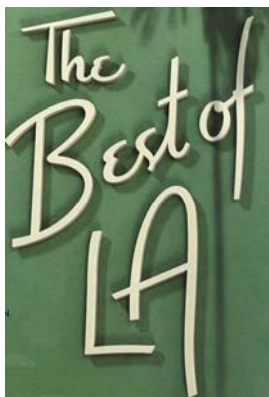


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Cookies that bring tears of joy in Century City, smokin' beef jerky in Boyle Heights, and a romantic restaurant that ignites fireworks in Santa Monica. It's time to dig in.

RESTAURANT COOKING CLASS

A number of restaurants offer cooking classes these days, but we're particularly fond of those at **JAR**. Suzanne Tracht and her sous-chef, Elizabeth Keitz, chat away instructively as they prepare the likes of endive, Asian pear, and Humboldt Fog salad; mussels with water spinach, lobster béarnaise, and fennel salt; the famous JAR pot roast; arugula and goat cheese mashed potatoes; and roasted apricots with vanilla bean ice cream. Held on Saturday, the classes last three hours, and each dish is served as it's completed, along with a paired wine. Students walk off with a folder containing all the recipes—these are dishes you'll want to make at home. There are kids' classes, too. » 8225 Beverly Blvd., L.A., 323-655-6566 or thejar.com.

DUMPLING HOUSE

Resident Chinese foodies—and others who've done their legwork—may recommend the newest seafood house or chandelier-lit dim sum hall to acquaintances, but for close friends and family they name **DIN TAI FUNG**. The Taiwanese-owned,

Shanghai-style dumpling house tops our list because after six years, unlike many splashier places we know, each dish is still flawless. The soup dumplings are delicate and bursting with intense broth; the tissue-thin dumpling wrappers are made from a proprietary flour blend, and the five-spice-infused fried pork chop always crackles with the scent of fresh oil. The house chicken broth is so potent, it's offered in diminutive bowls—priced black chicken is said to be the secret ingredient. The operation is expanding, but to avoid a long wait we advise going during off-hours. » 1108 S. Baldwin Ave., Arcadia, 626-574-7068.

FROZEN YOGURT

There are obvious advantages to having **PINKBERRY** yogurt on your tiny West Hollywood block, but hordes trying to park near their shrine isn't one of them. The pilgrims are drawn to a sparkling-clean shop serving divine plain and green tea frozen yogurt that's made from yogurt, not powder. This is no faux ice cream, and it's not overladen with sugar. Toppings run from per-

fect, ripe seasonal fruits—raspberries, mangoes, strawberries, blueberries, bananas—to cereal and chocolate chips. Owner Hye Kyung (aka Shelly) Hwang's concept is high and so successful that 20 more shops are in the works. Next up: Larchmont Village, Beverly Hills, Studio City, and Westwood. » 868 Huntley Dr., West Hollywood, 310-659-8285.

POLENTA

Perhaps only fine cooking can render something crunchy and pliant at the same time. The golden crust of the polenta cake at **FORD'S FILLING STATION**, which barely contains the creamy insides, defines just such a generous and paradoxical state. In many preparations polenta is but a conveyance for more intense flavors, a culinary doormat. In chef Ben Ford's rendition the elements are stacked to maximum effect. Blistered tomatoes sit above sautéed chanterelles; a dollop of mascarpone envelops spoon-soft pearl onions. This is a vegetarian dish with the soul of an ice cream sundae. » 9531 Culver Blvd., Culver City, 310-202-1470.

BURGER MENU

The champion burger at Father's Office—with blue cheese, caramelized onions, and arugula—was years ahead of its time. Now we've got gourmet burger nights at Tower Bar, Doug Arango's, and Grace, and entire restaurants devoted to burger menus. The Hollywood Roosevelt's 25 Degrees has sirloin patties and an impressive roster of cheeses, but days go by when pickles, root beer for the floats, and chocolate ice cream for the shakes are AWOL. At **THE COUNTER**, however, the burgers—made of beef, chicken, turkey, or veggies—are outstanding, and the extras are reliably in-house. There are toppings galore (blue, feta, Swiss, cheddar, and other cheeses, avocado, bacon, fried onion strings, fried eggs) and all manner of tasty sauces. Dare to go bunless and get your burger nestled in a bowl of field greens. » 2901 Ocean Park Blvd., Santa Monica, 310-399-8383 or thecounterburger.com.

BEEF JERKY

WE HAVE BEEF JERKY, declares the hand-painted sign outside **A&Z NUT WAGON**, a tiny red-stucco store in Boyle Heights that while named for its chief stock-in-trade—roasted-in-

