

10 Coolest Small Towns in America 2012 33 Most Beautiful Places In America 10 Restaurants That Started a Food Movement 10 Places You Would Rather Be on a Wednesday

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By Jamie Beckman, Wednesday, Aug 29, 2012, 8:00 AM | Subscribe to the magazine



Momofuku, in New York City, is a bustling hotspot for Korean-fusion dishes. (Courtesy danpeng1/Flickr)

It wasn't long ago that the phrases "local food," "gastropub," "New Nordic," or even "rustic Italian" would have left most Americans scratching their heads in confusion. Now, thanks to pioneering chefs like Alice Waters and Mario Batali, we all know a lot more about where our food comes from and the tradition that informed its preparation. Here, some of the standout restaurants that started it all, plus tips about how to place your order and, in some cases, more affordable offshoot restaurants that still live up to the quality of the original.

**GET INSIDE THE RESTAURANTS!**

**Momofuku Ssäm Bar**  
New York City  
Ssäm Bar, one of restaurateur David Chang's empire of 10 Korean-fusion restaurants, opened in 2006, on the heels of Chang's Momofuku Noodle Bar ("Momofuku" is a reference to Momofuku Ando, the inventor of instant noodles). Ssäm, with its cozy communal-seating bar and busy din, soon became an instant fixture and a destination on the NYC dining scene after it ditched its initial "Asian burrito" concept. (Trivia: "Ssäm" means "wrapped" in Korean.) Well-composed dishes like soft, savory steamed pork buns with cucumbers, scallions, and hoisin sauce, and raw seafood, such as the striped bass with plum, cilantro, and green peppercorns, are hallmarks of the menu.

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**How to order at Ssäm Bar:** This menu of small plates is intended for sharing and nibbling. Or, make a quick pit stop by grabbing a seat at the adjoining, newly revamped bar, Booker and Dax, and ordering a drink like the Laurel & Hardy, made with rye, cognac, maraschino, fernet, benedictine, and mole bitters (\$15), plus an order of steamed pork buns (\$10) or a plate of ham slices straight from farms in Kentucky or Virginia ([momofuku.com/restaurants/booker-and-dax](http://momofuku.com/restaurants/booker-and-dax)) from the limited bar menu. For sheer per-person savings, you can order an entire pork shoulder (the "bo ssäm" meal) for six or more people (\$200) or a newer menu item, the whole rotisserie duck for three to six (\$140)—each comes equipped with a selection of sides like oysters, in the case of the pork shoulder, or chive pancakes with the duck ([momofuku.com](http://momofuku.com)).

**Noma**  
Copenhagen, Denmark  
Winner of the U.K.'s prestigious "Best Restaurant in the World" award three years running, Noma is considered to be the premier destination for "New Nordic" cuisine. Using local ingredients like halibut, roots, and berries and "molecular gastronomy" techniques developed with University of Copenhagen scientists (foams, emulsification, and liquefaction, for example), chef René Redzepi produces inventive dishes like roast filet of muskox and skyr and toasted rye kernels. Redzepi once worked for molecular gastronomy's forefather, chef Ferran Adria, at previous "best restaurant" El Bulli, in Catalonia, which just closed.

**Disney Mobile Magic**  
The official Disney Parks App on Verizon

Here in the U.S., get your Norse fix from New York City restaurant Acme, whose chef, Mads Refslund, was one of Noma's founders. The menu is divided into four distinct parts: raw, cooked, soil, and sea/land.

**How to order at Acme:** Choose a few small plates and pass 'em around. Acme recommends that new diners try the country toast with nectarine, brie, caramelized onions, and honey (\$12), farmer's eggs with Parmesan and cauliflower (\$10), and the pearl barley and clams dish, which is packed with scallops, artichokes, and roasted sunflower broth (\$19, [acmenyc.com](http://acmenyc.com)).

**Chez Panisse**  
Berkeley, Calif.  
That "slow food" movement that's so trendy right now? Chez Panisse started it all four decades ago. Chef Alice Waters opened Chez Panisse in 1971, with a menu emphasizing locally and organically grown ingredients and sustainable production methods. Her first creations, such as a pate en croûte and an almond tart, wowed critics and attracted the attention of culinary luminaries such as Julia Child, and the place has been an institution ever since.

Waters opened Chez Panisse Café, a moderately priced offshoot featuring an open kitchen with a wood-burning oven and charcoal grill, located directly upstairs from the first restaurant, in 1980.

**How to order at Chez Panisse Café:** Perfect for gastronomers on a budget, the café offers a three-course \$29 prix fixe menu that changes daily. One recent lineup: garden lettuce salad; hand-cut fettuccine with sweet corn, zucchini, crème fraîche, and basil; and blenheim apricot sherbet with mulberry gelée and summer berries ([chezpanisse.com](http://chezpanisse.com)).

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Rastaguytoday • 5 days ago  
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For fare that's just as inventive but requires less cash, try Sushi of Gari on New York City's Upper East Side for Masatoshi "Gari" Sugio's inspired creations, like their signature maguro topped with spicy tofu.

**How to order at Sushi of Gari:** A variety of imaginative sushi and sashimi platters are available for under \$50 (sushiofgari.com).

### Pret a Manger

#### London

Fast food and fresh food are no longer mutually exclusive, thanks to the rapid expansion of the Pret a Manger ("Ready to Eat") restaurant chain, which opened way back in 1986 in London but didn't migrate to U.S. shores until 2000. Pop into one of the chain's 265 stores today (U.S. cities with Pret stores include New York, Washington, and Chicago) and note that the mission is the same as it was back then: freshly made salads, sandwiches, yogurts, and sundries ripe for the plucking from refrigerated shelves are continuously stocked throughout the day, and no unsold selection is stored overnight. Instead, extra food is donated to local charities.

**How to order at Pret a Manger:** Well, this one's easy. Grab fresh salads, sandwiches, pots of yogurt, and lemonade off the shelf then bring your food to the check-out counter (pretamanger.com).

### Planet Raw

#### Santa Monica, Calif.

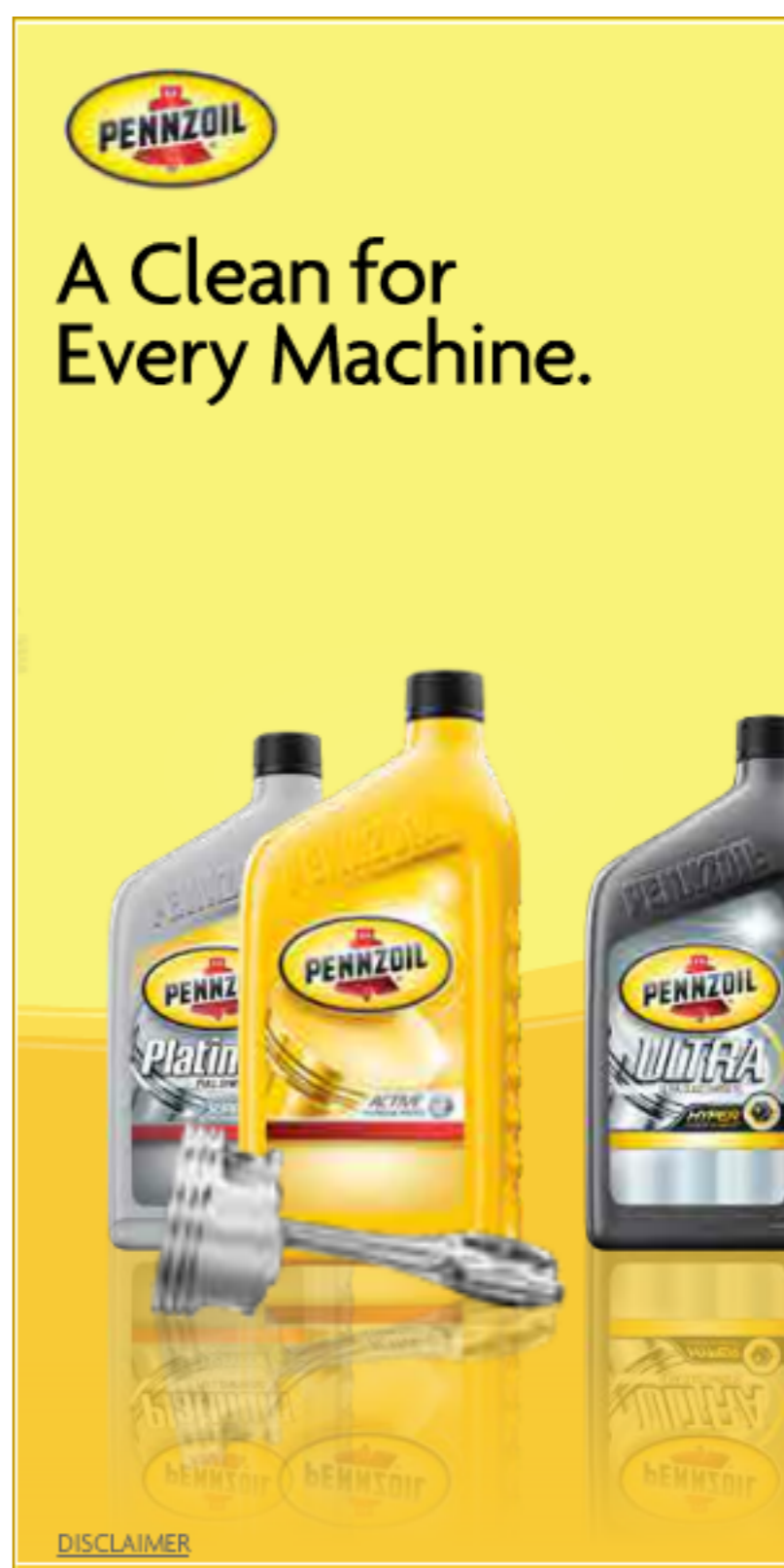
If you happen to be traveling with a companion who has a food allergy, Planet Raw is the place to bring food fans on a strict diet. The all-vegan, organic, and raw restaurant caused a sensation, as well as inspiring several imitators, when chef Julian Brotman opened its doors in the year 2000 (celebs like Woody Harrelson and Robin Williams are fans of his cuisine). Its drinks menu—actually, make that its "signature elixirs" list—is eye-popping itself, offering up drinks such as Alien Blood, a "savory, salty blend of field greens, cucumber, sea weed, zucchini, salsa, and spirulina" (\$9). (Don't worry—there's plenty of plain old organic wine and beer, too.) Even minor details at the restaurant are earth-friendly, from the recycled-paper menu to the sustainable beeswax candles, and budding raw gourmands can take a cooking class with Julian himself on the first Saturday of every month.

**How to order at Planet Raw:** Divvy up an appetizer of flax meatball sliders concocted from marinara sauce, vegan cream "cheese," and mushroom nutmeat. Then, if you've never had pasta-free pasta, seize the day with Raw's green curry pasta, made from your choice of zucchini or kelp noodles (\$17) and Thai nut curry cream. Greens are a classic standby, with 11 different specialty salads and dressings like pumpkin seed oil gracing the menu (\$11, planetraw.com).

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