

THE REAL-LIFE GUIDE TO FAMILY DINNER P.76

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THE **20 MOST**
IMPORTANT
RESTAURANTS
IN AMERICA

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Bartender
extraordinaire
Anna Wallace
of Seattle's *The
Walrus and the
Carpenter*



the
20

MOST IMPORTANT RESTAURANTS

IN AMERICA

No, we're not talking the fanciest, trendiest, or even the ones with the most stars. These are the places that define how we eat out: They're the fearless spots that drive chefs to innovate, restaurateurs to imitate, and the rest of us to line up. In short, these are the restaurants that matter—**right now**

BY ANDREW KNOWLTON, THE BA FOODIST

1

MOMOFUKU

NYC AND POINTS BEYOND

The Pork Bun that Launched a Thousand Imitators

David Chang wasn't the first to transform brussels sprouts from a side to a star. He wasn't a pioneer when it came to playing any music he wanted, and loudly. Backless chairs and no tablecloths were nothing new. And his world-renowned pork buns? Chang admits he ripped those off. But Michael Jordan wasn't the first guy to dunk, either.

What Chang did was put it all together and turn a tiny East Village storefront into the most important restaurant brand of the past decade—on his own terms. Momofuku is fun, unexpected, and full of attitude (too bad if you want something served “on the side”). The food avoids easy categories, and it is always evolving. Pork buns and ramen led to *bo ssâm*, *crudo*, and Fuji apple kimchi with jowl bacon, each dish addictive and, above all, on the leading edge of where food was—and is—going. Chang's empire,



FROM LEFT: Momofuku mastermind David Chang, likely contemplating the next city his pork bun empire will conquer. The menu at Momofuku Ssâm Bar is always evolving—the whole boneless porgy is a must order this winter.

which has expanded to include Noodle Bar, Ssâm Bar, Ko, Milk Bar, Mâ Pêche, and Booker and Dax, plus spots in Sydney and Toronto, has changed our dining culture for good (and for the better). I know because I see it—and taste it—every time I eat out.

For a video on the Momofuku revolution, download our tablet app: bonappetit.com/go/tablet

2 THE RESTAURANT AT MEADOWOOD

NAPA, CA

A Chef at the Very Top of His Game

I wasn't around when Alice Waters started the locavore revolution at Chez Panisse or when Thomas Keller gave

American fine dining an identity at The French Laundry. But I did eat Christopher Kostow's food in 2012. Like other modern chefs, he has a love affair with vegetables, many of which come from Meadowood's garden. A plate of salt-baked rutabaga is paired with woody matsutake mushrooms, goat's milk, maple, and shaved white truffles. But these aren't proverbial “figs on a plate.” Kostow's

elegant dishes arrive fresh from a precision dance routine with tweezers. And while the kitchen may work Momofuku-loose (is that Rick James on the speakers?), there's nothing dressed down about the experience. From the pressed white tablecloths to the artisanal tableware, everything reminds you that this will be a special meal. To see a chef at the peak of his powers, eat here now.

Reviving Southern Food, One Ingredient at a Time

3 HUSK CHARLESTON, SC

“The secret to delicious food is good dirt and plant varieties.” That's chef Sean Brock's mantra, and at Husk, the proof is in the (heirloom corn) pudding. Brock is also an evangelist for the Southern pantry. Everything he serves in this elegant 19th-century mansion comes from below the Mason-Dixon line, including many rare fruits and vegetables he cultivates himself. Here are a few of his staples.



Benne

The seed was almost lost in the early 1900s. Ground into a flour, it is the key to Southern dishes like brown oyster stew and sweet benne wafers.



James Island Red Corn

The first plant Brock grew as a Southern rare-seed saver (and the one tattooed on his arm). Its crimson kernels produce rich-tasting grits.



Honey Drip Sorghum

Juice pressed from the stalks of this plant is reduced to a molasses-like syrup (great over biscuits) and fermented to make tangy vinegars.



Greasy Beans

Full of umami-rich glutamic acid, these fat, slick Appalachian beans are meaty, delicious, and ideal for canning or cooking with a big piece of pork.