

From Cozy to Funky

Philadelphia's diverse dining choices by Evelyn Minick, Sara Moran, Elliot Shelkrot, and Kevin Vaughan

Philadelphia's restaurant renaissance began in the late '70s and is still going strong. Terrific new restaurants are opening every week, and it's usually worth making a reservation. A recent trend is BYOBs, where you can enjoy some of the city's best food, while saving money on drinks. It does require navigating Pennsylvania's archaic liquor laws, though. Wine and hard liquor can be purchased at state stores, some of which are listed at the end of this article. Beer can be purchased at delis and some bars.

Closest to the Convention Center

Reading Terminal Market \$
12th and Arch Streets,
215-922-2317,
readingterminalmarket.org.

Every Philadelphian has their favorite purveyor at this former train terminal. Enjoy walking the aisles and take it all in before you choose. There is one sit-down restaurant,



Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto's eponymous restaurant.

the Down Home Diner, that serves all day.

Center City West

Tequilas \$\$
1602 Locust St., 215-546-0181,
tequilasphilly.com.

Founder David Suro provides authentic dishes from all regions of Mexico. These folks know their tequila (Suro comes from Mexico's Tequila region) and they make their own under the label Siembra Azul, recently named among the 10 best tequilas by the *New York Times*. Tequila offers unique combinations and presentations, but there are no reservations, so come early.

Striped Bass \$\$\$\$
1500 Walnut St., 215-732-4444,
stripedbassrestaurant.com.

Stephen Starr revived Striped Bass when it nearly closed three years ago and it is consistently rated one of Philadelphia's best restaurants. Occupying an old brokerage house, it retains the original marble columns and five-foot-diameter crystal chandeliers. Striped Bass specializes in seafood but has other offerings as well. Reservations strongly suggested.

Susanna Foo \$\$\$
1512 Walnut St., 215-545-8800,
susannafoo.com.

PRICE GUIDE

Average prices for dinner, one drink, and tip. Lunches average 25% less.

\$.....	\$16-\$34
\$\$.....	\$34-\$53
\$\$\$.....	\$53-\$72
\$\$\$\$.....	\$72+

Former librarian Susanna Foo serves up reliably excellent Chinese French fusion with imaginative presentation. Many dishes combine Asian sauces with traditionally French entrées such as pheasant. Foo won an award in 1997 as the Mid-Atlantic region's best chef. Lunch and dinner are served daily. Reservations are advised.

Alma de Cuba \$\$\$

1623 Walnut St., 215-988-1799, almadecubarestaurant.com.

This was *the* place to spot Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez when they were in Philly filming *Gigli*. Alma de Cuba serves delicious food infused with the sensuous flavors of Cuba in a vibrant atmosphere reminiscent of old Havana.

Genji \$\$

1720 Sansom St., 215-564-1720.

Locals swear this Rittenhouse sushi shop is the best in the city. The philosophy here is to serve Japanese

food with Japanese culture, and indeed, the owners of Genji artistically present their cuisine in the great Japanese tradition. Specialties include sashimi, tempura, and of course, sushi. Go early and shop at a wonderful independent bookstore next door, Joseph Fox Books.

Melograno \$\$

2201 Spruce St., 215-875-8116.

A long wait here will be rewarded with simple and delicious Italian food in a simple but pretty interior. One of the city's best BYOBs.

Matyson \$\$

37 S. 19th St., 215-564-2925, matyson.com.

A terrific BYOB serving contemporary American food, Matyson is part of the movement to serve locally produced foods. Look for the amazing specials: They select a food, like nuts or spinach, and run it through all of the items on the special menu.

Continental Midtown \$

1801 Chestnut St., 215-567-1800, continentalmidtown.com.

This return to the '70s blends shag carpet and rattan swings with inventive food such as lobster mac and cheese and cotton candy.

La Viola \$\$

253 S. 16th St., 215-735-8630.

This BYOB can be loud and crowded, but it has great Italian food for a moderate price.

Apamate \$\$

1620 South St., 215-790-1620, cafeapamate.com.

A casual Spanish tapas restaurant with the best hot chocolate in town. BYOB, cash only.

Center City East

Morimoto \$\$\$\$

723 Chestnut St., 215-413-9070, morimotorestaurant.com.

Known from television's *Iron Chef*

and *Iron Chef America*, Masaharu Morimoto cooks up contemporary Japanese cuisine in a sleek environment. Great fancy sushi and sashimi, but reservations are essential.

Lolita \$\$

106 S. 13th St., 215-546-7100, lolitabyob.com.

Lolita is a BYOT—bring your own tequila. Wait staff will make margaritas at your table and bring fresh fruits for delicious sangria.

El Vez \$\$

121 S. 13th St., 215-928-9800, elvezrestaurant.com.

Pronounced “Elvis”—the name comes from a Mexican Elvis impersonator—this restaurant features a bejeweled motorcycle rotating above the center circular bar, and illuminated murals and velvet-upholstered booths surround. And check out the bathrooms: Although separate, the men and ladies come together at the sinks. Portions are small, but the chips are homemade.

Tria \$

1137 Spruce St., 215-629-9200, triacafe.com.

This spot focuses on the “fermentation trio”—wine, cheese, and beer—with delectable selections of all three. It also serves salads and sandwiches.

Zinc \$\$

246 S. 11th St., 215-351-9901, zincharphilly.com.

Exposed brick walls add to the charming atmosphere of this French bistro.

Mercato \$\$

1216 Spruce St., 215-985-2962, mercatoxyob.com.

Close quarters and noisy ambience add to the irresistible atmosphere at this Italian/new American BYOB. Cash only.



The bar at Striped Bass.



Chef and former librarian Susanna Foo (standing) joins authors (from left) Kevin Vaughan, Elliot Shelkrot, and Evelyn Minick.

Olde City

Buddakan \$\$\$

325 Chestnut St., 215-574-9440, buddakan.com.

Where else does a ten-foot Buddha watch over your table? This Stephen Starr restaurant was a hit from Day One. The setting is stunningly contemporary with sheets of water at the restaurant entrance. If you can pace yourself, try the dessert sampler, which includes mini versions of everything on the menu. Reservations strongly recommended.

Tangerine \$\$\$

232 Market St., 215-627-5116, tangerinerestaurant.com.

Excellent Moroccan-inspired menu and setting.

Continental \$\$

138 Market St., 215-923-6069, continentalmartinibar.com.

Retro cocktails and Rat Pack ambience—the lighting fixtures look like skewered olives. The eclectic menu includes wasabi mashed potatoes with every entrée.

Fork \$\$

306 Market St., 215-625-9425, forkrestaurant.com.

A foodie favorite, Fork serves new

American cuisine with emphasis on seasonal foods and special attention paid to side dishes.

Chinatown

Lakeside Chinese Deli \$

207 N. 9th St., 215-925-3288.

This is a great Chinese restaurant, serving dim sum made fresh to order all day. Don't miss the stuffed eggplant,

steamed pork buns, and baby bok choy with garlic, but get there early; it closes at 8 p.m. on weeknights.

Vietnam Restaurant \$

221 N. 11th St., 215-592-1163, eatatvietnam.com.

Adventurous authentic Vietnamese food. The third floor is home to the Bar Saigon Lounge, featuring cognacs, single-malt scotches and signature drinks such as lemongrass martinis, the Flaming Volcano (For Two), and the Suffering Bastard.

Lee How Fook \$

219 N. 11th St., 215-925-7266, leehowfook.com.

Lee How Fook translates as "good food for the mouth." This cozy BYOB offers an abundant selection of moderately priced Cantonese dishes prepared fresh. Closed Mondays.

Logan Circle (near Central Library)

Sabrina's Café and Spencer's Too \$

1802 Callowhill St., 215-636-9061.

An offshoot of the South Philly institution Sabrina's, this diner retains the original's charm, only funkier. Comfort food, a great brunch, and large portions can result in long, but quick-moving lines. BYOB.

Long's Gourmet Chinese \$

2018 Hamilton St., 215-496-9928.

Fresh Mandarin-style ingredients in a serene interior.

Rose Tattoo Café \$\$

1847 Callowhill St., 215-569-8939, rosetattoocafe.com.

Taking its name from the Tennessee Williams play, this quaint spot serves new American cuisine with spectacular fresh-flower arrangements and greenery throughout.

West Philly

White Dog Café \$\$

3420 Sansom St., 215-386-9224, whitedog.com.

Serving consistently good nouvelle American food, owner Judy Wicks has built quite a following for her cuisine and her philanthropic commitments. The café often hosts speakers and debates, and the two attached rowhouses are decorated in a delightfully eclectic Victorian style; next door is the Black Cat gift shop.

Pod \$\$

3636 Sansom St., 215-387-1803, podrestaurant.com.

Modern enough for a mention in *Wired*, Pod serves very cool pan-Asian food. Trendy lighting, and if you have a larger group and you're lucky, you can score your own pod and eat in a private space with lights that change colors on command as you dine.

Marigold Kitchen \$\$

501 S. 45th St., 215-222-3699, marigoldkitchenbyob.com.

This intimate dining experience feels like someone's house because it sort of is—upstairs is a six-room boardinghouse. Great food. BYOB.

South Street

Beau Monde \$

624 S. 6th St., 215-592-0656, creperie-beaumonde.com.

A cozy fireplace and yummy

STATE STORES (FOR WINE AND LIQUOR)

5 N. 12th St.
724 South St.
1628 JFK Blvd.
32 S. 2nd St.
1218 Chestnut St.
326 S. 5th St.
1913 Chestnut St.

crepes make this a great spot for a cold night or a weekend brunch.

Alyan's \$

603 S. 4th St., 215-922-3553.

A hole-in-the-wall Middle Eastern spot with the best french fries around. Try the shawarma and spinach pie too. BYOB.

Chick's Café and Wine Bar \$

614 S. 7th St., 215-625-3700,
chickscafe.com.

Chick's Café serves small plates with an interesting cheese list, and knowledgeable, friendly staff will help you navigate the wine list.

Coquette Bistro \$\$

700 S. 5th St., 215-238-9000,
coquettebistro.com.

A noisy French bistro with all the standards—steak frites, cassoulet, etc.—plus a raw bar. The interior makes you feel like you're in Paris.

Supper \$\$

926 South St., 215-592-8180,
supperphilly.com.

The owners have transformed a former Vespa salesroom into "an appealingly great American space," as the *Philadelphia Enquirer* called it. Supper serves smallish plates and has an interesting wine list.

South Philly

Victor Café \$\$

1303 Dickinson St., 215-468-3040.

Victor Café has been a South Philly staple since 1918 with wonderful

meals and waiters who burst into opera. The Victor Salad is a must.

Dmitri's \$\$

795 S. 3rd St., 215-625-0556.

Outstanding fresh Greek-influenced seafood, grilled in the open kitchen. No reservations, but leave your name and walk across the street to the New Wave Café for a drink while you wait. BYOB.

Villa de Roma \$

936 S. 9th St., 215-592-1295.

The real thing, smack in the heart of the Italian Market, serving manicotti, veal prepared seven different ways, and cannoli from the bakery around the corner. Red wine comes chilled and white often isn't. No reservations; cash only.

Little Gems

Capogiro Gelato Artisans \$

119 S. 13th St., 215-351-0900,
capogirogelato.com.

A small-batch gelato place that makes new flavors every day. They use fresh fruits, veggies, liquors, and spices in their mixes. The flavors are not subtle, so you will definitely taste the bourbon in the Bourbon Butterscotch, or the ouzo in the Star Anise with Ouzo. A must-have experience.

5 Guys \$

1527 Chestnut St.,
215-972-1375, fiveguys.com.

A D.C.-based chain that's expanding throughout the eastern U.S., 5 Guys has incredible burgers, fries, and hot dogs, perfect for a quick lunch or dinner.

Franklin Fountain \$

116 Market St.,
215-627-1899, franklin-fountain.com.

You'll feel like you stepped back in time at this Victorian soda fountain, complete with creams and fizzes made with the highest quality ingredients.

And no trip to Philadelphia is complete without one of our world-renowned cheesesteaks. Locals can't agree on who's the best, so you'll have to decide for yourself.

Pat's King of Steaks \$

1237 E. Passyunk, 215-468-1546.

Geno's Steaks \$

1219 S. 9th St., 215-389-0659,
genosteaks.com.

Long-time competitors, Pat's and Geno's are both open 24/7. Regardless of the weather, patrons stand outside at counters or sit at picnic tables to enjoy their steaks. (Geno's earned notoriety in 2006 for a sign directing customers to order in English.)

Jim's Steaks \$

400 South St., 215-928-1911,
jimssteaks.com.

The line to get in snakes around the corner, but South Street has some of the best people-watching in the city. ■



Dining at Buddakan.