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THE FOOD ISSUE

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GIADA DE LAURENTIIS

COMFORT LEVEL

Cozy Up to these Delectable Departures from Traditional Comfort Food at San Diego's Newer "It" Eateries

Calories, shmalories. The weather is cooler, times are tougher and money is tighter. What better excuse to make that waistline feel a bit tighter as well? After some painstaking "field research," 944 rounded up the most popular comfort food items on the menu at San Diego's most-buzzed-about newer eateries. A departure from the usual mac 'n' cheese and mashed potatoes, these indulgent dishes are the culinary equivalent of cozying up fireside outfitted in one of those "as seen on TV" Snuggles. They're that good.



The Spot: Lefty's Chicago Pizzeria, Mission Hills

The Dish: The Stuffed Pizza (we're talking a hefty three pounds of Wisconsin mozzarella!)

Comfort Level: Insane. The North Park joint is legendary, but this newer location has mouths drooling across Mission Hills.



The Spot: Wolfy's Place, East Village

The Dish: Make that "dishes," plural. Here, it's a tie between the Hot Dog Taco, Italian Beef sandwich and Cheese Steak sandwich.

Comfort Level: Heavy, but worth every cheesy, beefy bite. This new Chicago-style eatery offers the best of the Windy City, minus the actual wind.



The Spot: Cucina Urbana, Bankers Hill

The Dish: Short Rib Pappardelle

Comfort Level: This decadent dish is pretty friggin' comforting. Tender chunks of short rib are laced with carrots, parmesan and mushrooms — all bedded in hearty pasta ribbons. People can't get enough.



The Spot: Station Tavern & Burgers, South Park

The Dish: Sweet Potato Fries

Comfort Level: Crispy, fried comfort perfection. These bad boys are served with a wickedly addictive paprika aioli, all for a whopping ... \$3.50? Now that's a deal.



The Spot: True North, North Park

The Dish: Tater Tots

Comfort Level: Tater-tastic. I've said it before and I'll say it again: Tater tots are the new mac 'n' cheese AND the new parm-truffled frites. And True North does 'em right.



Photo by Amy K. Fellows

Joe Magnanelli

Executive Chef, Cucina Urbana
505 Laurel Street, San Diego
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Cucina Urbana is hands-down the most buzzed-about restaurant in San Diego at the moment. The new eatery is a 180-degree rebirth of a space that once housed the stuffy and pricey Laurel, complete with a funky Italian farmhouse-meets-urban chic décor, retail wine shop and nothing on the menu more than \$20. But it's Joe Magnanelli's food alone — fresh, California-inspired Italian cuisine with playful twists — that packs the house nightly. Previously heading the kitchen at Laurel, and before that, Chive, Magnanelli has hit a near-perfect stride with his cooking at Cucina Urbana — the latest brainchild of Tracy Borkum's Urban Kitchen Group.

944: What's been your most interesting diner request?

JOE MAGNANELLI: We had a request by a person who wanted us to separate their food on the plate so nothing was touching. And they wanted it in alphabetical order. Weird!

944: Where's food moving and what are some current trends?

JM: Smaller, local and affordable is where food is moving ... The most current trends I am seeing is chefs making almost everything — in-house — i.e., charcuterie, curing, pickling, etc.

944: If you had to eat fast food, where would you go for a bite?

JM: Do taco shops count?

Michael Psilakis

Chef & Co-Owner, Anthos
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Michael Psilakis has been gaining notoriety for his Greek haute cuisine restaurant in Midtown New York, Anthos. It is here he rarifies an already refined cuisine, taking traditional Greek dishes and ingredients and giving them the star chef treatment. Dishes such as Smoked Baby Octopus with lemon and fennel, Roasted Duardade with olives and grilled calamari and Goat Cheesecake offer a glimpse of his skills. Now Psilakis, along with partner restaurateur Donatella Arpaia, has brought the same idea to Miami with Eos, a stunning new restaurant in a breathtaking Kelly Wearstler-designed space on the 15th floor of The Viceroy hotel. The creative chef has Miamians happily munching on Crispy Rabbit, Lobster & Sea Urchin Risotto and Homemade Tagliatelle with Six Minute Farm Eggs and Black Truffles.

944: You cook all day. Do you still enjoy it when you get home?

MICHAEL PSILAKIS: I love cooking at home, but the cooking at home is real simple. Cooking at home is about bringing people together and spending time with people you love. Food is a gift. Chefs are gift givers by nature. It involves an emotional connection ... The food is about the gathering.

944: What's been your biggest challenge?

MP: Trying to get people to look at Greek food as a major cuisine and trying to showcase it in a way that makes it comparable to French [and] Italian haute cuisine.

944: If you had to eat fast food, where would you go for a bite?

MP: Pizza — it's something I could eat everyday.

