

Esquire

<http://www.esquire.com/blogs/food-for-men/best-colorado-restaurants-2011-101211>

HOME / BLOGS / EAT LIKE A MAN

EAT LIKE A MAN

FOOD.
DRINK.
ESQUIRE.

Where to Eat in Colorado Right Now

October 12, 2011 at 3:03PM by [John Mariani](#) | [7 comments](#)



I'd have a hard time deciding whether Wyoming, Montana, or Colorado is the most beautiful state in the West, but when it comes to good restaurants, the latter has more fine ones in Denver alone than in the other two states combined. Add in the glamor of Aspen and Vail, where people will spend big money for everything from Nobu Matsuhisa's sushi to magnums of D.P., and college-dominated places like Boulder (which *Bon Appétit* has called "America's Foodiest Town"), and you've got a whole lot of good eats and drinks to choose from. Here are some of the newest spots around the state where you'll get a distinct feeling for contemporary Rocky Mountain fare.

BB's Kitchen

Aspen

Despite its affluence, and the fact that many denizens need to be seen in the right ski outfit and at the hottest new table, Aspen has a number of homegrown, serious eateries the locals love in and out of season. The newest is a happy, unpretentious, second-floor place named BB's Kitchen (the owner is Bruce Berger), serving breakfast, brunch, lunch, dinner, apres-ski, and lounge food, along with the town's best-priced wine list. You can get a hearty matzo-ball soup with plenty of chunks of roast chicken and vegetables; an "Aspen croque" of griddled toast, smoked turkey, and melted Gruyere; a terrific burger with cheddar and onion; a pulled-pork Benedict with poached eggs, poblano hollandaise, and housemade English muffin. A 12-ounce ribeye with potatoes goes for \$29. Good food for the slopes. And Berger recently added a sleek new adjacent lounge.

ChoLon

Denver

If you like Morimoto in D.C. or Buddakan in Philadelphia, you should love ChoLon in downtown Denver, where chef Lon Symensma, an Iowa boy, is working in the same vein. In fact, he'd been chef at the New York branch of Buddakan as well as at Jean-Georges Vongerichten's Spice Market. He calls ChoLon a "modern Asian Bistro." While I'm not at all sure what makes this huge, sexy restaurant a bistro, I do know Symensma's doing some creative and personalized turns on Asian eats, like pork belly potstickers with ginger mustard; yellow curry mussels with French fries; and spiced donuts with Vietnamese coffee ice cream.

Lou's Food Bar

Denver

Frank Bonanno is already Denver's premier restaurateur with Luca, Mizuna, Bones, and Osteria Marco notched on his belt, and now he goes still more casual with Lou's Food Bar in the Highlands. Crafted from an old biker bar, the simplicity of the decor is outweighed by some serious cooking, from housemade charcuterie and Thai pork and duck on curried potatoes to lobster and shrimp sausage cassoulet and fried chicken with whipped potatoes.

Green Russell

Denver

Another of Frank Bonanno's enterprises, Green Russell is the city's hottest new bar and lounge, which he calls a "chef-driven cocktail joint." Named after a Colorado gold miner and set under Larimer Street, it has a subterranean urban hipness to it, with leather bar stools and banquettes and a speakeasy's sense of retreat. Especially after midnight, it's a place to satisfy the munchies with small plates. The measures and ingredients of the cocktails are taken very seriously.

Casa Tua

Aspen

An offshoot of the private club of the same name in Miami, Casa Tua has a club upstairs and a public dining room downstairs that adds considerable refinement to Aspen's rustic Italian dining scene. Opened by developer Michele "Miky" Grendene and his wife Leticia, Casa Tua is where Ruth's Chris Steak House used to be, now stylishly decorated with changing artwork by major Italian artists. The menu features regional dishes like smoked bacon from Alto Adige wrapped around prawns and served with a white-bean puree; Piemontese ravioli called *agnolotti del plin* with truffle butter and fresh thyme; and Colorado rack of lamb with eggplant-tomato *caponata* and a celery-root puree. Good place to wear the new suede jacket.

Frasca

Boulder

With no fear of contradiction — and with plenty of support from local and national press — I'll declare Frasca one of the very best Italian restaurants in America, actually *the* very best, by default, featuring the food of the region of Friuli, which owner Bobby Stucky and his wife Dinette, along with partner-chef Lachlan McKinnon-Patterson, fell in love with and to which they have committed their always-jammed restaurant. Frasca is not brand-new, but it keeps evolving, with dishes you won't find anywhere else, like gnocchi with green cabbage and Castelmagno cheese; *fagotelli* pasta with chicken livers and rhubarb; and sturgeon with leek, chanterelles, and Italian smoked ham. A master sommelier, Stucky stocks an exceptional wine list, also devoted to Friuli.

Pizzeria Locale

Boulder

Last spring, Frasca's Stucky and Lachlan, along with chef Jordan Wallace, debuted their new labor of love: a Neapolitan-style pizzeria based around a huge, handcrafted oven where they turn out soft-centered, smoky pizzas based on research the owners happily did all over Naples. They offer a baker's dozen of them, including classic margherita, along with one topped with corn, creme fraiche, and prosciutto, and another with buffalo milk mozzarella, pecorino, garlic, rapini, and sausage. There's usually a line out the door, and you'll have a raging appetite from the aromas coming from the kitchen.

Cafe Aion

Boulder

Smack in the middle of Boulder's university area, the casual Cafe Aion is filled at any hour of the day and night with students, professors, and locals who come for everything from Chef Dakota Soifer's inventive tapas to Colorado sweet-potato fries, from a tagine of butternut squash with tomatoes, chickpeas, and prunes to a harissa-laced half-chicken with potatoes and greens. There's a happy-hour menu with five-dollar cocktails and fried pork *chiccarones* with smoked paprika and pork sliders with spiced yogurt.

PLUS: *More John Mariani on Esquire's Eat Like a Man Blog and John Mariani's Official Site*