

SING IT LOUD: L.A.'S
BEST KARAOKE

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THE MUMMY: DEATH OF
A CULT MOVIE STAR

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Los Angeles

THE **ULTIMATE** GUIDE TO

CLASSIC L.A.

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The view from
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VEG OUT:
THREE CHEERS FOR
FORMALITY AT PATINA
(PG. 54)

Eat

SUNNY SPOT /// HOT WINGS /// MAGNIFICENT MOLE /// THE PIE HOLE /// TASTY DESIGN



Patricia Tsai
in her off-site
ChocoVivo
kitchen »

MAIN COURSE

Bar None

Chocolate gets back to its Mexican roots in Venice

➤ THE BARS AND powders crowding the shelves at ChocoVivo are about as close as you'll come to chocolate's original form, which evolved out of the Incan and Mayan cultures more than 2,000 years ago (well, maybe not the blueberry-lavender variety). Since leaving her corporate accounting career in 2003, ChocoVivo founder Patricia Tsai has been dedicated to researching, craft- >

ing, and promoting a rustic, minimally processed style of chocolate that's "enjoyed in a completely different way," she likes to say.

Tsai, whose new shop is in Venice, roasts and stone-grinds briefly fermented, organically grown cocoa nibs, which she imports directly from a family-run plantation in Tabasco, Mexico. She then forgoes the controlled heating and cooling process, called tempering, that gives commercial chocolate its alluring sheen. The product is sweetened to varying degrees with unrefined cane sugar and spiced with locally sourced ingredients like nuts, seeds, and dried fruits. The resulting bars have a rough look and a crumbly texture. While artisanal, complex, and nutritious, they're not exactly Valrhona. To chefs who tend to care more about mouth feel than pedigree, they have been a tough sell.

LOS ANGELES HAS had its share of fine chocolatiers emerge in the past few years, but their product is refined and candy box worthy. Tsai doesn't like to think of her chocolate as candy at all. "It's a food—it's an ingredient," she says. "People say they want whole, unprocessed foods, but then they go and eat Hershey's." (Tsai con-

fesses that she was once addicted to peanut M&Ms.) She decided to reach out to consumers personally via a grueling schedule at area farmers' markets. "You have to educate people in order for them to appreciate what's so special about this stuff,"

she says. The strategy worked. In addition to her Abbot Kinney shop, she plans to launch a full-service chocolate bar elsewhere later this year. "I want the whole process to be transparent," Tsai says. That means, eventually, a place for patrons to create custom blends, watch their product being made, and sip Oaxacan-style hot chocolate that's been whipped to a vigorous froth by hand.

➤ LESLEY BARGAR SUTER

Open Wide: Where To Get It

CHOCOVIVO
1504 Abbot Kinney Blvd.
Venice
310-463-7878
chocovivo.com



NEW RESTAURANTS

The scene at Sunny Spot

Island Fever

ROY CHOI RIDES THE CARIBBEAN WAVE, PLUS THREE MORE ARRIVALS

SUNNY SPOT

VENICE

➤ Kogi food truck pioneer Roy Choi welcomes his third brick-and-mortar operation: a vaguely Caribbean restaurant called Sunny Spot (see page 50). Sunny it is, compared with the moodier Beechwood, which formerly occupied the space. Mismatched floral fabrics cover the bar stools; vintage swag lamps light up the dining room. The cuisines of the tropics give Choi plenty to work with. Pickled slices of dragon fruit make for a light start. The Cuban *torta*—a stack of pork terrine, prosciutto, provolone, and jalapeños—is a taste extravaganza. Still, the kitchen can fumble with basics like fried plantains. Rum is the star of the bar—embrace it. » 822 Washington Blvd., 310-448-8884 or sunnyspotvenice.com.

CAULFIELD'S

BEVERLY HILLS

➤ A 14-foot mural sets the tone, depicting midcentury literary figures like Jack Kerouac and J.D. Salinger. The latter's famed anti-hero inspires the name of this new tavern from the owners of Magnolia. In the daytime the tile-walled front terrace invites, but come nightfall the heat-seeking crowds retreat to the brown leather booths. The service can feel unpolished to the point of off-putting, but the retro comfort foods do their best to console. Bread crumb-topped mac and cheese makes you wonder how all the dolled-up girls plan to go out after. Trout almonidine and toad in a hole complete the 50-year time warp. » Thompson Hotel, 9360 Wilshire Blvd., 310-388-6860 or thompsonhotels.com.

MAISON GIRAUD

PACIFIC PALISADES

➤ Acclaimed French chef Alain Giraud (Citrus, Bastide, Anisette) has tucked himself away in the hills of Pacific Palisades, where he's serving low-key classic French to an ecstatic neighborhood. Photos of lavender fields adorn the wall along with pictures of a young Giraud. The bakery counter is a gallery of rustic baguettes and *pain au chocolat*. Diners linger, enjoying Côtes du Rhône table wines and unfussy dishes like crisp savory tarts, Mediterranean sea bass with clams and chorizo, and roasted duck with root vegetables. Here we find the best version yet of the chef's signature *vacherin glacé*, set atop raspberry coulis. » 1032 Swarthmore Ave., 310-459-7561 or maison-giraud.com.

MILO & OLIVE

SANTA MONICA

➤ With her husband, Josh Loeb, and chef Evan Funke, pastry maven Zoe Nathan is dominating Santa Monica's dining scene. Joining Rustic Canyon, Huckleberry, and Sweet Rose Creamery is this darling pizzeria and bakery. The place is tiny, with a pizza bar and two communal tables seating 24 at a time. Already it's packed with new devotees of the crunchy artisanal bread-inspired pizzas offered *margherita* style or with toppings such as pork belly sausage and braised greens. *Branzino* ceviche with fennel is a surprise, as are veggie sides that name-drop local farmers. Doughnuts, muffins, and country breads are sold in front. » 2723 Wilshire Blvd., 310-453-6776 or miloandolive.com. ➤ L.B.S.