

# THE TASTEMAKERS

All eyes are on Los Angeles' dining scene, where influential chefs and restaurants are building international buzz with their creative cuisines. We've cherry-picked some standout spots and trends to watch.

*by* DANIELLE BERNABE



Silver Lake charmer Botanica. Opposite, from top: Dialogue's pork belly with strawberry sambal and nasturtium; Botanica's rice-noodle salad



## VEGGIE-FORWARD FARE

No matter the season, farmers markets in Los Angeles are a vibrant source of inspiration. Many of the county's hippest restaurants let nature's bounty guide their menus.

**>BOTANICA** One side of this newer Silver Lake establishment offers marketplace provisions; the other is a bustling eatery. Botanica's menu is a California-Mediterranean mashup, resulting in a playful seasonal feast. Locally grown, raised and sprouted ingredients star in dishes such as Cake for Breakfast (an almond-orange-honey treat with roasted fruit); Fatoush-y Salad (grilled and raw market fruits and veggies tossed with crispy focaccia, garlic labne and za'atar vinaigrette); and a drink list of natural wines and vibrant tipples. L, D (W-Su). 620 Silver Lake Blvd., L.A., 323.522.6106, [botanicarestaurant.com](http://botanicarestaurant.com)

**>THE HEARTH & HOUND** The eagerly anticipated eatery from chef April Bloomfield (of famed New York City gastropub the Spotted Pig) takes over the storied space formerly occupied by the Cat & Fiddle on Hollywood's Sunset Boulevard. The menu journeys through Southern California's bounty, offering vegetable-driven plates alongside local game, fish and other proteins roasted in the restaurant's massive hearth. The cuisine is balanced with an approachable wine list, curated with help from Beastie Boys' Michael "Mike D" Diamond. D (nightly). 6530 Sunset Blvd., L.A., 323.320.4022, [thehearthandhound.com](http://thehearthandhound.com)

**>MICHAEL'S SANTA MONICA** What's old is new again at Michael McCarty's groundbreaking restaurant, which emerged from a revamp last year with an updated menu—and fresh relevance—courtesy of chef Miles Thompson. An ever-evolving source of inspiration, the nearby Santa Monica Farmers Market informs the menu, so, depending on the time of year, you may find pairings like blistered broccoli with dates, yams and raspberries, and cabbage with huckleberry. D (M-Sa). 1147 3rd St., Santa Monica, 310.451.0843, [michaelsantamonica.com](http://michaelsantamonica.com)

**>DIALOGUE** This intimate 18-seat restaurant, tucked away in an unassuming nook along Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade, is helmed by James Beard Award-winning chef Dave Beran, formerly of Chicago's celebrated

Alinea. Beran's 15- to 21-course tasting menu is concocted to toy with the senses, while communal seating encourages hobnobbing. Come for the culinary adventure, stay for the dialogue. D (Tu-Sa). Gallery Food Hall, 1315 3rd Street Promenade, Second Floor, Santa Monica, [dialoguerestaurant.com](http://dialoguerestaurant.com)





Small plates at Tsubaki. Below: The patio at Tintorera

## JAPANESE TAPAS

An izakaya (literal translation: “stay sake shop”) is a traditional Japanese pub that offers small plates and drinks. These gathering places are sweeping L.A., bringing playful twists to familiar cuisine.

**>OSEN IZAKAYA** Hailing from Tao and Matsuhisa, Osen Izakaya executive chef/owner Damon Cho brings contemporary flair to customary izakaya small plates. In a Silver Lake strip mall, under the canopy of a cherry-blossom tree, diners enjoy cooked and raw bites, a variety of noodles and bowls and sushi and sashimi, complemented by Japanese brews and sake. L, D (daily).

2903 W. Sunset Blvd., L.A., 323.928.2220, [osenizakaya.com](http://osenizakaya.com)

**>MTN** Travis Lett, the chef behind Abbot Kinney mainstay Gjelina, now brings his culinary imagination to Japanese cuisine at MTN, just down the boulevard. With no signage, the restaurant’s whereabouts (and popularity) are evidenced by a long line of guests clamoring for Dungeness-crab ramen. Lett’s reimagined izakaya favorites also include squid-ink fried rice and simmered turnip sprinkled with hemp furikake. D (nightly).

1305 Abbot Kinney Blvd., Venice, 424.465.3313, [mtnvenice.com](http://mtnvenice.com)

**>TSUBAKI** At this Echo Park gem, chef Charles Namba’s fare is a nod to his upbringing and to L.A.’s diversity. Staying true to izakaya form, his dishes are meant for sharing, but Namba’s penchant for innovation shows up in such dishes as foie gras marinated in sake, “Fish & Chips” served with daikon fries, and Japanese “Dodger Dogs” transformed with yuzu slaw and shishito relish. Paired with a small-production sake list, curated by Courtney Kaplan, a meal at Tsubaki evokes an evening in Tokyo. D (Tu-Su).

1356 Allison Ave., L.A., 213.900.4900, [tsubakila.com](http://tsubakila.com)

## MODERN MEXICAN

L.A. is enjoying a new age of Mexican cuisine, heralded by chefs like Ray Garcia of Broken Spanish and Wes Avila of food truck Guerrilla Tacos (set to open a brick-and-mortar early this year). Newcomers continue to take risks and raise the bar.

**>TINTORERA** Maycoll Calderón worked with culinary greats including Jean-Georges Vongerichten before opening Mexico City’s acclaimed Huset. Now, the Venezuelan chef brings a taste of Mexico to Silver Lake with Tintorera, a charming, seafood-centric indoor-outdoor eatery. Sit on a patio festooned with twinkly lights and enjoy mixed ceviche brightened with coconut water, mussels bathed in mezzal broth, and wood-fired sea bass

plated with cauliflower and pineapple. D (nightly), Br (Sa-Su). 2815 Sunset Blvd., L.A., 323.741.0055, [tintorera.la](http://tintorera.la)

**>AINOKO** Sidle up to the Ainoko bar inside West Hollywood’s trendy Petite Taqueria to feast on chef John-Carlos Kuramoto’s 10- to 13-course exploratory tasting menu. Ainoko is an antiquated Japanese term that means “half-breed” or “hybrid,” and Kuramoto celebrates his Japanese-Mexican roots, fusing flavors from each



culture in his cuisine. For example, his signature dish—a build-your-own wagyu-beef-sukiyaki taco—incorporates pickled napa cabbage and cara-

melized onions for an unexpected flavor combination. D (Tu-Sa). 755 N. La Cienega Blvd., West Hollywood, 310.855.7223, [petitetaqueria.com/ainoko](http://petitetaqueria.com/ainoko)



## BUZZ FROM DOWN UNDER

Australia is known for its coffee culture and laid-back feels, which are steadily making their way to this side of the Pacific.

**>LITTLE RUBY** From the impresarios behind Ruby's in New York and the Eveleigh and Goldie's in L.A., Little Ruby offers an all-day menu with California and Aussie sensibilities, served in an open-air space steps from the beach and Third Street Promenade. Vegemite and avocado

toasts lead the brekkie parade, followed by grain bowls, chicken sandwiches, burgers, pastas and salads. B, L, D (daily). 109 *Santa Monica Blvd., Santa Monica*, 424.322.8353, [rubyscafe.com](http://rubyscafe.com)

**>GREAT WHITE** Sandy feet are welcome at Great White, a new Aussie-helmed café near the

Venice Beach Boardwalk. Quality hospitality, all-day coffee and feel-good dishes are perfect accompaniments to a day at the beach. After dipping your toes into the ocean, dip a spoon into a Blue Smoothie Bowl (passion fruit, banana, pineapple, E3Live blue algae, chia, fruit and a sprinkling of housemade granola). B, L (daily). 1604 *Pacific Ave., Venice*, 424.744.8403, [greatwhitevenice.com](http://greatwhitevenice.com)

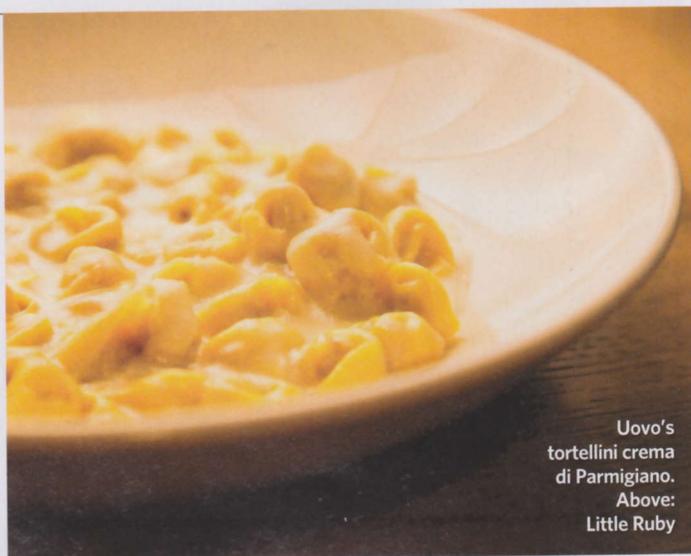
**>BONDI HARVEST** Hailing from the sands of Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia, Bondi Harvest's owners live by the motto "Eat well, go surfing." The café, which opened in 2016 on an industrial stretch of Santa Monica, has an equally chill vibe. Locally sourced ingredients lead the way for seasonal cooking and simple, wholesome eating. B, L (daily). 1814 *Berkeley St., Santa Monica*, 310.586.7419, [bondiharvest.com](http://bondiharvest.com)

## HAUTE CASUAL

New fine-casual concepts hit the spot when time, quality and taste are of the essence.

**>HIHO** Offering a luxurious take on an American favorite, this Santa Monica newcomer serves two styles of grass-fed wagyu-beef cheeseburger: the Classic double or triple beef with cheese and the HiHo, loaded with toppings like onion jam and housemade pickles. A vegan patty is available, as well. L, D (daily). 1320 *2nd St., Suite B, Santa Monica*, 310.469.7250, [hiho.la](http://hiho.la)

**>UOVO** HiHo's pasta-centric neighbor receives its freshly handmade pasta daily, direct from the company's kitchen in Bologna, Italy. Guests watch in anticipation as an assembly line of chefs prepare and plate classic Italian dishes such as cacio e pepe and spaghetti Bolognese. L, D (daily). 1320 *2nd St., Suite A, Santa Monica*, 310.425.0064, [uovo.la](http://uovo.la)



Uovo's tortellini crema di Parmigiano.  
Above:  
Little Ruby