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THE DENVER MAGAZINE

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MARGARITA

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THE BIGGEST GREEN SCAM IN AMERICA

BY JAMES CARLSON

GET AWAY TO NEW MEXICO'S HOT SPRINGS

BY KELLY BASTONE

THE LIFE OF A TRUE COLORADO COWBOY

BY MATT SLABY

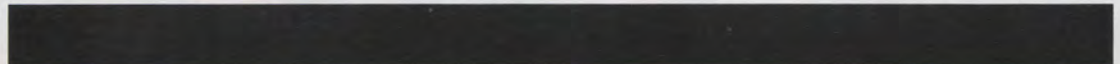


2011 Top of the Town

We can't believe it's been a year since our last lovefest with the Mile High City. But we've finally wrapped up months and months of super-secret investigating (read: a dizzying splurge on the finest meals, cocktails, shops, spa treatments, and entertainment our city has to offer) to bring you our 15th annual Top of the Town issue, and boy, are we exhausted—in the greatest kind of way. The more Denver grows, the trickier it becomes to identify the best of the best. However, we're equal to the task, and this year we've even added more categories, just to make our jobs that much more difficult. (We know, we know: Woe is us.) But with record-breaking input from our readers, who submitted nearly 170,000 votes, we've narrowed it down to a stellar list of Denver's best stuff. And let us tell you: The Mile High City has never looked so good.

EDITED BY JULIE DUGDALE REPORTING BY: SARA ABOULAFIA, GEORGIA ALEXIA BENJOU, PATRICK DOYLE, JULIE DUGDALE, AMANDA M. FAISON, NATASHA GARDNER, LUC HATLESTAD, SARAH HAUGHEY, LINDSEY B. KOEHLER, ERIN MCMILLIN, MAXIMILLIAN POTTER, SARAH RUMPLE, ROBERT SANCHEZ, DALIAH SINGER, ALLISON TONINI & GEOFF VAN DYKE

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARC PISCOTTY / ILLUSTRATIONS BY SEAN PARSONS

with a hefty bite of the gooey, ~~crispy~~ Utah scones (doughy ~~confections~~ more like beignets ~~or~~ *empanillas*) for dessert. 9682 ~~Colorado~~ *Compass* Road, Greenwood ~~Phone: 303-799-4432~~

HOT DOG

EDITORS' CHOICE BIKER JIM'S GOURMET DOGS

Every given day, you'll likely find a ~~stand~~, well, everyone else in the ~~center~~ downtown area) in line ~~at~~ Biker Jim's street cart. Among ~~the~~ interestingly offbeat sausages ~~he~~ offers, the 100-percent-beef ~~dog~~ a subtly spicy concoction ~~served~~ on a soft, toasty bun, is a



Gourmet dogs at Biker Jim's new eatery.

standout. The wide range of condiments—from cream cheese to an enticing DIY selection (think jalapeños and barbecue sauce)—will suit any taste. And unlike (too) many other local hot doggeries, Jim's is grilled, not just boiled. And guess what? Now that he's opened an actual restaurant, you no longer have to rely

on good weather to enjoy Jim's wiener-ly goodness. The menu is more extensive than he can pull off with a street cart, and we're obsessed: Try the rattlesnake and pheasant dog topped with harissa-roasted cactus, Malaysian curry jam, scallions, cilantro, and onions. Seriously. We'll see you there. 2148 Larimer St. (restaurant), 720-746-9355; 16th and Arapahoe streets and Auraria Campus (outdoor stands); www.bikerjimsgods.com

/KID-FRIENDLY RESTAURANT EDITORS' CHOICE LOU'S FOOD BAR

It takes a parent to understand the nuances of a truly kid-friendly spot. And the fact that Frank and Jacqueline Bonanno have two children is evident in the way their six-month-old Lou's Food Bar seamlessly welcomes the short set. We spied malleable Wikki Stix to play with and crayons and coloring sheets; plus, entrées can be ordered as a half portion for half the price. No-brainers include spaghetti with meatballs or the roasted organic chicken. All this, while you're enjoying house-made pâté, duck confit a l'orange, and a nice glass of Pinot Noir. So civilized. 1851 W. 38th Ave., 303-458-0336, www.lousfoodbar.com

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EDITORS' CHOICE CAFÉ AION

In Spain, eating tapas is about the experience—a languid mix of hanging out with friends and appreciating good food—and that's precisely what you get at Boulder's Café Aion. Chef-owner Dakota Saifer's simple, rustic menu changes on a whim, but when available, go for any of the house-cured meats; the roast beets with feta, mint, and almonds; or the fried cauliflower with saffron-infused yogurt (which was singled out by *Bon Appétit* in its October 2010 issue). Better yet: Order all three and a glass (or two) of the not-too-sweet sangría. Salud! 1235 Pennsylvania Ave., Boulder, 303-993-8131, www.cafeaion.com

TAPAS

A small-plate feast at Café Aion.



PACK IT IN
Summertime is in full swing, and nothing says Fourth of July like a scrumptious outdoor spread. We're not talking any old store-bought 'tater salad, though. If we could load up the perfect picnic basket, it would look something like this. —JD

Fried chicken: Steuben's

Accompanied by mashers, a biscuit, and gravy, Steuben's take on crispy, battered goodness is deliciously, yet simply, seasoned. www.steubens.com/take-out

Potato salad: Tony's Market

It's a classic, but mayo on a hot, sunny day can feel a little heavy—which is why we bypass the premade dishes and ask the deli to whip us up a German potato salad (Yukon potatoes, bacon, mustard seed, green onion) or a sweet potato salad with cranberries, red onions, and Parmesan. Make sure to call the day before you need your order. www.tonymarket.com

Watermelon: Interstate

Kitchen & Bar Nothing beats a giant, juicy slice of watermelon, but for a grown-up twist to your fruit, Interstate's watermelon, arugula, feta, and pistachio salad is a tangy treat. www.interstaterestaurant.com

Chips: Biker Jim's Gourmet

Dogs These ain't your mama's Ruffles: Jim's house-made crispy-golden chips are an addictively salty-fresh snack to munch after the mains have been devoured. www.bikerjimsgods.com

Apple pie: Wednesday's Pie

This caramel-apple version with almond-flour crust is one of only three varieties on tap each week, and there's a good reason: It's irresistible. Pre-order a whole pie and pick it up on Wednesday—the only day the tiny space doles 'em out. www.wednesdayspie.com

Old-fashioned soda: Hutch

& Spoon Sure, lemonade always does the trick when the sun is shining, but Hutch & Spoon's cool and refreshing cucumber soda ups the refreshment ante. www.hutchandspoon.com

Chocolate-chip cookies:

Buzz Cafe This drive-up, family-owned coffeeshop on Sixth Avenue and Marion Street bakes giant, made-from-scratch confections daily. They go quick, so stock up: You'll want more than one. www.buzzcafedenver.webs.com