

Six restaurants in Pasadena to try right now

By **JENN HARRIS**

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Pasadena may best be known as that little town with the Rose Parade and the big college bowl game. And isn't it where the little old lady in that Jan and Dean song is from? However, as far as dining is concerned, it's always been on the conservative side. But with a recent influx of eclectic chefs and a growing number of food enthusiasts, the city is building its own culinary buzz. You can eat as adventurously as you want, with goose intestine at the new Little Sheep in Old Town, and pig head, ears, tongue and feet sausage at Picnik down the street. Or you can just enjoy a delicious morning break with a simple but perfect pastry and coffee at Lavender & Honey. The city has a fresh crop of restaurants contributing to its vibrant, unique personality. Here's a look at some of the city's newest reasons to take the 110 Freeway north until it ends.

AltaEats: With no outdoor signage, you may unknowingly pass by this petite eatery at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains. But even without a sign out front, it can be hard to snag a table with chef and co-owner Paul Ragan's highly curated menu of house paté, confit and whatever is in season. What could be the smallest menu in the city changes frequently, with Ragan drawing inspiration from the time he spent working and living in Spain. Dishes include a "Lil Gem" Caesar-type salad with white anchovies, a duck hash with apricot-chile jam and a supple sous-vide duck egg, and if you're lucky, paella. The restaurant is also BYOB, with no corkage fee. And on Sundays, Ragan prepares \$45 "roastie" meals for four to go, with past items including *coq au vin*, pork adobo and smoked tri tip. *1860 N. Allen Ave., Pasadena, (626) 794-1162, www.altaeats.com.*

Eatery and Bacchus Kitchen, both by Claud & Co: Claud Beltran's catering-company-turned-restaurant Eatery is open only Tuesday through Friday so the chef and his team can still cater events on the weekends. A meal in this small space feels more like a dinner party with new friends, and there's always something different on the menu. One month it's "Pirates of the Caribbean" with *arroz frito con lechon*, and another, he's delving into Southern comfort food with gumbo and fried green tomatoes. Beltran has also taken over the former Lebanese Kitchen space on Washington Boulevard and plans to open Bacchus Kitchen in January, a 40-seat neighborhood spot Beltran says will have simple food done well and great wine. Plan on seeing a burger and fries, prime steaks, cheese and charcuterie, posole and plenty of Grenache, the chef's favorite grape. *488 N. Allen Ave., Pasadena, (626) 688-7256, www.eateryonallen.com.*

Picnik: Sure, it's sausages and beer, but Eddie Ruiz of Corazon y Miel and Electric City Butcher's Michael Puglisi have created a hog heaven, complete with pork from Heluka-raised pigs and condiment-stocked picnic tables. This is where you can get plump house-made sausages served with the bright zing of sauerkraut on baguettes slathered with house-roasted garlic butter. And when the sun is shining on the packed patio, is there a better place to enjoy a full list of craft beers to pair with your lamb fatback-laden merguez sausages or "three-bean stew with nine hog trimmings"? *168 W. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena, (626) 793-8008, www.picnikpasadena.com.*

Lavender & Honey Espresso Bar: Mornings at this new boutique coffee house and cafe are spent with a decorated foam-topped cappuccino in one hand and a slice of freshly baked bread sticky with lavender honey in the other. The baristas are brewing Klatch coffee, and if you're in the mood for something sweet, there's a display case full of Berolina bakery pastries. But this isn't just a morning spot. You can order a classic Italian cold cut sandwich or roast beef with sriracha, and their toasts come topped with mashed avocado and red jalapeños or honey and bananas. *1383 E. Washington Blvd., Pasadena, (626) 529-5571, www.lavenderandhoneyespresso.com.*

Little Sheep Mongolian Hot Pot: A location of the popular hot pot chain in China opened in Old Town earlier this summer. It's the same concept as shabu-shabu, where meat, vegetables and noodles are dipped into hot liquid to cook, but Little Sheep's steaming pots are full of aromatic broths peppered with gogi berries, black cardamom pods, ginseng and herbs. For those who can handle spice, you can have your broth turned a deep red with mala chile oil for that mouth-numbing sensation you get with Sichuan peppercorns. Available meats include the standard chicken and beef along with pork blood and pork intestine, or you can order seafood with fish balls and head-on shrimp. And if you'd like to create your own flavor profile, there's an extensive condiment bar with chiles, garlic, vinegar, fermented bean paste and more. *45 S. Fair Oaks Ave., Pasadena, (626) 229-0888, www.littlesheephotpot.com.*

Union: Bruce Kalman likes to switch up his menu frequently to keep up with the local farmers market offerings. He takes his produce seriously, going as far as quoting farm-to-table queen Alice Waters and posting farmers market schedules on a wall in his dining room. But you can always bet on some form of guanciale and Kalman's famous porchetta for dinner. The former Westside chef (the Churchill and the Misfit) is also passionate about pasta, turning out a selection of house-made spaghetti, tagliatelle and more covered in pork ragu or arugula pesto. And if you're looking for a place to take someone special, this dimly lighted spot has quickly become a favorite destination for dates. *27 E. Union St., Pasadena, (626) 795-5841, www.unionpasadena.com.*

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