

Top 10

Katharine Shilcutt's 10 Favorite Dishes in Houston

By Katharine Shilcutt Thu., May 23 2013 at 6:00 AM

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In a [recent *Food & Wine* article](#), restaurant editor Kate Krader called Houston "America's newest capital of great food" and listed 10 of her favorite dishes/drinks in our city to underscore her point. They included the Vietnamese Wagyu meatballs at Underbelly, the blackstrap rum daiquiri at Charity Saloon and the fatty brisket at Gatlin's BBQ.

The list was the source of much discussion in Houston food circles, and even inspired at least one local blogger -- Albert Nurick -- to write a [10 best dishes list of his own](#). "My approach focuses on the classics," wrote Nurick. "I'm going for the timeless dishes that describe the dining scene in Houston." To that end, Nurick's list featured selections such as the fajitas at the original Ninfa's on Navigation, chicken and waffles from the Breakfast Klub and the chocolate souffle from Tony's.

While trying to decide what my final blog posts for Eating...Our Words would be before my departure tomorrow, I considered the fact that I won't be around this year for the [100 Favorite Dishes countdown](#) nor for the annual Best of Houston® issue in September. Both are excellent means of recognizing restaurants that may not be the hottest, youngest, newest things in town but are still vital components of our city's dining scene.

So I decided to take my inspiration from Krader, Nurick and all of the other people who chimed in on Twitter while discussing the Food & Wine article last week and write a 10 Best Dishes list of my own. Sort of.

The dishes below are my 10 favorites in Houston -- the ones I'd drag friends and family to eat because they have to try *just one bite*, the ones I'd take out-of-towners to eat because I like what they say about my city, the ones that I seek out myself when I'm in need of comfort or just a damn good meal.



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Photo by Mai Pham

1. Wild game burger at [Rainbow Lodge](#)

Like Hobbit Cafe, I have nothing but fond memories of Rainbow Lodge, both at its former home on Buffalo Bayou and its "new" location on Ella. My parents were married there; that's how much my family -- and I -- love this Houston treasure set on the lush banks of White Oak Bayou.

Rainbow Lodge is best known for its beautiful view onto the verdant, rolling banks of the bayou, its bountiful gardens and its menu of wild game and Gulf Coast favorites, dishes such as buffalo tartare with quail eggs or Southern-fried quail with cheese grits and a bourbon-bacon gravy. The timber-framed lodge is refined and business-friendly by day, while the fireplace and ski resort feel impart a deliciously romantic allure by night. This is my special occasion spot *sine qua non*.

It also happens to be where you'll find the best burger in Houston. And just as no list of Houston dishes is complete without Tex-Mex or barbecue, it's certainly not complete without a burger.

A lot of love goes into these studiously constructed burgers, which are only served on Fridays at lunch. Instead of being wasted, tasty scraps from all the wild game the lodge goes through for a few days' prior are saved and thrown into the meat grinder. The result is a patty that can be a blend of antelope, boar, buffalo, venison and anything else the restaurant uses that would taste good on the griddle. Onto each hand-formed patty go even more house-made ingredients: roasted garlic mayonnaise, whole-grain mustard and thick-cut pickles (all made on site) along with a blend of three Cheddar cheeses. Each burger is served on Slow Dough buns made specially for Rainbow Lodge.

The burger recently won the [3rd annual *Houston Press* Burger Bracket](#) in a contest that could be politely described as a bloodbath. Those who'd had Rainbow Lodge pegged as just a fancy-schmancy date place were blown away by the arm-soakingly juicy burger and its lovingly made ingredients. What started as a way to use perfectly good wild game has grown from a few burgers at lunch every week to a stampede to get the 60 patties the restaurant turns out on Fridays.

As with Gerardo's, however, this limited availability ensures the highest quality and makes you appreciate the burger all the more. Familiarity breeds contempt. Trust me on this one, and on this: Get to Rainbow Lodge early on Friday afternoon before all those lovely burgers are gone.
