sandwiches
- 50. Asian Cafe Express

dishes, too, like collard greens, lentils and a tasty mix of cabbage, carrots and potatoes.

45 Cornish Pasty Co.
 960 W. University Drive. 480-894-6261, cornishpastyco.com.

You'll need two hands to hold on to these pasties (pronounced pass-TEES). These English pastry pouches come stuffed traditionally, like the steak and rutabaga; semi-traditionally, like the cottage pie with ground beef, peas, carrots and mashed potatoes; or fancifully, like the chicken tikka masala with green peppers and potato in red curry sauce.

**Mesa/Chandler
 — Dobson Road
 Corridor**

46 Cyclo
 1919 W. Chandler Road, Chandler. 480-963-4490, azeats.com/cyclo.

Sassy Justina Duong, pictured at right, injects her personality into Cyclo's energetic Vietnamese fare. There's plenty of pizzazz in nibbles, like tamarind-glazed short ribs and spicy beef salad. Pho stocked with brisket and sirloin is perfumed with Asian spices. The headliners on the entree list are mint chile chicken and rice vermicelli with pork and sausage.

47 C-Fu Gourmet
 2051 W. Warner Road, Chandler. 480-899-3888, cfugourmet.com.

By day, C-Fu's non-stop carts wheel through the restaurant with premium dim sum, including sticky rice in lotus leaf, cheung fun noodles, stuffed eggplant and every sort of dumpling imaginable. By night, C-Fu is known for its extensive live seafood. Two of the best: crab in black-bean sauce, and whole fish steamed with ginger and scallions.



48 Shimogamo
 2051 W. Warner Road, Chandler. 480-899-7191, shimogamoaz.com.

Why is this place so popular with visiting Japanese? No doubt the pristine sushi and sashimi are a big draw. But the chef is just as comfortable with the rest of the Japanese repertoire, including octopus ceviche, miso-marinated black cod, tempura udon noodle soup, pork katsu and baked lobster and avocado in a mayo-based dynamite sauce.

49 Lee's Sandwiches
 1901 W. Warner Road, Chandler. 480-855-1778, leessandwiches.com.

The French didn't do much good in Vietnam, but they did introduce sandwiches, called banh mi. The ones at Lee's are

fabulous, thanks in large part to the fresh baguettes, baked in-store. The best banh mi are filled with some form of pork — barbecue pork, grilled pork, shredded pork, cured pork, pork roll — set off with tangy pickled vegetables.

50 Asian Cafe Express
 1911 W. Main St., Mesa. 480-668-5910, asiancafeexpress.com.

This restaurant doesn't look like much from the outside (or the inside), but the kitchen more than compensates for the lack of ambience. The menu is huge, and you want to focus on the authentic stuff, like salt and pepper squid, sour vegetable whole fish, hot bean sauce mussels and black mushroom chow fun. Check the wall for specials. ■

NICK DE LA TORRE