

## Columbus Dispatch, The (OH)

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### THE TOP 20

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#### FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Difficult economic conditions have taken their toll on the dining industry. According to the National Restaurant Association, restaurants are reporting lower sales for the seventh time in the past nine months -- citing the sluggish economy as their No. 1 challenge.

Despite these trying times, the Columbus culinary scene remains competitive.

Yet there are some notable changes to the Top 20 listing since last year's Dining Guide:

\* Perhaps the best-known chef in town, Hartmut Handke, has sold **Handke's** Cuisine, long a mainstay of The Dispatch's Top 10. The new owners, Tim and Lorie Phalen, are in charge of the operation, which will be assayed in due course.

\* At Barnum & Tibbetts Prime Kitchen & Wine Bar (now known as B&T), two of the partners (including the chef) have been bought out by the third, and a new chef is introducing a lower-priced menu, which also will be reviewed soon.

\* The new chef-owner of L'Antibes, Matthew Litzinger, is planning to introduce a totally revamped menu later this month; that, along with significant changes in the wine list, will merit reinspection.

Those listing changes aside, several constants remain: Like any other restaurant rating, this list is subjective. The primary criterion is quality of the food. Value, the surroundings and the level of service also are taken into consideration -- as are other factors, such as the willingness to take reservations, noise level, menu variety and attention to details (quality of the bread, olive oil and butter, for example).

The "Top 10" restaurants represent the best in Columbus. The second 10 -- called "the Next Tier" -- also are deserving of mention. Both lists are presented alphabetically.

Review visits to restaurants are unannounced. Meals are paid for in full and reimbursed by The Dispatch. The selection of restaurants to be reviewed is entirely at my discretion and is not influenced, directly or indirectly, by The Dispatch.

### THE TOP 10

Barcelona

263 E. WHITTIER ST., GERMAN VILLAGE

614-443-3699

reservations recommended

[www.barcelonacolumbus.com](http://www.barcelonacolumbus.com)

After more than a decade of turning out high-quality cuisine, Barcelona is still going strong under owner Scott Heimlich, general manager Michael Singer and executive chef Paul Yow, who is one of the most consistently inspired chefs around.

In the usually busy -- and sometimes loud -- large, restored Victorian space (red-brick walls, old-wood floors, tin ceiling) and the unsurpassed, smoke-free outdoor garden seating, Yow and his staff serve a weekly changing lineup of the best in meats, seafood and produce.

Unlike most Spanish-influenced menus, Yow's goes far beyond many small-plate offerings.

Consider the new beet salad, which is both beautiful and delicious.

And the large plates explore much more than the mainstays of saffron, olive oil, garlic and peppers. The treatment of sea scallops is a perfect harmony of chili, sweet cream, ground dates, three types of mushroom, bacon and lima beans. And the kitchen will typically turn out at least three kinds of authentic paella each week.

Even the dessert list can reflect Spanish influences (a top-rate flan, or a half-pineapple given a caramelized coating and Catalan custard sauce).

The wine list continues to include an ever-greater number of food-friendly choices -- but be alert for high markups.

Serving lunch Monday through Friday, dinner daily; off-street and valet parking.

Bar of Modern Art

583 E. BROAD ST., DOWNTOWN

614-233-3000

reservations recommended

[www.barofmodernart.com](http://www.barofmodernart.com)

The main dining area -- now named the Loft -- is a semicircle overlooking a ground-floor stage and is open mostly on weekends and other busy evenings. Above the stage is a large movie screen showing classic films. Subtitles help to keep the sound level low.

Truly a multimedia venue, BOMA features original art in the various dining rooms and seven bars of this former Baptist church Downtown.

On less-busy days, the emphasis is on the newly expanded patio seating in front of the building; at those times, the indoor alternative is a smaller dining room downstairs.

Chef Brian Parker (formerly of M restaurant) creates American-eclectic cuisine in a number of striking presentations, from the soups (a cool, light puree of strawberries and sparkling wine during warm weather) to the main courses (Kurobuta pork loin with a puree of white beans and garlic; farm-sourced,

lean duck breast with a top-notch wine sauce).

Parker's desserts are equally noteworthy.

Current highlights include fresh blueberries and blueberry syrup within layers of puff pastry, and an offbeat creamsicle creme brulee that will bring back memories.

Serving dinner Wednesday through Saturday; on-street, off-street and valet parking.

DeepWood

511 N. HIGH ST., SHORT NORTH

614-221-5602

reservations recommended

[www.deepwoodrestaurant.com](http://www.deepwoodrestaurant.com)

The team of general manager Amber Herron and chef Brian Pawlak has fielded one of the best new restaurants in the Columbus area, turning the former Abbracci space into a destination.

Remodeled into two pleasantly divided areas replete with various woods, DeepWood is comfortable, with no feeling of crowding or excess noise.

Pawlak's New American menu is full of pleasant twists, from soups (cold ginger and peach with slivers of lobster) and first courses (tender gnocchi imaginatively and lightly creamed with vanilla and saffron) to a variety of main dishes (fresh fish over potato-and-cabbage hash; Vermont lamb chops with savory bread pudding).

Desserts get plenty of attention, from a wonderfully modern cheesecake to blueberry bread pudding with house-made blueberry-maple ice cream.

DeepWood's wine list has many excellent selections at more reasonable prices than most.

Serving lunch Tuesday through Friday, dinner Monday through Saturday; on-street and valet parking.

Dragonfly Neo-V Cuisine

247 KING AVE., VICTORIAN VILLAGE

614-298-9986

reservations recommended

[www.dragonflyneov.com](http://www.dragonflyneov.com)

Chef-owner Magdiale Wolmark applies classical cooking techniques of the highest standards to vegan dishes.

The seasonal menu includes concepts such as cassoulet that can change daily, depending on ingredients, and features more interesting and delicious mushrooms and vegetables than any other local restaurant (a recent 'shrooms Provencal arranges a saute of a half-dozen exotic types on whole-grain amaranth in an intensely colored and flavored vegetable reduction).

The pizza of the day is always a sure bet, with nutty-tasting sauces taking the place of cheese. The forcefully fruity sorbets used on many of the excellent desserts will make you lose desire for conventional ice cream.

An interesting wine list favors organic and unsulfured wines. During good weather, consider the chef's table and other outside seating.

An on-site retail bakery and shop offers locally grown produce, and the kitchen garden supplies herbs and greens.

Serving dinner Tuesday through Saturday, brunch Saturday; on-street parking.

Kihachi Japanese Restaurant

2667 FEDERATED BLVD., NORTHWEST SIDE

614-764-9040

reservations recommended

Kihachi is no ordinary Japanese restaurant. Chef-owner Ryuji "Mike" Kimura is passionate about fresh ingredients of the highest quality, and this translates into such high standards that many diners rate it the best restaurant, period.

Kimura's influence is particularly noteworthy on the list of appetizers, which changes daily depending on his discoveries in the markets he frequents. Written entirely in Japanese, the appetizer menu is cheerfully translated by the two

English-capable servers.

When an ingredient meets Kimura's demanding standards, he's liable to prepare it raw and present it simply, with perhaps just salt or soy dipping sauce (as with a perfect maitake mushroom).

Or it might be made into one of his delicate sushi offerings (spectacularly fresh mackerel); marinated and served cold (gobo or burdock root); flash-fried (octopus); or lightly cooked and presented in a mustard emulsion (sea clam). Be prepared to pay market price.

So concentrate on appetizers before turning what's left of your appetite to the printed menu's main dishes. Or put yourself entirely in Kimura's hands by ordering a multicourse omakase dinner when making reservations.

Serving dinner Monday through Saturday; ample parking.

Lindey's

169 E. BECK ST., GERMAN VILLAGE

614-228-4343

reservations recommended

[www.lindeys.com](http://www.lindeys.com)

The original destination restaurant in German Village seems better than ever.

The homey feel of some of the dining areas (it's a converted residence) provides an appealing contrast with the high-energy bar in the main dining room.

Chef Jon O'Carroll's kitchen puts a sparkle on much of the food, from properly dressed salads (spinach enhanced with a warm cake of gently sauteed goat cheese) to imaginative combinations (seared walleye served with a side of rice-barley pilaf and mango beurre blanc).

Classics get a new twist, such as macaroni and cheese lightened with goat cheese and cheddar and mixed with ham and peas. Substance reigns supreme when it comes to the tarte Tatin, which has more apples than even the tallest pie.

Serving lunch and dinner daily, brunch Saturday and Sunday; valet parking, limited on-street parking.

The Refectory

1092 BETHEL RD., NORTHWEST SIDE

614-451-9774

reservations strongly recommended

[www.therefectoryrestaurant.com](http://www.therefectoryrestaurant.com)

The Refectory is Columbus' premier French restaurant.

Executive chef Richard Blondin applies haute-cuisine touches (exquisite presentations, elaborate garnishes and refined sauces) to everything from classics (whole English sole) to modern adaptations (organic salmon with Szechwan peppercorns).

The list of hot-and-cold appetizers alone sets the Refectory apart.

But the pursuit of excellence carries all the way through to the dessert list. Current standouts include the passionate cake (coconut dacquoise with passion-fruit mousse and candied pineapple) and house-made sorbets with fresh fruit.

Presentation is refined without being overwrought.

The converted old brick church provides an upscale, romantic, but not stiff, setting; the well-staffed service is as accomplished as the cooking; and the wine cellar deserves special mention.

Longtime sommelier Jeff Elasky is back, presiding over more than 20,000 bottles, featuring great vintage depth from dozens of producers of Bordeaux, California cabernet sauvignons and Burgundies that consistently win world-class awards from leading wine publications.

The already formidable list has been expanding, and some of the prices -- which, considering the investment in stocking, aging and presenting such wines in top-rate wine glasses, have always been fair -- have been lowered.

Serving dinner Monday through Saturday; ample parking.

Rigsby's Kitchen

698 N. HIGH ST., SHORT NORTH

614-461-7888

reservations recommended

[www.rigsbyskitchen.com](http://www.rigsbyskitchen.com)

Kent Rigsby's menu is presented in the Italian fashion, with primi (consistently excellent pastas, gnocchi and risottos), secondi (fresh fish and meats done mostly in Mediterranean styles), and contorni (vegetable sides).

A pioneer in provisioning, Rigsby has diverse sources for meats (Jamison Farm lamb loin with porcini crust; Sweet Meadows pork scallops cooked with pancetta, olives, capers and white wine).

He's also a master at preparing long-time Italian favorites such as lasagna with a true Bolognese sauce. There is also a small menu of Venetian-style appetizers.

The new dessert list is almost entirely house-made and includes unusual offerings such as budino, a type of butterscotch creme brulee that tastes like it sounds, without being too sweet.

The black-and-white setting is dramatic, and patrons can rely on finding the best house-made sourdough in town.

Serving lunch and dinner Monday through Saturday; on-street and valet parking.

Rosendales

793 N. HIGH ST., SHORT NORTH

614-298-1601

reservations recommended

[www.rosendales.com](http://www.rosendales.com)

Spread over two floors of the former Winders Chevrolet building, Rosendales is urban chic. The high-energy setting is the showcase for the upscale cuisine from Richard Rosendale, an up-and-coming chef

who already participates in big-league cooking competitions (he's a semifinalist in the ongoing Bocuse d'Or).

Rosendale and his chef de cuisine, Bryan Skelding, preside over a regular menu that changes four times a year; a five-course set menu that changes monthly; and an eight-course tasting menu that changes daily, using both classical and ultramodern techniques.

Using familiar ingredients, the kitchen makes its mark through imaginative pairings (the foie gras-and-leek puree on the scallops Rossini has become a favorite menu item; Angus short ribs are slow-cooked and presented with Parmesan tapioca and freshly herbed vegetables).

The culinary imagination doesn't stop short of the dessert list, where you can find homespun-sounding items done to the highest standards (a moderately sweet, satisfying, yet not heavy, cheesecake topped with scoops of refreshing kumquat sorbet).

Sommelier Chris Dillman's large wine list offers one of the best collections of food-friendly, high-quality wines around, with unusual attention paid to half-bottles.

Serving dinner Monday through Saturday; on-street and valet parking.

The Worthington Inn

649 HIGH ST., WORTHINGTON

614-885-2600

reservations recommended

[www.worthingtoninn.com](http://www.worthingtoninn.com)

Chef Thomas Smith has a passion for high-quality ingredients that has led him to find increasingly more Ohio-based suppliers of mostly organic meats and produce. He also has a garden to raise all of his restaurant's herbs.

Although the setting is a beautifully restored, Federal-period inn, the cooking is modern. Consider Maine lobster potpie and beef short ribs braised with rosemary-scented Chianti, accompanied by goat cheese polenta from the new fall menu.

Smith continues to make his own sorbets and ice creams (even the melon sorbet, normally an extremely low-key item, is full of flavor), and they compete for attention with a large crepe filled with fresh fruit.

The wine list has been expanding the past few years, with commendable results. A few of the selections are bargains.

Serving lunch and dinner Monday through Saturday, brunch Sunday; on-street and off-street parking.

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THE NEXT TIER

## BLACK CREEK BISTRO

53 PARSONS AVE.,

OLDE TOWNE EAST

614-246-9662

reservations recommended

[www.blackcreekbistro.com](http://www.blackcreekbistro.com)

Owner Kent Peters grows and raises an increasingly large percentage of the produce and meats served at this funky, near-Downtown establishment with its Shakerlike decor.

Geoff Atkinson is in charge of the kitchen, which can produce attractions such as gnocchi and shredded duck with a smoky cream, buttermilk-marinated chicken, and fresh oysters deep-fried and served over Irish bread with a malty reduction of Guinness.

Keep in mind that, as with all restaurants that emphasize local sourcing, the food selections can change frequently.

The wine list is small but covers several types of wines and offers reasonably priced selections.

Serving lunch Monday through Friday, dinner

Monday through Saturday; on-street and valet parking.

## DOC HENDERSON'S RESTAURANT

318 E. 5th ST., MARYSVILLE

937-642-6661

reservations recommended

[www.dochendersonsrestaurant.com](http://www.dochendersonsrestaurant.com)

This beautifully restored Victorian-era home features several elegant dining rooms quiet enough for conversation.

Chef Jeff Bentley's menu

is an intriguing mix of traditional dishes (fried green tomatoes; grilled beef

tenderloin) and eclectically modern American offerings (jerk shrimp; almond-crusted scallops), with crossovers thrown in (grilled meatloaf; pancetta-wrapped pork loin).

What counts is the depth of excellence including the variety of appetizers, each treatment of potato and



the house-made desserts (daily cheesecake specials and sorbets).

The service is friendly and knowledgeable, and the wine list has been chosen with care and features some of the lowest markups around.

Serving lunch and dinner Monday through Saturday, brunch Sunday; ample off-street parking.

HUNAN LION

2000 BETHEL RD.,

NORTHWEST SIDE

614-459-3933

reservations recommended

Hunan Lion's interior is elegant, quiet, well-lighted and spacious without feeling cavernous.

Owner Jason Chang's Thai heritage is reflected in the superbly prepared Thai

offerings. Highlights include the curry dishes -- green (scallops and shrimp in a light but flavorful sauce); yellow; and red (duck breast with bamboo shoots) -- not because of inherently superior recipes, but because of the commitment to preparing the complex curry seasonings on-site, from scratch. They have a depth of flavor that shows just how world-class Thai cuisine can be.

But the Thai list is just one page of the large menu, which is mostly devoted to equally well-prepared Hunan, Szechwan and Cantonese dishes, such as the bone-in half-duck cooked crisp with five-spice seasoning.

The wine list is comparatively large.

Serving lunch and dinner daily; ample parking.

LUCE

3499 MARKET ST., POWELL

740-881-4600

reservations recommended

[www.lucecafe.com](http://www.lucecafe.com)

The new owners -- chef Alex Rodriguez and his wife, Kelly -- have raised the standards even higher at this fine establishment, which evokes the look and feel of an Italian cantina and wine bar.

The wine list features many fine-quality, food-friendly wines.

Among the selection of small and large plates consider specials such as the exquisite veal tortellacci as well as the char-grilled scallops over a green risotto and an updated version of eggplant Parmesan from the regular menu.

The updated tiramisu and the panna cotta are also original; but the dessert list includes classics such as apple crostada.

Serving lunch and dinner Tuesday through Saturday, dinner Sunday; ample parking.

M

2 MIRANOVA PLACE, MIRANOVA CORPORATE TOWER, DOWNTOWN

614-629-0000

reservations recommended

[www.matmiranova.com](http://www.matmiranova.com)

Chef Sonny Pache's menu is mostly updated American dishes and steaks, commendably showcasing heartland ingredients, including elegantly sauteed Amish chicken served over Ohio-grown root vegetables, and veal loin with a classic meat-stock reduction, shiitake-flavored.

The elaborate decor, like the menu, has stood the test of time. Expect some lighting changes throughout the evening.

The dessert list favors updated Americana with coffee and doughnuts, a root-beer float and cake and ice cream.

The wine list is huge, not inexpensive and covers an immense range of the wine world.

Serving dinner Monday through Saturday; valet parking.

SCALI RISTORANTE

1903 RT. 256 (AT LIVINGSTON AVENUE), REYNOLDSBURG

614-759-7764

reservations recommended

[www.scaliristorante.com](http://www.scaliristorante.com)

Frank Scali's huge, open kitchen looks out onto a simply decorated, pleasant dining room, to which it sends steaming platters of both red-sauced Italian-American food and the less common, rustic offerings of his native Calabria.

Although the red-sauce offerings are noteworthy (his father's homemade ravioli), it's Scali's daily inspirations that lure patrons to this Reynoldsburg gem. (Consider eggplant rotolini; limoncello shrimp risotto prepared in a shrimp broth; or pasta shells stuffed with sausage, porcini mushrooms and cheese

and finished with a tomato-basil sauce.)

Scali also has put together a superior list of Italian wines at fairer-than-normal prices that includes an unusually broad selection of Chianti Classico along with rarities such as a Lagrein from northern Italy.

The restaurant is a family affair -- Frank's wife manages the dining room, his father makes the pastas and his mother visits tables when she's not baking bread.

Serving lunch Thursday and Friday, dinner Tuesday through Saturday; ample parking.

## SPAGIO

1295 GRANDVIEW AVE., GRANDVIEW HEIGHTS

614-486-1114

reservations recommended

[www.spagio.com](http://www.spagio.com)

Few restaurants would offer such a varied palette of dishes, from comfort food (Mother Seifert's meatloaf) to up-to-the-minute trends (napoleon of sliced beets sandwiching whipped goat cheese), and do them so well, avoiding excess fat, sugar and salt.

Owner-chef Hubert Seifert's kitchen, where he is assisted by sous-chefs Felipe Saavedra and Christine Remley, is at a peak of its 29-year history.

Upcoming highlights include oyster stew, Alsatian choucroute garni and a terrific selection of house-made, filled pastas, such as butternut squash tortellacci. And don't overlook the designer pizzas.

The fairly large wine list includes a nice number of food-friendly selections (although not at friendly markups).

Serving lunch and dinner Tuesday through Sunday, brunch Saturday and Sunday; off-street and on-street parking.

## THE TOP STEAK HOUSE

2891 E. MAIN ST., EAST SIDE

614-231-8238

reservations recommended

[www.thetopsteakhouse.com](http://www.thetopsteakhouse.com)

Despite its 50-plus years in business, the Top has been under only three ownerships. A relative of current owners Craig Hoover, Matt Schoedinger and Jean Adkins -- Denver Adkins -- is executive chef of this fully renovated 1950s steakhouse, complete with piano bar and the copper- and leather-topped regular bar.

His kitchen still turns out the best values in high-end steaks, avoiding the irritating and expensive a la carte system: You don't have to pay extra for a potato or a salad, and the steaks and chops are at least as good as the super-expensive ones elsewhere.

Given the restaurant's long history of success, menu tweaks are few and cautious (adding snails and oysters Rockefeller to the appetizer lineup). But daily specials supplement longtime favorites, the wine list has been expanded and reservations are now accepted.

Soon to come to the menu are house-made desserts.

Serving dinner daily; off-street parking.

### TUCCI'S WOOD-FIRED BISTRO

35 N. HIGH ST., DUBLIN

614-792-3466

reservations recommended

[www.hdrestaurants.com](http://www.hdrestaurants.com)

Executive chef Jeff Headley -- who will be transitioning from Tucci's to his own place in the Short North -- has created a high-energy kitchen that produces delicious twists on classic dishes (risotto that combines the sage and prosciutto elements of saltimbocca) along with Euro-fusions (delicate parsleyed gnocchi accompanying roast rack of lamb).

It's all served by a well-trained staff in the renovated decor of this unpretentious Olde Dublin restaurant.

Patrons can choose from one of the lowest-priced wine lists around.

Serving dinner Monday through Saturday; on-street parking and valet service Tuesday through Saturday.

### Z CUCINA DI SPIRITO

1368 GRANDVIEW AVE., GRANDVIEW HEIGHTS AREA

614-486-9200

reservations recommended

[www.zcucina.com](http://www.zcucina.com)

The replacement of executive chef Brian Pawlak (now at DeepWood) with David Gade has been flawless (the two worked together for more than six months).

Gade's menu continues the eclectic Italian and American offerings, along with the tradition of using different garnishes on different dishes (polenta red-hued with sweet pepper paired with grilled veal chop; rosemary-roasted potatoes and heirloom tomato salad with seared scallops).

Gade's originality is reflected in desserts as well -- making panettone into a light "bread" pudding and producing a tarte Tatin with fresh peaches.

Voile and other fabrics divide this high-ceilinged space into comfortable dining rooms that aren't too noisy (although still lively).

The nice wine selection is marred only by high prices.

Serving dinner Monday through Saturday; on-street and valet parking.

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