

IRVINE DINING

A

to

Z



Enjoy an alphabetical compendium of iconic Irvine restaurants and dishes – from All That Shabu to Zov's – that will satisfy your urge for local and global cuisines and settings from casual to elegant.

by Benjamin Epstein



Irvine Grill at Quail Hill Shopping Center

A All That Shabu

CULVER PLAZA

Flavor-packed broths, intriguing ingredients and virtually endless additions make this a go-to Korean hot pot experience. The plan: Choose among nearly a dozen cuts; boil them in individual pots at your table; and eat all you can. Possibilities include the signature rib-eye and popular Angus beef brisket as well as pork belly, chicken breast and lamb shoulder. Seafood and vegetarian hot pots are available, too. Expand your horizons with ingredients such as acorn jelly salad, spicy japchae (sweet potato starch) glass noodles and rooty mustard dipping sauce.

B Bagel Shack

ALTON SQUARE

Like being a kid in a candy shop, except it's a bagel shop! Considering bagel and cream cheese? A dozen types of bagels, eight flavors of cream cheese and a dozen more toppings that include smoked salmon, hummus and peanut butter-jam yield hundreds of combinations. Bagel sandwiches – such as The Wedge with avocado, bacon and jalapeño cream cheese or The Doheny with olives, tomato, feta cheese and balsamic – are fully customizable, too.



Beef soltani with basmati rice and garden salad at Irvine Grill

C Cucina Enoteca

IRVINE SPECTRUM CENTER

The Cal-Ital eatery evokes modern coastal kitchen, country farmhouse and a touch of whimsy. Known for its innovative design, in-house wine shops and rustic-meets-refined California-Italian cuisine, the brand recently celebrated its Sweet 16, and the Irvine location, the county's first, has been there almost as long. Regional chef Cesar Sarmiento's menu presents indulgent house-made pastas, innovative pizzas, creative large plates, celebrated cheese and salumi programs, artisanal breads and elevated antipasti and dolci.

D Dive Oyster Bar

IRVINE SPECTRUM CENTER

As the name suggests, a bar near the entry offers fresh oysters, half a dozen varieties daily. But the beautiful bivalves most often serve as a prelude to the restaurant's steam-kettle-cooked Cajun favorites and Creole creations, enjoyed at tables beneath an irresistible undersea mural. Practically obligatory chowders – perhaps the Chowder Frots (fries, tots and cheese) or Dive Chowder with crab, shrimp and clams – also make way for the starring pan roasts, cioppino, gumbo, jambalaya or Maine lobster roll.



MASTRO'S OCEAN CLUB

Irvine Spectrum Center

The upscale restaurant's calling cards include caviar-topped oysters and roasted-garlic red king crab legs. But the USDA Prime steaks – as well as the American wagyu, Japanese A5 wagyu and A5 Kobe cuts – can steal the spotlight. Lobster mashed potatoes for the table and the warm butter cake are almost mandatory.



COMING
SOON

DIN TAI FUNG

Irvine Spectrum Center

The Taiwanese noodle destination that first brought Shanghai-style xiao long bao – soup dumplings with 18 meticulous folds, aka XLB – to international attention opens an inviting outpost in Irvine. A half-century after its founding in Taipei, the renowned restaurant also offers buns, spicy wontons, potstickers, rice cakes and refined cocktails.



Eureka!

UNIVERSITY CENTER

Creative burgers and rotating taps are the calling cards at this bustling spot. New on the menu: Black and Blue Mushroom burger with blue cheese, mushrooms, whiskey-caramelized onions and Calabrian chile aioli. Options that never get old: the bison burger – with charred Fresno chile, bacon-infused jalapeño jam and smoked mozzarella – and the Double Smash cheeseburger with garlic dijonaise. Mac N’ Cheese Balls make for shareable memories. Both the cheesecake and the carrot cake are finished with WhistlePig Bourbon maple whipped cream.

Fogo de Chão

IRVINE SPECTRUM CENTER

The elegant Brazilian steakhouse was first to bring the art of open-flame-roasted cuts continuously carved tableside by gaucho-garbed servers to international attention. Coveted cuts include the signature picanha (cap of the sirloin), fraldinha (bottom sirloin), bone-in rib-eye and lamb chops. The Indulgent Churrasco menu adds lobster tail and more. The Carrara Market Table offers endless salads – seasonal hummus and crispy chickpea kale are new – plus charcuterie, exotic fruit and feijoada, the traditional black-bean stew.

Georgia’s Restaurant

IRVINE SPECTRUM CENTER

Nika Shoemaker-Machado puts the home in down-home. The Southern dishes she serves – fried chicken, blackened catfish, fried green tomatoes – are all recipes her mother learned from her grandmother. As the Irvine location marks its first anniversary, soul-delicious attractions keep coming. There’s a new kids’ menu and weekday lunch offerings, including a grilled cheese sandwich with

blackened chicken soup for \$7. The Peach Festival presents fresh peach salad, cobbler and brunch-perfect sangria through August.

Habana

IRVINE SPECTRUM CENTER

Palatial 1940s Cuba sets the scene for croquetas, crab cakes and Cubanitos, for ropa vieja and rum pepper shrimp. Each dish reflects the island nation’s vibrant culture and flavors. Make it a feast with the Taste of Habana sampler or the paella a la Habana for one or for two. Enjoy rum? Start with a classic mojito and finish with Bacardi Reserva Ocho ice cream. A meal on the verdant patio offers pleasures all its own.

Irvine Grill

QUAIL HILL SHOPPING CENTER

A comprehensive menu of classic Persian fare packs in loyal devotees, inside and on two patios. The Irvine Grill Special brings a sampler of signature appetizers. There are a half dozen beef dishes, including filet mignon kebabs; eight New Zealand lamb dishes from traditional shank to French-cut rack of lamb; and even more chicken preparations. Seafood star: pomegranate branzino. Persian-inflected margaritas are the highlight of the cocktail menu.

Javier’s

IRVINE SPECTRUM CENTER

The dining room’s metal tree sculpture is stunning. The patio landscaping is impressive. And the bar, its 100 artisan-woven ropes radiating from the ceiling, is among the city’s most magnificent. Menu highlights often come in threes, among them a trio de ceviches, the trio de enchiladas del mar and La Tablita board for two or three with Prime Angus steak and carnitas. Fried ice cream in a buñuelo basket is a festive finish. Scores of tequilas include four of Javier’s own.



Q&A

Olga Barriga

American classics

Getting familiar at Wood Ranch BBQ & Grill

What makes a restaurant classic at these Spectrum Center favorites? Consistent quality, familiar menus and updates that keep the experience forever fresh.

Wood Ranch BBQ & Grill spans American barbecue with Carolina pulled pork and Texas-inspired smoked brisket. Managing partner Olga Barriga says the eatery prides itself on “Southern California barbecue,” notably its slow-roasted and mesquite-grilled tri-tip. Famous Shredded Onions, peanut coleslaw and summer-perfect Mom’s Deep Dish Peach Crisp are alone worth a visit.

What makes Wood Ranch a classic?

Not just the menu. We treat everyone as family; it’s guests’ needs first. That’s what makes Wood Ranch ... Wood Ranch!

What are your most popular dishes beside the tri-tip?

The brisket ribs are a staple. And the new chopped salad.

How often do you change the menu?

We roll out very few new dishes. When we do, they are a hit. The James crispy chicken sandwich, the Natalie chopped salad, the Lauren mac ‘n’ cheese are all named for members of the owners’ families. We are a very family restaurant!

MORE SPECTRUM CLASSICS

Yard House

The sports bar and restaurant presents New American dishes with global tweaks: Poke nachos, anyone? Classic rock provides the soundtrack for Kurobuta burgers, vegan wings, vampire tacos and lobster garlic noodles.

Cheesecake Factory

More than 250 American and global dishes, and large portions, have made this spot a mainstay for nearly 30 years. Recent additions are as diverse as chicken and jalapeño fritters and SkinnyLicious Branzino.

California Pizza Kitchen

Forty years ago, the Original BBQ Chicken Pizza launched California-style pizzas and revolutionized toppings. CPK continued to push boundaries with gluten-free and cauliflower crusts.



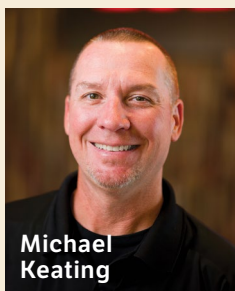
Sauced BBQ & Spirits at The Market Place



Happiest hours

Sauced BBQ & Spirits beckons after work

There are so many reasons to take advantage of happy hour: It's the end of the workday, time to unwind with colleagues, catch up with friends, meet a date. Known for its creative Southern barbecue and playful pig-themed decor, Sauced BBQ & Spirits at The Market Place offers one of Irvine's best options, available 3-5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and after 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday. According to General Manager Michael Keating, there are dozens of food and drink options, including shareable \$8 brisket-chili-cheese fries, \$9 cauliflower bites and \$10 sliders.



Michael Keating

Which items are most popular?

The \$5 pints by Sauced Brewing. The price is unbeatable. The wings – gochujang, buffalo or barbecue style. The sliders – two tri-tip with Alabama white sauce or two pulled pork sauced to your liking.

Sauced is your name! What are the options?

Four are always on the table. Our Tin Roof is a Kansas City-style barbecue sauce, the Hot Tin Roof adds habaneros. Pig Candy is our sweet barbecue sauce – people mix the Pig Candy with the Hot Tin Roof to bring down the heat. Georgia Gold has a mustard flavor.

How happy is the vibe?

It's chill! People come to watch sports. We have 12 big-screen TVs – sound on for the biggest games.

MORE HAPPY HOURS

Puesto Los Olivos Marketplace

Half-priced Snacks & Share feature chilaquiles, chicken flautas and still-crackling chicharrones plus \$6 drafts and \$10 margaritas 3-5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Warehouse 72 Hyatt Regency

Bar and patio happy-hour choices include disco fries (\$5), black-truffle arancini with flash-fried risotto (\$8) and wines by the glass (\$9) or a pineapple-jalapeño margarita (\$12) 4-7 p.m. daily.

Cha Cha's Latin Kitchen The Market Place

Happy hour features a huge array of Mexican specialties at the bar and high-top tables all day Sunday through Thursday and until 7 p.m. Friday.

MANAAO THAI COMFORT FOOD

Irvine Spectrum Center

The eatery showcases distinctive flavors that owner Kanate Ungkasrithongkul experienced growing up in central Thailand. The Los Angeles Times recently named the khao soi noodles with braised beef or soft-shelled crab at the original location among the year's best dishes. The menu – share plates, curries, stir-fries – is ever evolving.



COMING
SOON

K Kalbi Social Club

IRVINE SPECTRUM CENTER

The new Korean barbecue destination is both elegant and social, especially at the circular bar looking out onto the plaza. Attentive servers work the table grills. Feasts for two or more feature short rib, beef brisket and rib-eye in a choice of three marinades plus banchan (sides) and dessert. Shareable pan-fried dumplings, four beef cuts and five-color bibimbap can be ordered a la carte. Cocktails include the creamy Mak-geoky Old-Fashioned served in a bowl.

L Little Sister

IRVINE SPECTRUM CENTER

The dishes at chef Tin Vuong's Vietnamese bistro seem classic and East-meets-West contemporary. Decor? Sultry Saigon, where his parents came from. The sweet and spicy lemongrass chicken wings and stylish cocktails make the highly regarded spot as ideal for a quick rendezvous as for a multicourse feast. The shaky-shaky beef and green papaya salad with beef jerky, grilled prawns and peanuts seem especially pleasurable amid the patio's fronds and ceiling fans.

M Marble Steakhouse & Grille

WOODBURY TOWN CENTER

Can't decide if you're in the mood for exquisite steak, excellent pasta or elaborate tableside Korean barbecue? Marble Steakhouse has you covered for all three, pulling off the hat trick with aplomb. Steak highlights include chateaubriand, aka center-cut tenderloin, and Japanese A5 wagyu New York. There are twin lobster tails, too. Italian signatures include mushroom or squid-ink risotto. Both the banchan sides and the beef are strengths of the Korean experience.

N Nara Thai Kitchen

ORCHARD HILLS SHOPPING CENTER

Provocative flavors, creative presentations and gracious ambience beg repeat visits. Wooden figurines line the bar. Dining-room decor includes distinctive tables and hanging light fixtures. Thai Angus Beef Jerky brings crispy marinated pork strips and spicy dipping sauce. Som tum, Bangkok-style green papaya salad, arrives in a mortar and pestle while curries are served in one-of-a-kind ceramic bowls. Finish with the crispy coconut-rice pancake khanom krok.



O Fine Japanese Cuisine at Quail Hill Shopping Center



Kalbi Social Club at Irvine Spectrum Center

O Fine Japanese Cuisine

QUAIL HILL SHOPPING CENTER

The O is for omakase and the signature “O” sashimi sampler as well as for ocean. The sampler introduces six of the elegant destination’s fusion sashimi dishes, each served in its own stylish spoon, and leaves room for crispy lobster roll, seafood nabe udon soup or wild-caught miso Chilean seabass. Popular sushi bar lunch specials include a 12-piece selection or an elaborate chirashi bowl.

Panini Kabob Grill

LOS OLIVOS MARKETPLACE

The bustling spot presents the best of the Mediterranean. Start with the hummus trio or falafel appetizer. Kabobs include the popular beef koobideh and skewered charbroiled chicken; strawberry date salad is summer perfect. Enjoy all three items on the kabob combo plate. Pasta and panini sandwiches reflect the venue’s beginnings as an Italian cafe nearly 30 years ago. Lots of vegetarian choices include the caprese panini and rigatoni rosa. Ka-Boxes are ideal for takeout.

QUICHE

Pandor Artisan Bakery and Café at The Market Place offers four styles of the dish: quiche Lorraine with leeks, bacon and cheese; quiche Florentine with Parmesan, spinach and shallots; quiche Mediterranean with sundried tomato, basil and goat cheese; and a quiche du jour. Also find quiche at Alton Square’s **La Boulangerie** and **Paris Baguette** at Campus Plaza, Crossroads and Woodbury Town Center.

Robota Wasa

IRVINE SPECTRUM CENTER

The contemporary Japanese decor is stylish and inviting, with one-of-a-kind ceramic plates covering one wall and a beautiful patio. Chef Jin Woo Kim’s presentations of impeccably sourced seafood include the popular spicy tuna crispy rice and salmon-skin taco starters; the buttery black cod entree; mentaiko and shrimp pasta; plus elaborate charashi bowls, bento boxes and sushi platters.



CULINARY ADVENTURES: KIDS EAT FREE

Little foodies get a tasty trip around the globe through Aug. 28 via the Culinary Adventures: Kids Eat Free program. Sundays through Thursdays at nearly three dozen restaurants in Irvine, purchase an adult entree and get one complimentary kids’ meal.

How’s this for a delectable journey? At Irvine Spectrum Center, participants are as diverse as **Brio Italian Grill** and new Singapore-based **Le Shrimp Noodle Bar**. The adventure might continue with **Saaj Mediterranean** at Sand Canyon Plaza, **Maast Indian** at Alton Retail Center, **Cha Cha’s Latin Kitchen** at The Market Place and **The Great Greek** at Westpark Plaza.

Visit kidseatfreeoc.com for a list of participating restaurants. Or download the Retail Therapy app for this offer as well as hundreds more shopping, beauty and activity deals.



Cha Cha’s Latin Kitchen at The Market Place



Cynthia Vigil



Near the office

Benny & Mary's aims for cozy

The dining destinations at retail centers get more attention, but those working in the office buildings of Irvine can take advantage of restaurants and cafes that are convenient and often spectacular. Consider Benny & Mary's at Irvine Towers. Cynthia Vigil, co-owner with her husband, Chad Reinhardt, designed every inch of the dazzling venue.

What do Benny and Mary have in common with Chad and Cynthia?

Benny and Mary are an exciting couple I made up. Benny was a retired interior designer and Mary his ex-fashion model wife. They have the best dinner parties – everybody wants an invitation!

You've described your cuisine as "eccentric."

What does that mean?

Fun, a little funky, kind of youthful and kind of silly. Cheese dumplings in tomato bisque served in a spoon, bulgogi on bao – but also a filet mignon and creamy lemon bucatini.

How do you make such a sprawling space feel cozy?

My aesthetic is maximalism – more is more, not less is more. Different patterns and textures together make you feel cozy. A lot of restaurants are white, clean, crisp and bright and very open. We're not that.

MORE OFFICE OPTIONS

Herb & Ranch UCI Research Park

"Top Chef" finalist and "Chopped All-Stars" judge Brian Malarkey is behind Herb & Ranch. The attractively designed space offers breakfast and lunch at five themed stations.

Wara Bistro Market Place Center

New Wara Bistro is inviting and offers a serene escape on the terrace. Highlights include smoked salmon eggs Benedict, fried chicken croffle (i.e., croissant-waffle) and ube latte.

Tru Bru Organic Coffee Irvine Towers

Tru Bru tempts with an organic acai bowl or breakfast burrito early, chicken artichoke salad or grass-fed burger at lunch and ginger turmeric latte or other coffee drinks anytime.



SUPER IRVINE INTERNATIONAL MARKET

Parkview Center

An Irvine fixture for nearly 30 years, the market's new incarnation promises an epicurean odyssey spanning continents and cultures that includes a meat and produce paradise, gourmet groceries and fast-casual dining. Its emphasis on international foods is no surprise, as the owners also operate highly regarded Persian dining destination Irvine Grill.

Shake Shack

IRVINE SPECTRUM CENTER AND THE MARKET PLACE

Fans hit repeat for made-to-order burgers using premium Angus beef from famed meat purveyor Pat LaFrieda. Customers happily add crinkle-cut fries, hand-spun shakes and house-made lemonades. The smash-patty-and-cheese ShackBurger is the top seller among the made-to-order burgers. The SmokeShack, which adds bacon and chopped cherry peppers, and the Avocado Bacon Chicken aren't far behind.

Taco Rosa

THE MARKET PLACE

The venue has a Mexico City vibe, but its ancestral recipes derive from regions throughout Mexico, conscientiously sourced and prepared using artesian water

and non-GMO corn. Consider the ceviche tostadito trio, alambre quesadilla, blackened tacos or carnitas Michoacan. The taquiza for two brings skirt steak, chicken breast and tiger shrimp over caramelized onions and brie cheese. Margaritas include an elaborate coconut con paleta version. The stemware is memorable, too.

Urban Plates

CROSSROADS AND THE MARKET PLACE

It's like having a home-cooked meal at the home of a creative cook who makes all kinds of cool stuff to satisfy all kinds of tastes. Winning decor at the casual urban-chic spot includes handsome woods, kitchen utensils covering one wall and colorful contemporary dishes high on another. Among menu highlights are chimichurri grass-fed steak, a Mediterranean bowl, Caribbean salad, Moroccan chicken braise and vegan appetizer combos Three Up and Four Up.



Taco Rosa at The Market Place



Los Olivos resident Patty Soffer loves how Village Market serves the community. “It’s my coffee shop, snack bar, grocery store, wine spot and social hangout.”

V Village Market

LOS OLIVOS AND THE VILLAGE APARTMENT COMMUNITIES

A pair of Village Markets serve luxury apartment communities near Irvine Spectrum Center and Los Olivos Marketplace. Larger Village Spectrum goes beyond market staples to numerous thoughtfully curated selections. Consider dolmas in the deli case, build-your-own sandwiches and pizzas, the Pastrami Monster burger hot off the grill and snacks, including Walker’s Mini Shortbread Scottie Dogs. Village Market & Cafe offers made-in-house pastries and Belgian waffles in the morning and build-your-own sandwiches at lunch.

W Wagyu Meat and Grill

CULVER PLAZA AND SAND CANYON PLAZA

Picking up your wagyu filet mignon, rib-eye or Denver cut for home use? First enjoy a wagyu bulgogi plate, a wagyu burger or a non-wagyu chicken bowl, salmon plate or galbi short rib. Combo plates are popular. The market-side wagyu meat is known for its marbling, which contributes to its tenderness, flavor and rich texture. All meats are broken down in-house, and the tasty salads and sides are prepared on-site, too.

X XIAO LONG BAO

The steamed pork dumplings, XLB for short, date to China’s Qing Dynasty. They’re known for their 18 delicate folds and savory broth. Dumpling specialist **Ja Jiaozi** serves two styles: Kurobuta pork and the signature Kurobuta pork and dried shrimp. **Northern Cafe**, at University Center and Westpark Plaza, offers juicy pork and pork and crab. New Szechuan spot **Kuan Zhai Alley** at Los Olivos Marketplace presents its pork XLB with a side of vinegar.

Y Yup Dduk

CAMPUS PLAZA

The name translates to “bizarrely spicy rice cakes.” The restaurant serves the spiciest street food in Korea, where it is among the country’s most popular brands. The namesake dish brings a large bowl of rice cakes, fish cakes, mini-sausages, cabbage, green onion and light mozzarella cheese. The broth uses Korean ttangcho peppers. Spice levels range from extra mild to “challenge,” with the mild described as “pretty spicy.” Cool off with banana milk.

Z Zov’s Bistro

ORCHARD HILLS SHOPPING CENTER

Revered chef-restaurateur Zov Karamardian, a county treasure for more than 40 years, puts a contemporary spin on Mediterranean fare that reflects her Middle Eastern heritage. The mezze platter, golden lentil soup, kebob two ways and Moroccan salmon salad always inspire. The sensuously spiced lamb burger – on the cover of her cookbook “Simply Zov” – is among the best handhelds of any kind in the county.



MIKIYA WAGYU SHABU HOUSE

Parkview Center

All-you-can-eat wagyu for less than \$100? That’s the lure at Mikiya. Four tiers of choices range from a \$45 menu featuring American wagyu beef plus chicken, Kurobuta pork and vegetables to the \$98 menu adding Japanese A5 and Australian wagyu, seafood and appetizers. Choose two of four broth options. Seatings are 90 minutes.





RH Ocean Grill at Fashion Island

COASTAL VIBE

New RH Ocean Grill offers a luxurious dining destination overlooking the Pacific Ocean

Those heading for rooftop RH Ocean Grill at Fashion Island are encouraged to ascend four grand flights of stairs past exquisite home furnishings vignettes. The dining destination itself is, likewise, stunning, filled with contemporary chandeliers, faux olive trees, stylish fountains and, seated at the tables, Newport's finest clientele.

Many begin with a caviar appetizer. Specialties that feature the prized hybrid caviar Petrossian Imperial Kaluga include mini lobster rolls; mini king crab rolls; toro or salmon cones; grilled avocado; and the lightest imaginable house-made chips and dip. Elaborate seafood towers and crispy artichokes with rosemary aioli are also popular starters.

The shaved rib-eye dip is the runaway favorite; impossibly tender meat and Emmentaler Swiss cheese share a charred, buttered baguette with memorably savory jus on the side. Salad? Consider kale Caesar with Tuscan kale or classic Caesar with romaine; luxe add-ons include king salmon, buttered lobster or filet mignon. The whole grilled branzino stars at dinner.

The caramelized banana split and butterscotch brûlée – “no words” is the menu description – offer equally memorable finishes in wholly different ways.



RH Ocean Grill



Joey Newport Beach at Fashion Island

MORE OPTIONS FOR OCEAN CHIC

Joey

FASHION ISLAND

Hummus, gyoza, ravioli: The menu at Joey is global. Think greatest hits of Planet Earth. They're all beautifully executed using local ingredients and served in cool, modern-art-filled surroundings. Popular dishes include seared salmon sushi, chicken lettuce wraps and the Joey Classic Steak. Just inside the door is a lively bar plus a standing bar for walk-ins waiting for a table. The spacious patio has a retractable roof.

Ocean 48

FASHION ISLAND

The Mastro brothers' newest restaurant, part of their second

restaurant group, is the most spectacular yet. The beyond-stylish light fixtures in the main dining room include huge spheres high above a reflecting pool. Five other spaces offer a variety of experiences. Highlights



Ocean 48 at Fashion Island

of the impeccably sourced menu include Sasanian osetra caviar; Norwegian king crab legs; Iberico pork chops; and chef favorite Prime New York strip steak.

Javier's

CRYSTAL COVE SHOPPING CENTER

The expanded resort-inspired patio includes palm trees and fire features. The Cabo Azul main dish features Maine lobster enchilada, shrimp- and Dungeness crab-stuffed poblano chile and an Ensenada-style shrimp taco. Consider the Javier's Cristalino margarita, made with the restaurant's own bottling of reserva añejo tequila. You'll feel like you're in Baja Sud in no time.