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# RELISH

CITYVIEW'S GUIDE TO ALL THINGS DINING

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# DINNER *and a* SHOW

Local performance venues and superb restaurants provide some great pairings.

By Jim Duncan

This year, hope springs eternal with the gray clouds of autumn, especially for the arts and sports worlds. A year and a half of virus fatigue and its accompanying empty stadiums, music halls and auditoriums have held back a world that wants to go out with the crowd again. The resulting shortage of black ink in budgets has stressed out athletics directors, coaches, maestros, conductors and musicians.

There is a glimmer of hope now for a coming season. Both the arts world and the sports world begin anew in fall, when summer aestivations give way to the new year for school, symphonies, concerts, art shows, football, basketball and hockey. This hope carries over to the hospitality industry. If Kinnick, Trice, Carver-Hawkeye and Hilton are allowed to return to full capacity, it will be as much a boon to Iowa City and Ames area hotels and restaurants as to the university athletics departments. It is also hoped that entertainment visitors will lead business travelers back from 18 really bad months.

This is particularly true in greater Des Moines where many hotels have higher demand on weekends than weekdays. That is a new thing, and COVID mutations — from alpha to zeta — exasperate the dreaded severity and duration of COVID. Restaurants and hotels love sports and entertainment. After all, the old cliché about first dates is “dinner and a show” not “Uber Eats and Netflix.” So, with the hope of a renaissance for big crowds, we looked around the metro for perfect pairings — not of wine with entrees, but of restaurants most convenient to the area’s biggest entertainment venues.

## Iowa Events Center + Buzzard Billy’s

Wells Fargo Arena is Des Moines’ No. 1 venue. From the pro franchise of The Wild, the Wolves and the Barnstormers, to blockbuster concerts like Paul McCartney, Garth Brooks and Taylor Swift, to the high school championships in wrestling and basketball, it guarantees bodies in seats all four seasons. While all of downtown is relatively convenient to the arena, no place is more so than Buzzard Billy’s (615 Third St.). It is now open from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week. Breakfast here is a big new hit. Many events at Hy-Vee Hall and Community Choice Credit Union Convention Center begin in the morning, long before most visitors feel like hot dogs or nachos.

Buzzard Billy’s offers exciting breakfasts like southern fried chicken and waffles, Belgian waffles, bananas foster French toast and blackened catfish with potatoes and eggs. Their cinnamon rolls are as big as the parking lot. Lunch and dinner menus also offer things you can’t find many other places in Iowa. Fried alligator tails, cheese curds, poutines with barbecue, crab corn soup, 10 different styles of chicken wings, burnt ends gumbo, and crawfish etouffee, to name a few.

The restaurant specializes in Louisiana cuisine. There is a large menu of blackened fish, steak and seafood dishes, excellent po boys, eggplant canoes stuffed with seafood, and even a dish named after the Tehoupitoulas, an extinct Indian tribe who inhabited the bayous before the Cajuns. Cocktails are exciting, and beers are mostly local craft brews. There are kids’ menus for both breakfast and lunch/dinner. Everything about Buzzard Billy’s says that it is time to have fun. So let it be with autumn of 2021.

## The Des Moines Civic Center + Splash

While all of Court Avenue and most of East Village is easy walking distance of the 1979 Des Moines Civic Center, Splash shares an intersection with the Des Moines institution. The Des Moines Civic Center is one of the best managed auditoriums of its size (2,744 seats) worldwide. Some years it has led the world in attendance for its size group. There are Broadway series, pops series, symphonic series, etc. It is one of a very few venues worldwide where both Broadway plays and Symphonic music are performed. That takes incredibly versatile acoustic design.

Director Jeff Chelesvig says that Broadway stars like Tony winner Cherry Jones are amazed with how the “barn” plays and how much the audience appreciates the performances. The auditorium is designed without center aisles, balconies or box seats. It thus presents a more democratic experience than most buildings. Everyone sits together without any elitist trappings. It is, in this respect, Iowan.

Splash (303 Locust St.) balances a “dinner and a show” evening with lavish trappings and decadent fish and seafood air freighted from Europe, the Caribbean and the Pacific. The furniture includes cloth tablecloths and large stuffed chairs that are upholstered in red ostrich hide. Doric columns, checkerboard floors, aquariums, murals, a balcony area, private rooms and a separate oyster bar contribute to a special night out.

The salmon is from Norway, the sea bass is Chilean, the yellowfin is Hawaiian. King crab is from Alaska, and lobsters are from Maine. Caviar is sourced both from Russia and the U.S. Mussels grew up around Prince Edward Island. Some steaks are USDA prime. Fish can be ordered char grilled, miso grilled, sake grilled, meuniere, pan seared, blackened or moutarde. The wine list is a perennial winner of top wine awards.



Splash pairs lavish trappings with the democracy of the Civic Center.

## Temple for the Performing Arts + Centro

The Temple for the Performing Arts hosts drama, musicals, pop-folk concerts, comedy and chamber music. It sits in the heart of the hot Western Gateway restaurant scene, walking distance from top cafés Proof, Americana, Django, Exile, The Walnut and Fresko. Nothing is as convenient, though, as Centro. It is in the same building, a former Masonic Temple.

Centro's signature is its coal-fired pizza oven. These gems are disappearing even from Brooklyn where they once dominated the New York market. They are the hottest of ovens and can cook a pizza in a couple minutes. They feature thin crusts, blisters and some charring. Fine ingredients like San Marzano tomatoes, fresh mozzarella, Rosa pepperoni, Niman Ranch ham, and La Quercia charcuterie are used. Lemmo's handmade cavatelli are a feature of the pasta menu.

## Drake Stadium + Jethro's/Fong's Pizza

Drake Stadium was the original project that brought the university together with the business community and the civic government of Des Moines. It's been paying the city back since 1925 with classic brick architecture and its blue oval track. Track meets draw huge crowds to the combined championships of boys and girls track, the Drake Relays, the AAU Junior Olympics, USTF championships and NCAA championships. Smaller meets also draw fans to Des Moines. Drake football competes in the Pioneer League, which includes teams from California, the East Coast, the Deep South and the Midwest. Roosevelt High School plays home games there and occasionally Dowling Catholic does.

Jethro's and Fong's Pizza are Des Moines classics. Their neighboring outlets on Forest Avenue are the closest restaurants not named McDonald's to the stadium. Jethro's is a nationally famous barbecue for huge appetites. Fong's is a cross breed of the tiki bar and the pizzeria featuring crab Rangoon pies.

## The Knapp Center/Shealow Auditorium + the Drake Diner

The Knapp Center is Drake's all-purpose indoor arena. It hosts Drake basketball's rising men's program and its always good women's team. Volleyball, lectures and concerts are also hosted here, plus both college and high school graduations. Shealow hosts most Civic Music Association events, plus superb student, faculty and guest concerts. It's an intimate venue without a single bad seat and fabulous acoustics.

The Drake Diner (111 25th St.) is the epitome of its genre. Modeled after Fog City in San Francisco, it features iconic, checkerboard design, superb gravies, classic rock music, counter and booth service, a screened-in patio, and famous malts and milk shakes. It also draws a big crowd after church services. The Drake Diner makes three kinds of pancakes, including potato and pumpkin. Their French toast is made with cinnamon rolls. Blue plate specials like hot beef, hot pork, hot meatloaf and hot turkey star at lunch and dinner. The walk across campus to Shealow, the Performing Arts Center and the Knapp Center covers the best of Drake's grounds.

## Grand View arts and sports venues + Prophecy

Grand View University has been on a roll since the new millennium, with attendance and construction more than doubling and great success in sports. Wrestling and football teams have won national titles. The university wins so many wrestling titles that they often host the national finals. The school also has superb theater and music departments with nice venues to showcase them.

While Iowa Beef Steakhouse is a local classic and Pho All Seasons is a great Vietnamese café, the most convenient place is Prophecy (2100 E. 14th St.). It features West African cuisine, which features more yams, casava, corn and ground nuts than the more locally popular East African cuisine. The restaurant, though, has a higher mission. They believe that food is means to a better end for world peace, understanding and justice.

## Iowa State Center + Provisions Lot F

Iowa State's sports and arts venues are bunched together south of the main campus. Football is so hot there that every game could sell out this year. Their basketball teams are generating more interest, as well. It is hoped that CY Stephens Auditorium will bring back the great national and international performing arts groups, too.

Provisions Lot F (2400 North Loop Drive) is the latest refinement of the restaurant group that made Aunt Maude's and The Café state of the art of Ames. Most everything is homemade from scratch, food is sourced locally, and some things stick out as "good as they get." In that group are the tomato ginger soup made with coconut milk and curry, Korean noodle bowls with poached eggs, and the avocado toast with hot chili oil, toasted coconut and fresh fruit.

## Principal Park + High Life Lounge

Principal Park is the host to the Iowa Cubs baseball team and usually the state high school baseball tourneys. Sometimes concerts are held there. The ballpark is also home to the Cub Club, which is open to the public for lunch and breakfasts that draw some movers and shakers. It's not as convenient on game nights, though.

Also, a refurbished building nearby offers interesting fast food like Fuzzy's Tacos and Blaze Pizza, but their parking lot can be confounding. So, our choice here is High Life Lounge (200 S.W. 2nd St.) a take on mid 20th-century supper clubs. It features broasted chicken, rarebit burgers, beef stroganoff, pot roast, chicken pot pies, deviled eggs and gizzards.

## Hoyt Sherman Place + Aposto

Hoyt Sherman hosts some of the most progressive music in town. It's always had a knack for picking talent that isn't hot enough for much larger arenas but can pack this place. Gladys Knight is on the tentative schedule, for instance.

The neighborhood has some marvelous recent additions with Lua, A Dong and Gateway Market Café close by. We have to go with Aposto at Café di Scala (644 18th St.). Tony Lemmo's Victorian café is a romantic sojourn to another time and place. Dinners are prix fixe these days and feature four or five courses, including a homemade pasta, the house's specialty. Ingredients are fresh and local, and the bar is special. Aposto works with curtain times to make sure you are out in time. ■

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# Trends, new stuff and milestones

By Jim Duncan

A lot of stuff happened since we last published a year and a half ago. A virus from far, far away and the severe reactions to it took down a lot of popular places — Trostel's Dish, Table 128, Red Rossa, Gazali's at Drake, Teddy Maroons, BAH, New Hong Kong, George the Chili King, Broken Branch, Big Al's on Army Post, Saint's.

Fast food places also took huge hits. Even the Jimmy John's on Grand Avenue has a "for lease" sign up now. Perhaps it really is possible to overbuild the sub shop industry. Many places pivoted to survive. St. Kilda's Surf and Turf became Franka pizzeria. One Gusto became El Guapo. Harbinger became Basic Bird, a carryout Korean café, and then reverted to being Harbinger. Papa Keno's became Dough Co. Fletcher's returned as a barbecue with a management contract with Orchestrate. El Pollo Ranchero opened a new Mexican-style chicken rotisserie in Normandy Plaza, next to Big Al's, which took over a Chicken Coop. Chicken Coop took over two new locations. Fernando's moved two blocks west to the new hotel across from Drake's Old Main. Hummus Mediterranean Grill moved into the same place, replacing Gazali's. Habanero's opened in a venue that previously was both a KFC and a Taco Bell. Anna Dolce took over the Blu Toro.

Breakfast was a big winner with new places like Breakfast Club, Early Bird and R&C's Diner, plus vastly expanded brunch and breakfast menus all over town. Another winner was the home delivery food service. Cocktails-to-go actually became a thing.

Inflation reeled out of control with both food prices and labor costs soaring. Fast food giants BK, KFC, Wendy's and Hardee's offered expanded breakfast and chicken sandwich bargains. Lachele's Fine Foods opened an old fashioned bargain diner.

## TRENDS

**Pseudo meat** made from plants continued its cult-like sales growth, and turkey remained the top choice for cold sandwich eaters... Taking advantage of hard times were new guys **Mulberry Street Tavern**, **Fresko**, **St. Kilda's** in Clive, **Franka** in Clive, **Aura** (the first American restaurant

owned by the Wasabi knife slingers), **Gursha Ethiopian**, and **Prophecy West African Café**... Dishes making a comeback included chicken and noodles, pork shoulders, smashburgers, corned beef hash, breakfast skillet, enchiladas, tamales, rotisserie chickens, matzo soup, and Campbell's soups... California restaurants are bracing for huge **increases in pork prices**, particularly bacon, due to new animal rights legislation.

## NEW STUFF WE LIKE

**Sadler's** is an East Texas smokehouse that now focuses on its wholesale sales for fully wood smoked, sliced and cooled products. We tried their brisket, ribs, pulled pork and pulled chicken and found them superior to most other cold cuts available. The company has been around since 1948 and remains in the same family. Now sold in some Hy-Vee's, it is a new "go to" product for sandwiches... How many times have your graters and mandolines bloodied your fingers? If you are like me, you will love the new **Safegrate Grater Tool**. Not only does it protect your fingers, it provides such a secure grip that you can work much faster. I found one on Amazon for about \$13. Then I got more for friends... **The Le Creuset Outlet store** in Altoona provides fabulous discounts on the world's finest cast iron cookery. The catch is the colors are those that moved slowly on the larger market... Our favorite new food books are "**World Travel: An Irreverent Guide**" by Anthony Bourdain with Laurie Woolever, "**The Emperor's Feast**" by Jonathan Clements, "**The Food of Oaxaca**" by Alejandro Ruiz, "**Animal, Vegetable, Junk: A History of Food from Sustainable to Suicidal**" by Mark Bittman, and "**Salmon**" by Mark Kurlansky.

## MILESTONES

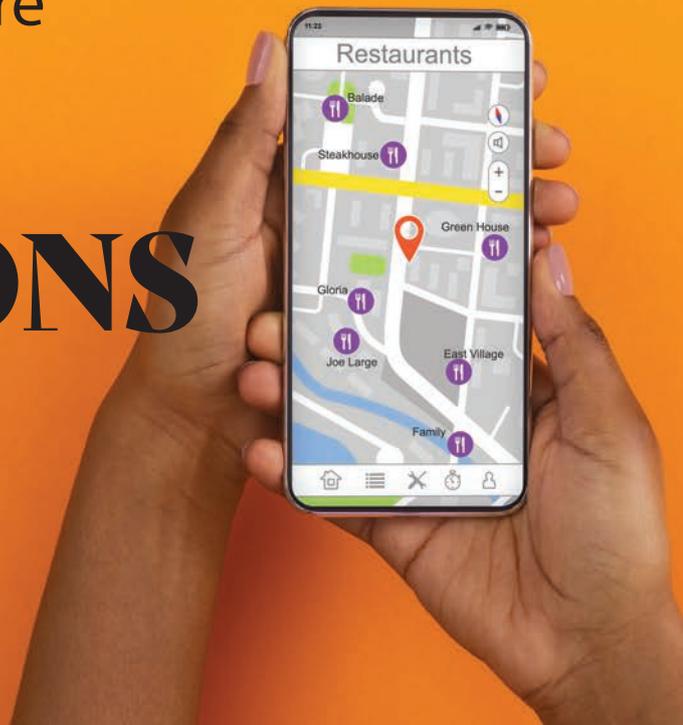
During our long COVID-19 break from publishing, several local institutions passed significant milestones. **Maccabee's Glatt Deli** passed its 30th year in the Waveland area. **Sakura** sushi turned 10 in Normandy Plaza, and **Zombie Burger + Drink Lab** also turned ten in East Village. ■

Des Moines area restaurants are

# TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

What does it take to entice long-distance drivers?

By Jim Duncan



On the occasion of the Civic Center’s first completely sold-out event, the promoter commissioned a survey of the crowd. With 700 respondents, a 25% sample, we determined that half the audience came from beyond Polk County, and a quarter had driven more than 50 miles. Those were big numbers, but they were anticipated from ticket sales. So, we asked respondents what else about Des Moines lured them into driving to the capital city. Other than big events like the state fair and the wrestling tournament, the No. 1 answer was “the Italian restaurants.”

That was a surprise few saw coming, but it was interesting enough to track. For years to come, I have counted license plates in Des Moines restaurant parking lots. Other than during the fair and the wrestling tournament, the restaurant with the highest percentage of out-of-county plates has consistently been The Latin King, one of the long-term Italian restaurants of Des Moines. Actually, it’s been the biggest long-distance draw during the fair, too. Italian restaurants Chuck’s, Noah’s Ark and The Hilltop also draw long-distance diners well. So does Trostel’s Greenbriar, which is not Italian.

Random checks of license plates are not a scientific method of surveying, but they mean something — namely that restaurants in Des Moines are tourist attractions. That’s not just a thing for New Orleans and Las Vegas. And it’s no longer just the old Italian restaurants that bring people to town.

What does it take to entice long-distance

drivers to a local restaurant? The answers are several now. We determined some of them over decades of chatting up customers, owners, servers and particularly bartenders who seem to learn more about their customers than others, even license plate counters. Here are some that stand out.

## Nostalgia

People visiting their old home towns are extremely interested in visiting their favorite restaurants from their youth. A lot of that is neighborhood centric. Roosevelt grads want to visit Noah’s and Jesse’s Embers. Lincoln alums prefer Bordenaro’s, Barrata’s and, until its recent closing, Noodles. East grads and Grand View alumni are big supporters of Latin King. North grads love Chuck’s, which hosted the sports teams after games for years. Urbandale and Johnston alums in town for class reunions love Trostel’s Greenbriar. So much of West Des Moines, Ankeny and Altoona has been razed and replaced by newer things that nostalgia doesn’t play as well there. Young Valley grads have told us, though, that Olive Garden and Red Lobster were the biggest deals for prom, so maybe the nostalgia of the future will be franchised by Darden.

Maid Rite president Brad Burt says his company is quite aware that many people returning to Des Moines from out of state visit a Maid Rite as one of their first stops. Curiously, Maid Rite covered the state’s mid-sized towns in the middle of the 20th century and have never really caught on outside



Loose meat sandwiches are a charm unique to Iowa.

of Iowa. Frequent visits to Ottumwa and Marshalltown have revealed huge nostalgia appeal for old-fashioned-designed loose meat joints Canteen Lunch in the Alley and Taylor’s, respectively. Brick Street Market and Café in Bondurant was designed to suggest the wind-grieved Butler Café of 1946. Its loose meat sandwiches, fried chicken and root beer are intentional odes to nostalgia. Paula’s in Valley Junction serves old fashioned loose meat sandwiches in nostalgic trappings.

Sioux City developed its own fast food culture because it was deemed too small for McDonald’s, Burger King and KFC to build there for years. To this day, its Taste Inn & Out (famous for onion chips), Miles Inn, and Milwaukee Wiener House are often first stops for high school reunion visitors from out of state. When Cronk’s Café closed last year after



Baja Tacos has a thick homemade take on tortillas.



Injera and curries at Gursha Ethiopian.

nine decades, people traveled back to Denison for one last visit. The great New Yorker food writer Calvin Trillin once said that “if your favorite pizza isn’t the first pizza you ever tasted, then you are a big fat sissy.” Pizza Ranch has moved, like Iowa itself, from small towns to larger towns, to suburbs. It has found built-in customer bases as it moved to larger places because so many people from small towns in Iowa learned to speak pizza at Pizza Ranch. The chain often drove smaller independent pizza vendors from town, assuring its hold on new generations.

## Ethnicity

Des Moines is the only place in Iowa to find a lot of ethnic cuisines. Iowa City may be more cosmopolitan when students are on campus, but the all-encompassing scope of Des Moines food opportunities overwhelms the college town. In the Internet era, ethnic communities are well connected, so the word gets out when a restaurant opens that serves an underserved type of cuisine.

The city now has multiple African cafés including Patience’s,



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Africana Halal, Gursha, Taste of Africa Café and Prophecy. Most are mostly East African, serving spongy injera bread, made from teff flour and featuring spice choices influenced by the large Indian populations in East Africa. Far more populous West Africa is barely represented in Des Moines, though Prophecy does just that. (Fifteen years ago, West Africa was represented by multiple restaurants and East Africa by none). Gursha is a modern Ethiopian restaurant that serves food in the “build your own style” of Subway and Chipotle. It’s also located in Dog Town, where young diners are more adventurous. Prophecy is in the Grand View area. Both Drake and Grand View have been expanding their foreign student populations. Word gets out fast.

South Asian food choices have exploded in Des Moines, too. India Star, the original Indian café here, was a North Indian gem with a homemade tandoori oven and the charm of owner Baba Singh. It’s moved to nicer digs a few blocks west since its humble beginnings. At the same time, many new places have come, and some have gone. Most of them featured the cuisine of South India and the Deccan Plateau, especially Hyderabad, which is to India what Emilia Romagna is to Italy, Lyon to France, Barcelona to Spain, and Oaxaca to Mexico — culinary capitals.

Bawarchi, Persis and Amaravati all mention Hyderabad influences on their menu — mainly dum biryani, rice’s most lavish treatment and the dish most associated with the Andhra capital. All also do tandoori,



Des Moines is loaded with skilled itamaes.

arguably chicken’s greatest application, and naan. Amaravati and Persis brag more about other South Indian dishes and Chinese-Indian fusion. Nepali restaurant Kathmandu and Pakistani café Lzaza also cover tandoori. Lzaza adds a Chicago menu, with Chicago Italian beef sandwiches. Most of these places serve Halal meats. Most had buffets before COVID-19 sanitized the world. Kathmandu offers thalis, the great invention of the Indian Railroad. They are virtual individual buffets with platters of several different dishes plus bread and rice.

Maccabee’s Glatt Deli is celebrating its 30th anniversary on Polk Boulevard, where it occupies the street’s only commercial building. It is suitably unique, the only glatt deli in town. Glatt is the strictest form of kosher. The deli impressed Fox News during the caucuses. No one expects to find a place like this in Des Moines. Rabbi Yossi Jacobson entertains guests, many international, with life lessons.

Mexican restaurants are rife in Des Moines but two are different from most. La Familia and Baja Taco serve menus that represent the District Federal and Baja California. That means more lamb, goat and broths, plus thicker homemade tortilla takes.

Chinese restaurants are fading from the local scene. Heavenly Asian, though, represents the highwater mark of Chinese luxury in Iowa. Wong’s Chopsticks offers a weekend dim sum menu that draws folks near and far. Pho All Seasons and Pho 515 star on Des Moines’ superb lineup of Vietnamese cafés. The latter is housed in Iowa’s best Asian supermarket — C Fresh.

Ethnic restaurants that entertain diners while feeding them are also

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popular. Brazil Terra Grill Steakhouse and Ohana both inhabit Clocktower Square as they show off their knife skills. Several exceptional sushi places — the Wasabis, W Tao, Miyabi 9, Sakura — all have itamae chefs and air freighted fish, even blue toro. Also attracting folks from afar are Waterfront and Splash, which air freight divine fish from all parts of the world.

## Sports, fire and brews

Sports fans of particular teams have restaurant representation in town. Wisco Grub and Pub offers a mostly Wisconsin menu with sausages, cheese and fish dominating. Even smelt and walleye are sold there. Truman's is dedicated to the Kansas City fans with sports bar food plus breakfast seven days a week. Rico's is a Raiders bar and specializes in chicken wings and fish.

Wood-burning grills are making a comeback in the metro. St. Kilda's cooks steaks and fish over wood in an open kitchen. Fresko adds chicken. Their steaks include a wagyu ribeye. Firebirds Wood Fired Grill grills steaks, fish and chicken.

Brewhouses and craft beer outlets

abound in Des Moines, and many serve excellent food. Iowa Taproom might be the biggest café attraction in town, especially when big events are playing Wells Fargo Arena. High Life Lounge has a supper club menu and a number of beers on tap. Lua might make the best fries in town plus other kitchen treats. Court Avenue Brewing Company is the original brew pub here, or at least the longest operating one. They also offer food fare from burgers to steaks and pizza. Exile has the most extensive food menu around. Royal Mile offers a full English pub menu. Hessen Haus has the best German menu. Barn Town Brewing offers a decadent menu that includes a section of state fair food.

The alcohol and food combination hits its zenith at The Hall and The Foundry. The latter has a tasting room for all their booze. They are associated with the Templeton Rye distillery. The Hall advertises they are the largest beer retailer in the state. They have three food menus — finger food, German food and burgers. Food sales go to the Justice League for Food, which trains homeless, parolees and foster kids in the hospitality and construction industries. ■



La Familia is not a typical Des Moines Mexican cafe.



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# 20 MENU ITEMS THAT MAKE

# Mouths Water



From caviar to the King Porker, from sweet to savory, fresh from the sea and from the farm, the following delectables have central Iowans salivating.

By Jeff Pitts

Whiskey Pecan Pie at Bubba - Southern Comforts offers a bit of "Dixie" to Des Moines residents, served with vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce.

The central Iowa food landscape boasts numerous excellent eateries. But, sometimes, detailing which restaurants you should try and why involves too much detail and nuance to do the job properly. As such, CITYVIEW decided to try something simpler and set out to find 20 (or so) menu items that make mouths water. From caviar to something called the "King Porker," from sweet to savory, from something fresh from the sea to fresh from the farm, the following delectables have central Iowans salivating. Enjoy.

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1525 High St., Des Moines

[www.luabeer.com](http://www.luabeer.com)

Menu offerings include Bacon & Kale Toast sandwiches, Smush Burgers, and bowls of Chilled Avocado And Whey, but Lua's hand-selected and harvested Lua Reserve Caviar — served with *feuilles de brick*, egg yolk, *crème fraîche*, cucumber and chive — has central Iowans sprinting for this Sherman Hill hotspot.



Lua Reserve Caviar, at Lua Brewing, is served with *feuilles de brick*, egg yolk, *crème fraîche*, cucumber and chive.

## 2. CHICKEN & WAFFLE

### The Chicken

Along Great Western Trail, 4221 S. Orilla Road, West Des Moines

[www.thechickenorilla.com](http://www.thechickenorilla.com)

Nashville hot boneless chicken strips on top of a large Belgian waffle with cream cheese sauce and maple syrup. That's the reward for stopping along the Great Western bike trail in what was once the town of Orilla (now West Des Moines).

## 3. BLUEBERRY CHEESECAKE CUPCAKE

### Molly's Cupcakes

215 E. Third St., Des Moines

[www.mollysdsm.com](http://www.mollysdsm.com)

This East Village sweet spot offers an array of tantalizing made-from-scratch options to add to this list: German chocolate, chocolate mousse, chocolate raspberry, cake batter, coconut dulce de leche and *crème brûlée*. But the Blueberry Cheesecake option at Molly's takes the cupcake. Vanilla cake baked with fresh blueberries and infused with classic cheesecake filling, graham cracker pieces, glazed blueberries. "UNCLE!" Where is the sign-up sheet?



The Blueberry Cheesecake Cupcake at Molly's Cupcakes

#### 4. LIBRARY NACHOS

##### University Library Café

3506 University Ave., Des Moines

[www.thelibrarydm.com](http://www.thelibrarydm.com)

What's Dogtown's not-so-well-kept secret? Drake students might say they are at the "library," but if they do, it's likely they're noshing the magnificent nachos at University Library Café. Library Nachos feature fresh flour tortillas topped with pinto beans, shredded cheddar cheese, Monterey cheese sauce, salsa, mild banana pepper rings and sour cream. Add optional cheeseburger, chicken, roast beef, bacon or corned beef.

#### 5. CHEESEBURGER, FRIES

##### B-Bop's

Multiple locations

[www.b-bops.com](http://www.b-bops.com)

Take the winner in CITYVIEW's Best Of Des Moines poll in the category of Best Local French Fries — B-Bop's — and you add in the top vote getter for having the city's Best Local Burgers — also B-Bop's — and the arithmetic is easy. B-Bop's is a wonderful on-the-go option.

"Grab a No. 1 combo consisting of a quarter-pound cheeseburger, fries and a large Diet Mountain Dew," says a certain unnamed source. "So good."

**TIP:** Savvy veterans of B-Bop's say to do yourself a favor and bank a chocolate shake for the road. Enjoy!



The No. 1 combo consists of a trusty cheeseburger alongside tasty fries at... B-Bop's, a central Iowa favorite.

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King Porker at Des Moines Pizza Company

## 6. KING PORKER

### Des Moines Pizza Company

612 Locust St., Des Moines

[www.demopizzaco.com](http://www.demopizzaco.com)

Offering traditional favorites with a twist, unique pizzas sure to surprise you, and some unconventional specialty slices, the menu at Des Moines Pizza Company (DeMo Pizza Co.) is loaded with intriguing options, including the King Porker pizza — with pulled pork, cowboy bacon, BBQ sauce, poblano pepper and topped with granny smith apple coleslaw — that has central Iowans' tastebuds twitching.

## 7. THE WERTZBURGER WARRIOR

### Gilroy's Kitchen

1238 Eighth St., West Des Moines

[www.gilroyskitchen.com](http://www.gilroyskitchen.com)

What do you get when you combine 14 ounces of beef awesomeness loaded with bacon, jalapeños, garlic aioli and cheese? You get The WertzBURGER Warrior, a true mouthful in more ways than one.

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The WertzBURGER Warrior at Gilroy's Kitchen on Eighth Street in West Des Moines.

## 8. BUTTERMILK FRIED CHICKEN AND WHISKEY PECAN PIE

**Bubba - Southern Comforts**

200 Tenth St., Des Moines

[www.bubbasm.com](http://www.bubbasm.com)

Buttermilk fried chicken with certified organic chicken, brined, breaded, seasoned and fried to order. Served with bread-and-butter pickles, roasted garlic and buttermilk mashed potatoes and a choice of two sides. And if you know what's best for you, polish it off with... whiskey pecan pie? Yep. Bubba brings a bit of "Dixie" to Des Moines with vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce.

## 9. THE SUNDAY DRIVER

**The Whiskey House Grill**

2510 S.W. White Birch Drive, Suite 8, Ankeny

[www.thewhiskeyhouse.net](http://www.thewhiskeyhouse.net)

One egg, plus a one-third-pound burger patty and bacon, Prairie Breeze white cheddar, sun-dried tomato spread, caramelized onions, on a brioche bun. You had us at "egg." The Sunday Driver is worth a look.

## 10. TRUFFLED MAC & CHEESE

**Americana**

1312 Locust St., Des Moines

[www.americanasm.com](http://www.americanasm.com)

Truffled Mac & Cheese? When this kind of opportunity knocks, you gotta get the concoction of goat cheese cream sauce, truffle oil, toasted bread crumbs, fresh herbs served with either chicken, shrimp or salmon.

**TIP:** If you like breakfast, and if you enjoy a good lunch, Americana serves the city's best brunch, according to CITYVIEW readers in its annual readers' choice polling. The Saturday-Sunday brunch offerings include a bottomless mimosa and bloody-mary bar.

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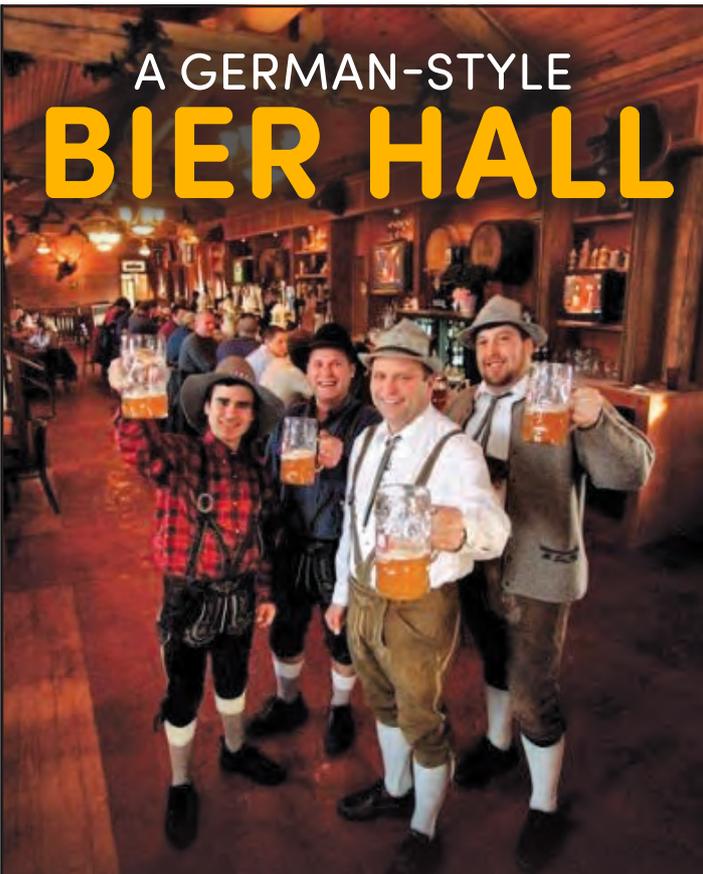
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A full pound of the Bering Sea's best Alaskan king crab legs are on the menu at Chicago Speakeasy on Des Moines' north side.

**11. ALASKAN KING CRAB LEGS**

**Chicago Speakeasy**

1520 Euclid Ave., Des Moines

[www.chicagospeakeasyrestaurant.com](http://www.chicagospeakeasyrestaurant.com)

A full pound of the Bering Sea's best Alaskan king crab legs, tender, sweet and served with drawn butter and lemon. And don't forget, "Wid' all da' grub listed above ta' gets the following for free: choice of baked potato, steak fried potatoes or side of spaghetti, hot mini loaf of bread and our famous salad bar."

**12. PANANG CURRY**

**Cool Basil**

1250 86th St., Clive

[www.coolbasilliveiowa.com](http://www.coolbasilliveiowa.com)

"Unscientifically speaking and unofficially, the Panang Curry — a smooth curry cooked with coconut milk and a creamy peanut sauce — might be the single best thing I've ever tasted," said a customer in Cool Basil's waiting area. That sounds worth a try. Good food, stellar service, plus a thick menu stuffed with sushi, stir-fried dishes, noodles, Thai and more.

**13. LIL ELVIS**

**Dirt Burger**

407 E. Fifth St., Des Moines

[www.dirtburger.us](http://www.dirtburger.us)

What is the "Lil Elvis" ice cream treat at Dirt Burger? Can it really be an oat-milk-based soft-serve shake with banana, peanut butter, jelly and vanilla ice cream? Say, "Y-E-S!"

**NOTE:** All ingredients at Dirt Burger are 100% plant based.

**14. LARGE DUTCH CHOCOLATE LETTER**

**Chocolaterie Stam**

2814 Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines

[www.stamchocolate.com](http://www.stamchocolate.com)

Chocolate, chocolate, chocolate. Milk chocolate, white chocolate, mocha chocolate. You can never go wrong with chocolate. If chocolate equals happiness, then Chocolaterie Stam is somewhere very near paradise, and the large Dutch chocolate letters, a popular tradition in Holland, are hand-crafted with either dark or milk — your choice — and custom-made. These yummy treats weigh more than 6 ounces and are approximately 6 inches tall. "A little bit of sweetness can drown out a whole lot of bitterness," said a wise soul.



The Chicken serves a tasty Chicken & Waffle along the Great Western Trail in West Des Moines (formerly the town of Orilla). Photo submitted

## 15. CHICKEN SPIEDINI

### The Latin King Restaurant

2200 Hubbell Ave., Des Moines  
[www.tursislatinking.com](http://www.tursislatinking.com)

The Chicken Spiedini has been a best seller for nearly 30 years at The Latin King Restaurant. Boneless breasts of marinated chicken skewered, rolled in Italian breadcrumbs, charbroiled and then served with Amogio sauce.

**TIP:** Call ahead if you're coming for dinner. After seven decades in central Iowa, this east-side mainstay continues to draw local foodies in droves.

## 16. OOLONG (WULONG) TEAS

### Gong Fu Tea

414 E. Sixth St., Des Moines  
[www.gongfu-tea.com](http://www.gongfu-tea.com)

“Oolong (Wulong) teas are semi-oxidized teas that lie in between green teas and black teas on the tea spectrum. They are processed in a manner similar to black teas, although the leaves are not allowed to oxidize as fully as their black counterparts. The liquor produced when steeping an oolong is typically a light green color, although a reddish tone is also possible from some types within this varietal — especially those that are more fully



Gong Fu Tea serves Oolong (Wulong) Teas, with a side of tea expertise, in the East Village in downtown Des Moines.

oxidized. Oolongs tend to have a wheat-like aroma that may be tempered with floral and/or woody attributes inherent within the ultimate expression of the plant and its environment. They are always smooth, with very little astringency on the finish — yet they have good strength of flavor and pair well with foods.

The very best examples of this renowned varietal come from Fujian Province, China and

Taiwan. Oolongs tend to be the tea type that many tea enthusiasts gravitate to in time — the complexity of the multiple flavor profiles offered up in successive steepings of high quality leaf provide a pleasant challenge to the connoisseur's palate.”

That's the type of tea expertise available at Gong Fu Tea in downtown Des Moines' East Village.

## 17. CHICKEN JALAPENO

### Skip's

4000 Fleur Drive, Des Moines

[www.skipsdesmoines.com](http://www.skipsdesmoines.com)

Chicken Jalapeno with chicken breast, jalapeno cream sauce, linguini pasta. Classic.

## 18. PAN ROASTED SOCKEYE SALMON

### R+C's Diner

6587 University Ave., Windsor Heights

R+C's Diner is open in Windsor Heights. Local restaurateurs Joe Tripp of Harbinger and Simon Goheen of Simon's have teamed up, and the menu is loaded. One especially enticing item: the Pan Roasted Sockeye Salmon served with potato and dill krepplach, lemon caper butter and roasted asparagus.

**TIP:** Send a little love — a round of drinks — to the hard working folks in the back of the house for \$7.

## 19. PRAIRIE FIRE CINNAMON WHISKEY

### Iowa Distilling Company

4349 Cumming Ave., Cumming

[www.iowadistilling.com](http://www.iowadistilling.com)

"Bottoms up!" The hardcore heat served up via Prairie Fire cinnamon whiskey at Iowa Distilling Company is one of many homegrown and tasty concoctions that are putting Cumming, Iowa, on the map.



The beef tacos at Kung Fu Tap & Taco with cheese and lettuce. Plus, "Every Night is Bike Night," and Hamm's is on tap.

## 20. TACOS

### Kung Fu Tap & Taco...

210 Indianola Road, Des Moines

[www.facebook.com/kungfutapandtaco](http://www.facebook.com/kungfutapandtaco)

The tacos are served until 1:30 a.m. every night of the week. But don't ask for a menu. There is only one item available: Beef tacos with cheese and lettuce. That's the entire list. Simple. Easy. No fuss. No muss. But oh-so-tasty. And "Every Night is Bike Night," and Hamm's is on tap. ■

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- Latin King
- Lucky Bamboo Asian Cuisine
- Lucky Horse Beer & Burgers
- Lucky Lotus
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