

Where to Eat

A SAMPLING OF THE AREA'S BEST RESTAURANTS, FROM *GLOBE* CRITICS



Cured meats at UpperWest in Cambridge

Top PICK

UpperWest / Cambridge / \$\$

Located in a comically oddball spot (the basement of a veterans hall), this simple, unadorned wine bar is one of my favorite new restaurants. Its menu can barely be called one: about a half-dozen dishes, most so simple they don't even require a stove, like charcuterie boards, cheese plates, tinned fish, and pastas. But due to the alchemy of good food, good drinks, and good music, plus the endearing intimacy of this cozy little place, it channels the wonderfully homey experience of eating in a rustic European tavern.

1 CEDAR STREET, NORTH CAMBRIDGE, 617-714-5734, UPPERWESTCAMBRIDGE.COM — Sacha Pfeiffer

METRO BOSTON

BACK BAY

Porto / \$\$\$\$ From local luminary Jody Adams and the team behind Trade, Porto brings Mediterranean meze to one of the city's highest rent districts. Inventive cocktails, fish, and pasta dishes stand out in this pristine, fully imagined space in the shadow of the Pru in the Back Bay. **Ring Road, Boston, 617-536-1234, porto-boston.com** —Nestor Ramos

CAMBRIDGE

Bambara / \$\$\$\$ It may be located in the Hotel Marlowe, but Bambara serves anything but safe or standard hotel fare. Whether it's with a platter of house-made charcuterie, a bowl of sunchokes in buttermilk, or a plain old hamburger, chef David Bazirgan—a veteran of No. 9 Park and a decade in San Francisco—demonstrates again and again the steadiest, most creative hand. **25 Edwin H. Land Boulevard, Cambridge, 617-868-4444, bambara-cambridge.com** —Ted Weesner

En Boca / \$\$\$ A few steps off Harvard Square's main drag, En Boca aims to transport diners much further. Chef Benjamin Lacy's menu circles the Mediterranean, picking up influences and inspiration, then putting them into practice using ingredients found closer to home. Clever cocktails and elevated wines by the glass round out a restaurant that's unfailingly interesting and ambitious. **8 Holyoke Street, Cambridge, 857-259-6321, enbocacambridge.com** —N.R.

Harvest / \$\$\$\$ This Harvard Square institution, which hides down a Brattle Street alley, continues to buzz like a hive going on for 42 years now. There are four dining areas to choose from and a sturdily built menu that excels with meat. Shut your eyes and listen: You're liable to hear the most cerebral conversation this side of ancient Greece. **44 Brattle Street, Cambridge, 617-868-2255, harvestcambridge.com** —T.W.

Little Donkey / \$\$\$ Meet Jamie Bissonnette and Ken Oringer, unleashed. This chef duo's latest venture is a Central Square restaurant with no rules, with a menu that refuses to be locked into any specific cuisine. It's food that makes you cock your head, scrunch your brow, exchange quizzical glances with your tablemates, and ask: What exactly are we tasting? The answer could be matzo ball ramen or farro kimchi fried rice or Vietnamese bologna with squid or a fried chicken sandwich. The creativity and complexity of the flavor combination often wows. **505 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, 617-945-1008, little-donkeybos.com** —S.P.

KEY TO TYPICAL ENTREE PRICES

\$ \$10 OR LESS **\$\$\$** \$16 TO \$25
\$\$ \$11 TO \$15 **\$\$\$\$** \$26 AND UP