



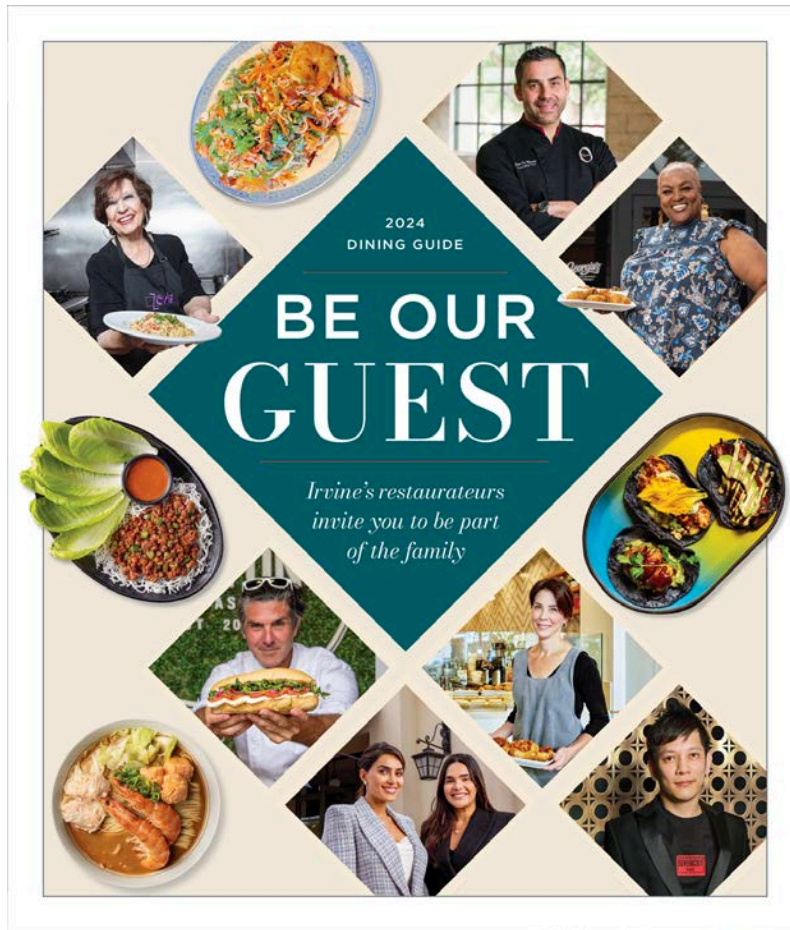
Mahta and Ana Ariarad, who run Irvine Grill, have strong family ties to Irvine.

DINING, COMMUNITY

YOUR 2024 DINING GUIDE

We celebrate Irvine's 400 restaurants, from family-run enterprises to award-winning chefs.

AUGUST 5, 2024



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This month, we celebrate Irvine's 400 restaurateurs, from family-run enterprises to award-winning chefs. No matter what you're craving - delectable Southern fare, authentic pasta or a comforting bowl of ramen, to name a few - you'll find it here.

DINING: BY THE NUMBERS

<p>42</p> <p>international restaurants make Irvine a center for global dining</p>	<p>104</p> <p>dining choices at Irvine Spectrum Center and The Market Place</p>	<p>400</p> <p>total restaurants in Irvine, offering chef-driven dining throughout the city</p>	 <p>Lettuce Wraps from P.F. Chang's</p>
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FAMILIAR FACES, FABULOUS FARE

These dishes highlight Irvine's flourishing food scene and its local ties

Oliver's Trattoria | *Quail Hill Shopping Center*

Chef-owner Erik De Marchi flaunts impeccable technique for his signature Chitarra Cacio e Pepe with four humble ingredients - pasta, grated Parmesan and pecorino cheeses plus pasta water - emulsified to coat housemade pasta strands that attract just-cracked black pepper. It's not a sauce - it's made-to-order alchemy. Sure, there are other worthy pastas, pizzas and proteins on Oliver's lunch and dinner menus, but one order of Cacio e Pepe is a master class for an outstanding dish.



Oliver's Trattoria is locally owned and operated.

HiroNori Craft Ramen | *Sand Canyon Plaza*

Don't let the no-frills digs fool you: This is where to find the artisan old-school ramen that launched Hiro Igarashi and Nori Akasaka into the Michelin universe. Tonkotsu Ramen is silky broth, dense with flavors achievable only by simmering pork bones overnight, that's literally made for slurping down bouncy, hand-cut noodles. The kitchen adds fall-apart pork chashu, green onion, spinach, bean sprouts and a jammy

egg half. You add black garlic oil or house spicy sauce to suit. Vegans get a wildly savory miso-sesame broth.



Del Frisco's Grille | *Irvine Spectrum Center*

A menu favorite among guests and the celebrity chef who developed them - "Hell's Kitchen: All-Stars" winner Ariel Fox - Cheesesteak Eggrolls combine thinly sliced sirloin, sweet-and-spicy chile sauce and honey mustard to seriously addictive ends. The shareable appetizer provides a winning prelude for USDA Prime steaks. Dessert cocktails such as the Banana Bread Old-Fashioned are another intriguing draw.



Habana | *Irvine Spectrum Center*

Though the comforting Ropa Vieja beef stew was born in Spain, it's a national dish of Cuba and a megahit at Habana, where roast beef, onions, garlic and sweet peppers are slowly simmered with the care of a grandmother. The juicy beef pairs splendidly with spiced black beans, buttered rice and sweet plantains. On Sundays, the dish appears with eggs as a brunch item, perfect for alfresco feasts on the sultry patio. Day or night, don't forget the mango or guava Havana rum daiquiri.



Little Sister | *Irvine Spectrum Center*

Cold, tangy, spicy and crunchy, chef-founder Tin Vuong's refreshing warm-weather classic Papaya Salad is a flavor unmatched in these parts. Shredded green papaya provides a juicy canvas that absorbs a bright and complex vinaigrette of lime juice, fish sauce and garlic, while garnet-red slivers of sweet Viet beef jerky, grilled fresh shrimp and a tumble of crushed salty peanuts make every bite a flavor implosion. For a zesty quencher, try the house-infused lemongrass, ginger and mint sipper: Glamorade.



Paul Martin's American Grill | Irvine Spectrum Center

The Brick Chicken at restaurateur Paul Fleming's classic spot brings half of an herb-marinated, free-range chicken, seared between bricks, then roasted and finished with a savory jus. It's presented with fluffy mashed potatoes, blistered tomatoes and roasted garlic. Finish with another essential: the sizzling St. Louis-style butter cake in a mini-skillet. Start with a beyond-classic cocktail, perhaps a Paper Plane from 1860s New York, at the convivial bar.



Paul Martin's American Grill

Cluck Kitchen | *The Square*

Spicy chicken sandwich? Cluck's Nashville Hot Chicken rules the roost. The brioche bun can't begin to contain its transcendently textured fried chicken breast, never mind the finishing slaw, pickles and Comeback sauce; choose heat from light to Reaper. Non-spicy sandwiches include the Havarti Hen, with cheese and sundried tomato. The Toma-Cluck, a tomahawk-style chicken chop with white bread and dill pickle, comes Nashville hot or not.



Hot Nashville Tenders at Cluck Kitchen.

DonerG | Crossroads

Move aside carne asada fries; Turkish Street Fries rule the munchie scene in this ZIP code. Each hefty bowl has a base of crispy fries barely visible under a colorful heap of toppings - grilled halal beef and onions, purple cabbage, fresh corn, jalapeno, feta cheese and parsley garnished with ribbons of creamy signature sauce. Save room for the unique Turkish ice cream that's cold but doesn't melt.



Texas de Brazil | *The Market Place*

Prized by Brazilians for its intensely beefy flavor, the picanha cut is the precious sirloin cap by another name, cooked here “gaucho-style” over live coals and served sizzling, with unending trips to a buffet loaded with salads and sides. It’s one of 20 meats served tableside continuously, until you tap out. Not into beef? There’s also all-you-can-eat lamb chops, pork loin and bacon-wrapped chicken breast, as well as the legendary lobster bisque.

The Dive Oyster Bar | *Irvine Spectrum Center*

The restaurant and its irresistible undersea mural beckon for fresh oysters and New Orleans fare, but those in the know don’t leave without ordering one of its New England-style chowders: perhaps the Dive Chowder with blue crab, shrimp and clams or the Loaded Mac N Chowder in a sourdough bowl. The runaway favorite: Chowder Frots, a party in a bowl bursting with fries and tots, cheese, onions and parsley.



A colorful mural is just part of the allure at The Dive Oyster Bar, a new restaurant at Irvine Spectrum Center.

P.F. Chang's | *Irvine Spectrum Center*

There are lots of copycats now, but it was P.F. Chang's Chinese Bistro that put chicken Lettuce Wraps on the map. The dish - six romaine lettuce "boats" plus minced chicken, garlic, scallion and sesame oil prettily presented on a bed of crispy rice noodles - works equally well before mains such as Mongolian beef or as an entree itself. A decor refresh includes a striking mural of a female samurai.



Yup Dduk | *Campus Plaza*

Yup Dduk, whose name translates to “bizarrely spicy rice cake,” promises Korea’s spiciest street food at locations worldwide. Spice levels at this Irvine outpost range from extra mild to “challenge,” with the mild described as pretty spicy. The starring yup dduk translates to distinctively textured rice cakes, presented in a large bowl alongside fish cakes, mini-sausages, cabbage, green onion and a grand swirl of light mozzarella cheese. Cool off with banana milk.

Capital | *Irvine Spectrum Center*

Dim sum at this spot lures date-nighters and large parties for a seemingly endless menu of 100 flavor and texture options. No wonder diners avoid decision fatigue with the Dim Sum Platter, which includes pork sui mai, sugar cane shrimp, vegetable egg roll, dragon dumpling, crab wonton and butterfly shrimp. Crunchy, succulent, sweet and savory all in one order. Only a lychee martini could improve this sampler.

Cucina Enoteca | *Irvine Spectrum Center*

Italian seafood fans are suckers for the lightly charred Grilled Octopus here, upgraded with gourmet flourishes that include marinated gigante beans, piquillo pepper, a touch of fennel pollen and a drizzle of salsa verde. Add a blistering-hot margherita pizza, a bottle of cold pinot grigio and a table on the canvas-shaded patio for an alfresco meal worthy of Italy's dreamy Amalfi Coast.



At Cucina Enoteca, the Feast of the Seven Fishes is a tapas-style platter for sharing.

Eureka! | *University Center*

Try Irvine's most original burger, the Fresno Fig Burger, which one Yelper called "a charcuterie board on a toasted bun." Eight ounces of juicy beef is stacked with creamy goat cheese, crisp bacon, spicy mustard, peppery arugula and a bit of fig jam. Seasoned fries are the must-have side. And now you know: Fresno is California's top producer of figs.



Meizhou Dongpo | *Culver Plaza*

The Beijing-style, half roast duck at this luxe Sichuan eatery might be Southern California's best. Meticulously prepared, elegantly sliced tableside, presented with savory pancakes and add-ons, the dish makes any meal a special occasion. The more simply presented crispy-skin duck also lures. Adventurous eaters appreciate the rest of the menu, too: Meizhou Dongpo serves its unabashedly fiery dishes precisely as it does at its original locations in China.



A chef at Meizhou Dongpo carves roast duck. The restaurant at Culver Plaza is known for its spicy Sichuan cuisine.

Puesto | *Los Olivos Marketplace*

Puesto's tacos layer stone-ground, blue-corn tortillas with crispy melted cheese and distinctive toppings. Order individually or, better yet, mix and match three for a Taco Trio. Nearly a dozen choices include the filet mignon with pistachio-serrano salsa, chicken al pastor with hibiscus-chipotle tinga and the tamarindo shrimp. Start with the inspired Puesto Perfect guacamole, with habaneros and Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, or the chicharrones, aptly described as "crackling pork magic." The patio is magic, too.



Burnt Crumbs | *Los Olivos Marketplace*

Impossibly puffy pancakes put chef-owner Paul Cao on the culinary map and diners on cloud nine daily at this now-famous source for stacks of ethereal pancakes graced with whipped cream and fresh berries. Never too sweet and always worth the 15-minute wait, the melt-in-your-mouth Souffle Pancakes join the scrumptious novelties such as the Spaghetti Grilled Cheese Sandwich and the Breakfast Salad. Weekly pancake specials might include caramel apple, grilled pineapple or Cinnamon Toast Crunch.



Angelina's Pizzeria Napoletana | *Los Olivos Marketplace*

Fans know the devil is in the details of the red-hot Diavola Pizza - adored for its fiery Neapolitan-style salame and mild mozzarella di bufala atop San Marzano tomato sauce on a blistering wood-fired crust. Insiders favor the patio banquette for polished pastas, vivid salads and Irvine's only pizzas with a coveted AVPN (Associazione Vera Pizza Napoletana) certification. Don't overlook summery sippers such as the Limoncello Mojito, and always consider the heavenly housemade tiramisu.

Cha Cha's Latin Kitchen | *The Market Place*

Crispy, flaky crust gives way to fragrant, tender picadillo in this trio of Picadillo Empanadas hand-formed from fresh masa daily. The ground-beef filling is layered with Latin seasonings that play well against the earthy, gluten-free corn pastry. Ribbons of silky crema fresca add a dairy tang. Pair with a mango-habanero margarita under a patio umbrella for a tropical vibe. The aromatic flavor bombs are discounted daily in the bar during happy hour.



Irvine Grill | Quail Hill Shopping Center

Persian cuisine is renowned for slow-cooked fare bursting with flavor and fragrance, epitomized by lamb shank. The dish's origins date back to the ancient kingdom's royal kitchens, well before the patio dining so popular at Irvine Grill. The Mediterranean magnet further elevates the festive entree with coveted New Zealand lamb and presents it with Persian dill rice and a dipping broth. Vying for most popular: the beef soltani skewer duo. Start with the eggplant dip.



Charbroiled chicken with Tahchin and Shiraz salad.

Zov's Bistro | Orchard Hills Shopping Center

A perennial top seller, the lavish Mediterranean Mezze Platter is made for summertime lounging under the shady arcade with a glass of French rosé. Brimming with six shareable spreads and snacks, including silky hummus and toasty babaganoush, the sampler includes the freshest pita bread and feeds three to five. Owner Armen Karamardian says the platter is his favorite, noting the rich Lebni cheese is made with a family recipe passed down for generations from dairy-owning relatives in Lebanon.



Mediterranean Mezze Platter at Zöv's Bistro

All That Shabu | Culver Plaza

The restaurant deems rib-eye its signature cut. But try convincing fans of filet mignon or brisket. No matter, you can request all three and more for the all-you-can-eat, boil-at-your-table experience. The Korean hot spot also offers pork belly, chicken breast and lamb shoulder; seafood options; broths from vegetarian to spicy beef; distinctive sauces such as rooty mustard and pine chile; intriguing salads such as acorn jelly; and seemingly endless add-ons.



Sweetgreen | *Irvine Spectrum Center*

The Kale Caesar Salad is proof a low-carb bowl bomb can wow your palate while packing a powerful punch of nutrition. Tenderest leaves of emerald green kale are finely shredded to best absorb the super savory Caesar dressing, while juicy tomatoes, shaved Parmesan and cheesy crisps bring those classic flavors that salad fans adore. Roasted chicken bumps the protein count to 39 grams, though sliced steak is a just-debuted upgrade.



Grater Grilled Cheese | *Sand Canyon Plaza*

Every buttery grilled cheese at Grater starts with the “Basic 5” cheeses: colby, Swiss, Monterey, provolone and cheddar, all natural, all unprocessed and all deliriously oozy. The Lobster Grilled Cheese with pale ale-chipotle aioli, one of 10 sandwich options, might make you melty, too. Second choice: L.A. Pastrami. The off-the-charts finish: Loaded S’mores Sweet Potato Fries. Cheese-grater light fixtures add to the surprisingly stylish ambience.



Maast Indian Creative Kitchen | *Alton Retail Center*

There's a burrito on virtually every table, never mind that Maast is an Indian restaurant. The filling might be vindaloo or coconut curry; masala-topped tortilla chips are the favored side. The Tandoori Burrito with marinated grilled boneless chicken tops the list, followed by vegetarian tandoori paneer; there are plenty of other proteins and fillings for build-your-own versions. The popular and fully customizable Parathadilla is an Indian flatbread quesadilla.



Javier's | *Irvine Spectrum Center*

The eye-popping and palate-pleasing cantina transports with its luxe interior, lavish patio and sensational Enchiladas Del Mar. These seafood enchiladas feature your choice of shrimp, Dungeness crab or Maine lobster, all with a tomatillo sauce. The shrimp and lobster versions add garlic and butter. The obvious best choice? One of each, discreetly drizzled with sour cream and garnished with micro cilantro.

“Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined this success, and I have Irvine to thank. The people here have been so loyal and so good to us.”

– Javier Sosa Sr., Founder of Javier's



O Fine Japanese Cuisine | *Quail Hill Shopping Center*

The “O” in O Fine is for omakase, elaborate chef’s-choice tasting menus, as well as the more accessible “O” signature Sashimi Sampler. The sampler introduces six of the shimmering destination’s fusion sashimi dishes - among them halibut with truffle oil and truffle paste, snapper with crispy garlic and scallop with peach - and leaves room for an entree of wild-caught miso Chilean seabass.



Sashimi Sampler at O Fine Japanese Cuisine

SWEET, FUN & FAMILY-RUN

Hudsons Cookies | *Irvine Spectrum Center*

Mom Verlie Payne baked her way through over 300 cookie recipes in the 4-by-4-foot kitchen of her New York City apartment while perfecting the crispy-edge, gooey-center, ginormously large cookies she now sells at Hudsons Cookies (named after her son) at Irvine Spectrum Center.



Blk Dot Coffee | *Irvine Spectrum Center, The Market Place*

As a child, Mai Tran loved to shop at Irvine Spectrum Center and The Market Place. Now her family owns a thriving small business, Blk Dot Coffee, at both locations. “We wanted to bring the tradition of Vietnamese coffee, with our own spin on it,” she says.

Pandor Bakery | *The Market Place*

Tiffany and Raffi Sepetjian dreamed of opening a modern Parisian cafe in Irvine, so they scouted talent in France before opening Pandor Artisan Bakery & Cafe at The Market Place. They still import French ingredients for their crepes, buttery croissants and vanilla custard pies.



Tiffany Sepetjian

COASTAL CROWD-PLEASERS

Marché Moderne | *Crystal Cove Shopping Center*

Florent and Amelia Marneau are the heart and soul of Crystal Cove's most adored dinner destination for next-level French cuisine. Regulars often bypass the generous menu of bistro classics like steak frites or duck confit in favor of Florent's wildly creative daily specials and Amelia's sublime weekly desserts - all with tip-top service.

Gulfstream | *Corona del Mar Plaza*

Insiders know this upscale seafood spot typically requires reservations for diners with their hearts set on fried oysters, wood-grilled artichokes and the legendary grouper sandwich. A sprawling patio is popular with the smart set seeking a kid-free setting for leisurely lunches or sunset cocktails - like the Crisp Martini, a classic and a house favorite.

R+D Kitchen | Fashion Island

Loyal fans keep this sleek cafe bustling for contemporary American cuisine served with polish. A tight menu of proven signatures includes a flawless French dip sandwich, top-tier burger and Asian chicken noodle salad. Leather booths, a gracious bar and inviting patio are designed to suit parties of four or fewer. Check out the sleeper mai tai.



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