

THE OLD PLACE

The false front, the weathered wood, the antlers—the restaurant looks as if it's been airlifted from Deadwood. Tom and Barbara Runyon created a country hideout in the hills of Agoura after they bought the building in the 1960s. Before that the building served as a general store and post office for decades. Within are five booths, a snug bar, and the aroma of terrific steak cooked over red oak. // 29983 Mulholland Hwy., Agoura, 818-706-9001 or oldplacecornell.com.

MARY'S MARKET AND CANYON CAFÉ

To reach Mary's you drive past the turn-of-the-century storefronts of small-town Sierra Madre and into a tree-dense canyon along sinewy streets lined with stone walls. The parking lot sits above a leaf-strewn wash, and rustic homes climb the hill above the café. Anywhere else the waffles, corn dogs, and chicken salad sandwiches would be good enough; here, at a quaint counter in an unsullied swath of old California, they can only delight. // 561 Woodland Dr., Sierra Madre, 626-355-4534.

ARROYO SECO GRILL

The coffee shop takes cover in the Arroyo Seco Golf Course, which itself is in a broad riverbed and shrouded by sycamores. Most people only learn about the restaurant when they're plinking around the miniature golf course or the driving range. It can be pretty crowded at breakfast, but on afternoons you can have the place to yourself as you accompany your perfectly respectable burger with a Bloody Mary or a couple of beers. That's right: There's a full bar. // 1055 Lohman Ln., South Pasadena, 323-255-1155 or arroyoseco.com.



A natural stream in the Hancock Park area? El Rio del Jardin de les Flores runs mostly underground, but you can see it near 4465 West 8th Street between Longwood and Tremaine. Or gain admittance to the Wilshire Country Club, where it trickles west of Rossmore.

BASEMENT TAVERN

Brides, beware—Sazerac-sipping hipsters might be lurking beneath the floorboards of the Victorian, a charming wedding venue. On top of hosting all manner of private events, the little yellow mansion dating from 1882 recently opened its nether region as a speakeasy-style bar (hence the mounted deer head and crystal chandeliers) that slings Prohibition-era cocktails. The entrance is around back through the parking lot; look for the chalkboard sign. (We don't recommend going through the front unless you're in a tux—or you like free cake.) // 2640 Main St., Santa Monica, 310-392-4956 or thevictorian.com.

BARBARA'S AT THE BREWERY

It just feels right, being able to quaff a goblet of craft beer at a former brewery. Now in its 29th year, the converted Pabst Blue Ribbon facility and Edison power plant in Lincoln Heights is the largest live-work art colony in the world. Supplying those creative types with their fuel of choice, Barbara's restaurant is buried in the middle of the complex at the back of the parking lot, past a loading dock, next to a bookstore. Turn down Moulton and watch for a pink neon heart to your left. Three patios, a dining room, and a bar serve Macho Nachos, meat loaf, and ten primo beers on tap at lunch and dinner weekdays. // 620 Moulton Ave., Ste. 110, Lincoln Heights, 323-221-9204 or bwestcatering.com.



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MYTH? THE FASCIST RETREAT

WERE THE WATER TANKS, STAIRWAYS, AND BUILDING HUSKS OF MURPHY RANCH PART OF AN OLD NAZI COLONY? RECORDS ARE SCANT, BUT SEVERAL ACCOUNTS POINT TO A MYSTIC, "HERR SCHMIDT," WHO TAUGHT NAZI PHILOSOPHY AT THE UPPER RUSTIC CANYON PROPERTY AFTER IT WAS PURCHASED IN 1933. IT INCLUDED STRUCTURES BY WELTON BECKET, WHO DESIGNED THE CAPITOL RECORDS TOWER.

OFF-MENU DISHES

These days a restaurant's honest-to-goodness regulars can be hard to distinguish from its Twitter followers, but it's safe to say that if you've heard of the staff-only **Oaxaca**



The Mexican torta comes with chipotle chicken, avocado, queso fresco, and Cholula hot sauce. *Ole!*

sandwich at Tender Greens (tendergreensfood.com), you're on the inside track. Restaurants don't mention certain dishes on their menus for all sorts of reasons: as a special treat for loyal diners, mystique, ego. We've got to admit we like the look our friends give us when we ask for the **homemade blood cake on brioche** at Waterloo & City (waterlooandcity.com).



For the British classic, chef Brendan Collins tops the mix of pig's blood, caramelized apples, and onions with a fried egg.

Never had the **lobster mashed potatoes or wedge salad** at BLT Steak (bltsteak.com)? Well, now you can. If it's before 10 a.m. on a weekend, you can make like James Bond and order the top-secret **Italian Breakfast**

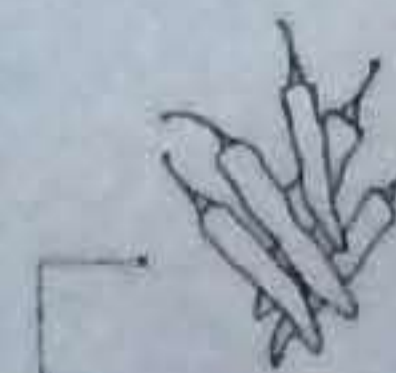


O' faithful! A hunk of iceberg with Roquefort, bacon, croutons, and halved cherry tomatoes.

at Dominick's (dominicksrestaurant.com), which features two eggs, wild boar bacon, polenta, mushrooms, and grilled bread. You might get the stink eye asking for a hamburger at any other Thai restaurant. At Jitlada (jitladala.com), it gets you the superspicy **Jazz Burger** wrapped in lettuce. Shhh. —L.B.S.



Chef Brandon Boudet grills the gamier wild boar bacon over a wood fire for this dish.



Jitlada's owner, Jazz Singanong, only whips up this beef patty with advance notice.