

You're Fired!
(Now What?)
See the World

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L.A.'s Most Famous
(Unknown) Artist
Revealed

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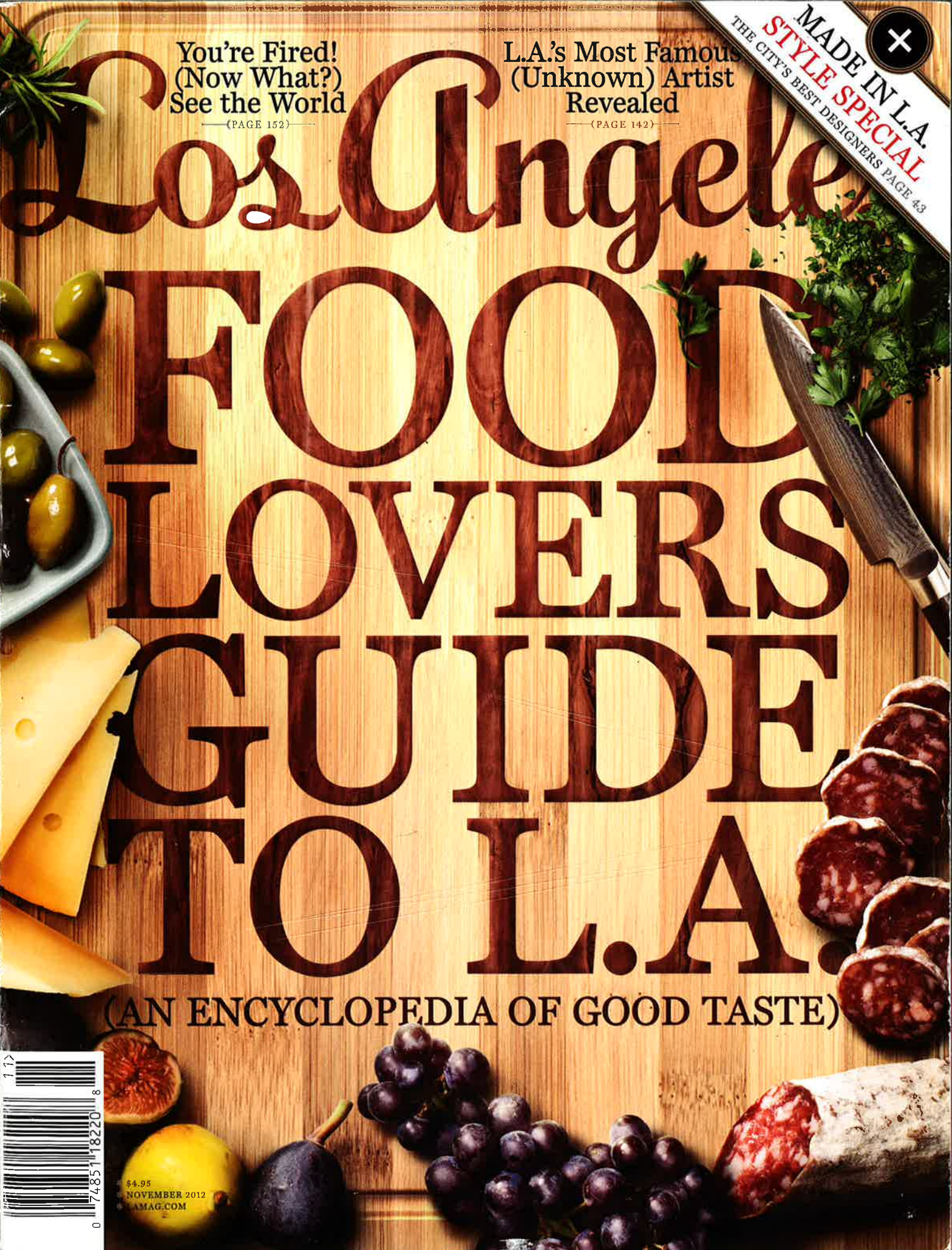
Los Angeles

FOOD LOVERS GUIDE TO L.A.

(AN ENCYCLOPEDIA OF GOOD TASTE)



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"QUINOA IS THE SUPERGRAIN AND HAS BEEN USED FOREVER IN THE LATIN KITCHEN. AS A FRITTER, QUINOA IS PERFECT BECAUSE IT STAYS CRUNCHY WITH RICH SAUCES."

[Susan Feniger / Street]



Feniger's quinoa fritters with avocado and tomatillo dipping sauce (see Quinoa, page 135). Get the recipe at LAmag.com/recipes.

Where to Eat Now

The definitive (and subjective) guide to the best restaurants in L.A.—from classic dives to four-star finds

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LESLEY BARGAR SUTER



DOWNTOWN AREA

Includes CHINATOWN, EXPOSITION PARK, HISTORIC CORE, LITTLE TOKYO, SOUTH L.A., WESTLAKE

Bäco Mercat ★★

408 S. Main St. (213-687-8808 or bacomercat.com), L-D Mon.-Sat. Full bar: Latin Fusion \$\$\$

◆ Chef Josef Centeno has dedicated this place to his flatbread taco hybrids called *bäcos*. But with dinner come small plates that rival the offerings at his former hub, the Lazy Ox Canteen. Beef *birria* is subbed for *ragu* on *pappardelle*. Fried shrimp arrive with heads on, ideal for popping. The *bäcos* include versions with *carnitas* and *salbitxada* sauce.

Blue Cow ●

350 S. Grand Ave. (213-621-2249 or bluecowkitchen.com), L Mon.-Fri.; D Mon.-Sat. Full bar: American \$\$\$

◆ The team behind Mendocino Farms has expanded its gourmet sandwich concept with this

indoor-outdoor spot that features a stellar bar. A cumbersome Cuban sandwich-*croque madame* hybrid is served open face with pork, house-made pickles, and a fried organic egg. Pink Eggs and Ham dresses two beet-marinated deviled eggs with bacon. There's an above-average hamburger (and that's saying something these days).

Border Grill ★

445 S. Figueroa St. (213-486-5171 or bordergrill.com), L Mon.-Fri.; D nightly. Full bar: Also at 1445 4th St., Santa Monica (310-451-1655), Latin \$\$\$

◆ Susan Feniger and Mary Sue Milliken are L.A. institutions. You've had *quesadillas* a hundred times, but not like these. *Platillos* include fried plantains and exploratory versions of *ceviche*. Missteps like dry *Negra Modelo*-braised short ribs come when curiosity gives way to practicality and routine. But it's never been about authenticity here; it's been about craft.

Bottega Louie ★★

700 S. Grand Ave. (213-802-1470 or bottegalouie.com), B-L-D daily. Full bar: Italian \$\$\$

◆ Downtown's most popular breakfast, lunch, and dinner destination is an Italian restaurant, a high-end patisserie, and a cocktail dispensary rolled into one. The open kitchen pulls off Italian standards—from *margherita* pizza to eggplant Parmesan—balancing the requisite generosity with an attention to detail. The bright, cavernous room feels au courant.

Chaya Downtown ★

525 S. Flower St. (213-236-9577 or thechaya.com), L Mon.-Fri.; D nightly. Full bar: Asian Fusion \$\$\$

◆ Different dishes are featured at each Chaya outpost; the ones here, we would argue, are the freshest yet. *Crudo* preparations include *tai* snapper with kumquat-chili relish and Scottish salmon with pickled fennel. House-cured, ruby red duck prosciutto is paired with shavings of *petit basque* cheese. Not all dishes can be a specialty; pastas are a low point. The Chaya folks have a knack for creating a happy hour scene.

Church & State ★

1850 Industrial St., Ste. 100 (213-405-1434 or churchandstatebistro.com), L Mon.-Fri.; D nightly. Full bar: French Bistro \$\$\$

◆ Chef Jeremy Berlin has put his stamp on this urban-romantic *bistro* with such items as the hearty vegetarian *cassoulet* with *Tuscan kale*, and braised pork belly with a pickled vegetable *salad*. The rest of the menu skews classic French, including dishes like *steak frites* and *bouillabaisse*. Toast the meal with cocktails that are on par with the neighborhood's most avant-garde offerings.

Drago Centro ★★★

525 S. Flower St., Ste. 120 (213-228-8998 or dragocentro.com), B-L Mon.-Fri.; D nightly. Full bar: Italian \$\$\$

◆ Though Sicilian, Celestino Drago has always had a fascination with a formality not associated with the south. What results are dishes that are rigorously composed yet laced with the robust flavors of his native island. The salt cod cake is brought into relief with caper berry *gremolata*. There is something essential about Italy itself in the *garganelli*, dressed with pork sausage and fennel seeds.

Langer's Delicatessen ●

704 S. Alvarado St. (213-483-8050 or langersdeli.com), B-L Mon.-Sat. Beer and wine. Deli \$

◆ Despite a dicey location across from MacArthur Park, this acclaimed deli thrives on the strength of its corned beef sandwiches. As proof of L.A.'s great ethnic stew, chances are the people eating matzo balls at the next table will be speaking Spanish, Korean, Tagalog, or Japanese.

Little Bear ★★

1855 Industrial St. (213-622-8100 or littlebearla.com), L-D daily; brunch Sat.-Sun. Beer and wine. Belgian \$\$\$

◆ Andre Guerrero's bustling tavern is dedicated to the food and drink of Belgium. The woody joint is half bar, with a hefty Belgian beer list assembled by Ryan Sweeney (Verdugo Bar, the Surly Goat) and dishes that are brew friendly. Cheesy *gougères* act

Campanile

A FOND FAREWELL

→ Depending on when you read this, you may still have a couple of weeks to experience Mark Peel's Campanile, which closes October 31. The 23-YEAR-OLD RESTAURANT became legendary for its seasonal California spin on Italian cuisine, ushering in the era of gourmet comfort food with its "Grilled Cheese Nights." Peel's then-wife, Nancy Silverton, started La Brea Bakery next door to produce the restaurant's remarkable breads. The cozy retreat will be sorely missed, but all is not lost: Walter Manzke (Bastide, Church & State) is taking over the space to open his long-awaited République next year.

THE KEY DETAILS



LEGENDS

- ★★★★ EXTRAORDINARY
 - ★★★ EXCELLENT
 - ★★ VERY GOOD
 - ★ GOOD
 - EVERYDAY FAVORITE
 - CLASSIC
 - * RATING PENDING
-
- \$ INEXPENSIVE Meals under \$15
 - \$\$ MODERATE Mostly under \$25
 - \$\$\$ EXPENSIVE Mostly under \$50
 - \$\$\$\$ VERY EXPENSIVE \$50 and over

Ⓟ BREAKFAST Ⓛ LUNCH Ⓧ DINNER

UPDATE

A FRESH LOOK AT AN ESTABLISHED RESTAURANT

These listings are a guide to establishments reviewed and recommended by our dining critics and staff and have no relationship to any advertising in *Los Angeles* magazine. Visits are anonymous, and all expenses are paid by the magazine.

Price classifications are approximate and based on a typical three-course dinner for one person, exclusive of drinks, tax, and tip; unless otherwise noted, these restaurants accept most credit cards.

We welcome your comments and suggestions. Please write c/o Dine, *Los Angeles* magazine, 5900 Wilshire Blvd., 10th floor, Los Angeles, CA 90036, or e-mail us at letters@LAMag.com.

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