

on the menu



Chef Joseph Oldham.

Insider's Extra

With all the culinary diversity and the different styles of cuisine, I find Houston a very international city. I have worked in Singapore, the Caribbean, Hawaii and studied briefly in Europe, so I find it very refreshing to have so many cuisines in one city. But as a native Texan, there's nothing I enjoy more than a perfectly prepared steak. So, when I'm not in my own kitchen, I enjoy dining at some of the city's great steakhouses, such as Fleming's.

—Joseph Oldham, Executive Chef,
Four Seasons Hotel Houston

The city serves up stellar **restaurants** and **nightlife**, including a wide range of cuisines and scenes, so you're sure to find the perfect fit for any meal or mood.

'ViN' Dining in the Theater District

Eating out after 10 p.m. in Houston used to mean ordering food at the drive-thru or for a sit-down meal or finding an all-night pancake place. Night owls and theater-goers no longer have to suffer. Enter ViN.

ViN (pronounced "vine"), an upscale eatery at Bayou Place, prides itself on its hours of operation as much as its culinary offerings. "Our kitchen is open till midnight to offer an alternative fine dining

opportunity for theater patrons," says Director of Sales Christine McCaskill,

Billing itself as "contemporary American cuisine with southern European influence," ViN is a multi-sensory experience. Red leather booths, white tablecloths and dark wooden floors envelop diners. Executive Chef Jared Estes' menu offers dishes of almost every color, complexity and style. House specialty is the bone-in filet, served with Maine lobster tail and lobster mac and cheese (\$38). Try the Gulf shrimp and grits with andouille sausage (\$11) appetizer or the Tartufo flatbread pizza with Yukon potato, arugula, preserved lemon and truffle oil (\$11).

When it comes to wine, ViN stays true to its name, offering more than 150 wines by the bottle and 34 by the glass. Interested in other adult beverages? Order from the in-house bar or head upstairs to RocBar after dinner. But don't take the stairs — ViN patrons are escorted up via the elevator, bypassing the often hour-long line.

"We hope to create a full experience for our patrons," says McCaskill. "Come for cocktails and dinner, go to a show, and come back for dessert. At ViN, dinner is the night out."

—Kristi Van Aken



Courtesy ViN

Details: 530 Texas Ave., (713) 237-9600, www.vinhouston.com.

BiCE Ristorante



F. Carter Smith



F. Carter Smith

For Italian-food lovers — novices and connoisseurs alike — BiCE Ristorante is an impressive addition to the Houston culinary scene. Not your ordinary, “red sauce”

Italian, BiCE (pronounced “bee chay”) specializes in authentic, northern Italian cuisine in an elegant, contemporary environment. White linens and black-and-white chairs, surrounded by cream walls with stained-wood trim adorn the polished hardwood floors with white wood inlays in the main dining area. The restaurant, which is located on the second floor of Galleria III (near Saks Fifth Avenue), also has a shaded patio that extends over the valet parking area for alfresco dining.

BiCE started in Milan in 1926 and has since stayed true to its roots and to the vision of the family matriarch, Beatrice (“BiCE” to friends and family).

Fresh, homemade pasta is the foundation for many of the dishes, and rich meats and seafood selections are plentiful. “Our menu changes weekly,” says Libby Cagle, the restaurant’s event coordinator. “Our specialty, though, is ravioli di manzo,” a braised short-rib-and-veal ravioli in marsala mushroom sauce (\$21). Gnocchi di patate, with crab and corn in a parmesan cream sauce (\$18) is not to be missed, nor is the Tuscan white-bean-and-lobster soup (\$9).

Though BiCE has been in Houston for only two years, it may be familiar to travelers: the family-owned restaurant has locations in a number of major U.S. cities and across the globe. “We cater to business travelers,” says Cagle. “We strive for consistency and a seamless dining experience. Wherever you are in the world, there’s a BiCE.”

—Kristi Van Aken

Details: 5175 Westheimer Rd., Suite 2295, TX, 77002, (713) 622-2423, www.BiCEHouston.com.

Good Music & Great Food

Looking for authentic Texas tunes and grub in the same place? Cowboy up at **Goode’s Armadillo Palace**. The Armadillo Palace features live music by Texas bands Tuesday through Saturday. Pull up a saddle at the bar and enjoy the famous barbecue and other Texas fare (try the seafood cocktail), along with the music and full-tilt Texas scene. Save room for the pecan pie, quite possibly the best in the Lone Star State. 5015 Kirby Dr. at Bartlett, Houston, TX 77098, (713) 526-9700; www.thearmadillopalace.com.

The relaxed pub atmosphere, great food and beer selection at **McGonigel’s Mucky Duck** is easily worth seeking out its somewhat hidden location, but add in the first-rate live music by folkies, roots rockers, emerging singer/songwriters and staid Texas musicians, and the Duck is a must for music lovers seven nights a week. Order up a pint and the Welsh Rarebit or baked Brie to get the evening started on a high note. 2425 Norfolk off Kirby and Richmond, Houston, TX 77098, (713) 528-5999, www.mcgonigels.com.

Serving up irresistible Tex-Mex since 1949, **Last Concert Cafe** features live music Tuesday through Saturday. With no sign on the bright red door, part of Last Concert’s mystique is the required knock on the door to gain entrance. Once inside, the unfussy décor sports a kitschy watermelon theme that typifies the lack of

pretention that has made this spot a local favorite for almost 60 years. The courtyard concert stage hosts great local acts including Carolyn Wonderland. 1403 Nance St. off N. San Jacinto, Houston, TX, 77002, (713) 226-8563; www.lastconcert.com.

Offering a taste of Louisiana just a few miles from Houston’s famous Galleria, **Magnolia Bar & Grill** is known for tasty crawfish and other Cajun delights. The expansive wooden bar sets the tone, while warm neutral walls host colorful artwork. Catch live music on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings starting at 6 p.m. 6000 Richmond Ave. at Fountainview, Houston, TX, 77057, (713) 781-6207, www.magnolia-grill.com.



F. Carter Smith

—Sandra Cook

A Night on the Town

Live it up any way you like! Houston has everything from cosmopolitan flair to low-key lounging.



Dean's Credit Clothing.

Downtown Scene

Start your evening with dinner and live jazz at Red Cat Jazz Café, featuring Gulf Coast and Cajun cuisine, or Sambuca, celebrated for fine dining.

Stay in a sophisticated mood with drinks at the State Bar in the old Rice Hotel building. Laid-back types may prefer a few pints at the Market Square Grill or Flying Saucer Draught Emporium. For a pub-like setting and a tasty fare, try the Oyster Bar at St. Pete's Dancing Marlin.

Butterfly High and Bar Bollywood, both at 902 Capitol, offer Asian and Indian style.

This pair of nightspots (offshoots of the popular Yatra Brasserie) feature creative cocktails and stellar Indian cuisine. Bar Bollywood spins a worldly variety of dance music.

Out on a weeknight? The Empire is always hopping, even on Mondays. Dean's Credit Clothing (a bar and vintage clothing store) screens art films. The nearby Char Bar, an elegant lounge, boasts a full-service tailor!

Midtown Mix

The Midtown area brims with nightlife options. Catch some cool live music at the renowned Continental Club (3700 Main),

or move to a Motown groove at Sammy's (2016 Main) while enjoying the sweet soulful sounds of its namesake, Sammy Reylford.

Experience the Red Door's unique yin and yang of a bustling first-floor bar scene paired with a serene rooftop bar with penthouse flair and great views downtown and midtown. Look for the unmarked red door 2416 Brazos St. at McIlhenny (just to the right of El Patio).

Sip with sophistication at Ibiza Next Door, a luxe lounge located adjacent to their popular Ibiza Food and Wine Bar (2450 Louisiana at McGowan). The lounge offers an extensive selection of wine and champagne, plus a full bar. The Lounge's lush interior includes serpentine banquettes and chairs, while the patio boasts sleek chairs and loveseat.

More casual spots include the easy-going Front Porch Pub at 217 Gray and the pretty, but unpretentious Pub Fiction at 2303 Smith.

Gotta Dance

Just blocks from The Galleria, The Roxy draws '80s maniacs, Hip Hoppers and anyone with a case of dance fever. The west side's Hush goes for Las Vegas abandon, and the seasoned DJs of the upscale Belvedere in Uptown Park fill your night with fabulous. Looking for a dance floor with Latin flavor? Strut your salsa steps at El Rodeo.

Ready to Relax

Sample sushi and sip hip cocktails for hours in the deliciously modern Rickshaw Far East Bistro, or perhaps a bucket of long-necks and po-boy sandwich at Big Woodrow's is more fitting. There's always Kenneally's Irish Pub for unique local ambiance and excellent pizza, and downtown's funky old bars La Carafe and Dean's Lounge offer tastes of Houston history.

Those with higher brows can savor fine wines in posh hotel bars the Four Season's Lobby Lounge or the Alden-Houston's A+ Bar. Late in the evening, the ultra-elegant patio at Mosaic (in Bayou Place above Vin restaurant) offers the perfect vantage point for viewing the Theater District and downtown skyline.

★ Please look for advertisements in this magazine. Map locations coincide with the Houston Easy Guide Map, page 37.

DOWNTOWN

AMERICAN

★ **HARD ROCK CAFE, 502 Texas Ave., Houston, TX 77002; (713) 227-1392.** Located in the glittery Theater District downtown, Hard Rock Houston has a social focus, bringing together all ages and all social levels to a common meeting ground. Surrounded by priceless memorabilia, you will feel the energy of the music phenomenon that swept the world. Let our energetic and entertaining staff make you feel like a Rock Star! (9J)
★ **VIN RESTAURANT, 530 Texas Ave. at Smith, Houston, Texas 77002; (713) 237-9600.** Enjoy culinary excellence at Houston's Bayou Place, as VIN (pronounced vine) delivers sleek and sophisticated dining to the downtown Theater District. Savor the menu of contemporary American cuisine with Southern European influence with the perfect wine and outstanding service. Lunch and dinner daily. www.vinhouston.com. (9J)

INDIAN

★ **YATRA BRASSERIE, 706 Main St., Houston, TX 77002; (713) 224-6700.** Come to Yatra Brasserie for a fine Indian cuisine. With 25 years of restaurant experience, we also operate a location in London that's been in service for seven years. Let our friendly wait staff serve you delicious curry platters and vegetarian dishes for lunch or dinner. www.restauranteur.com/yatra. (9J)

JAPANESE

★ **BENIHANA, 1318 Louisiana St., Houston, TX 77002; (713) 659-8231.** A meal at Benihana is an experience the smile of their chefs, the sizzle of their grill, the aroma of their steaks and the unmistakable taste of our teppan-yaki cooking. (9J)

STEAKS

★ **STRIP HOUSE, 1200 McKinney, Houston, TX 77010; (713) 659-6000.** Strip House is an American Steakhouse with a seductive ruby red interior that engages the senses. Known for its perfectly charred prime Dry Aged Steaks its namesake is richly marbled and bursting with juice. The creative side dishes such as black truffle creamed spinach and crisp goose fat potatoes exceed all expectation. Hundreds of bottles of wine have been carefully chosen to extend your dining pleasure. "Every piece of meat I encountered was impeccably broiled and seasoned."—Alison Cook, *Houston Chronicle*. (9J)
★ **VIC & ANTHONY'S, 1510 Texas, Houston, TX 77002; (713) 228-1111.** This world-class steakhouse delivers the best of the best, starting with the wine list: an extensive collection from around the world. Our menu features USDA Prime steaks, Australian Rock Lobster, and live Maine Lobster, plus gourmet sides, elegant soups, amazing appetizers, outstanding salads and desserts. www.vicandanthony.com. (9J)

UPTOWN/GALLERIA AREA

CONTINENTAL

★ **VARGO'S, 2401 Fondren, Houston, TX 77063 (713) 782-3888.** A Houston landmark for more than 36 years, Vargo's has been voted one of the 10 most romantic restaurants in Houston with superb food, elegant service and a legendary storybook setting. Our romantic, awe-inspiring location is enhanced by a private lake, acres of magnificent gardens, graceful swans and strolling peacocks. www.vargosonline.com.

ITALIAN

★ **GROTTO, 4715 Westheimer at Loop 610, Houston, TX 77027; (713) 622-3663, and at 6401 Woodway Dr. at Voss, Houston, TX 77057; (713) 782-3663.** Enjoy our authentic Italian cuisine, as close to the Bay of Naples as you can get without a trip overseas. Both locations combine a lively, casual, fun place with sensational food — a combination unmatched in Houston. www.grottohouston.com. (6K)

SEAFOOD

★ **THE OCEANAIRE SEAFOOD ROOM, 5061 Westheimer Rd., Ste. 8050, Houston, TX 77056; (832) 487-8862.** As sleek as a 1930s ocean liner, yet as relaxed as dinner on the shore, the Oceanaire Seafood Room provides the perfect setting to enjoy ultra-fresh seafood, flown in daily from around the world. (6K)

★ **WILLIE G'S, 1605 S. Post Oak Blvd. near The Galleria Houston, TX 77056; (713) 840-7190.** Nationally recognized as one of the top seafood restaurants in the U.S., Willie G's specializes in freshly prepared gumbo, blackened snapper and shrimp Creole. For the heart-healthy, enjoy grilled or broiled flounder, snapper and shrimp. Also certified Angus steaks. All major credit cards. & (6K)

SOUTH AMERICAN

★ **FOGO DE CHÃO, 8250 Westheimer Rd., Houston, TX 77063; (713) 978-6500.** An exciting Southern Brazilian steakhouse, where savory cuts of meat are presented on skewers and sliced tableside by their authentic "Gaucho" chefs. "Voted 'Houston's Best New Restaurant' by *Houston Business Journal* readers. Open lunch and dinner. (4K)

STEAKS

★ **BOB'S STEAK & CHOP HOUSE, 1801 Post Oak Blvd., Houston, TX 77056; (713) 877-8325.** Enjoy our warm, comfortable atmosphere and Galleria-area location. Bob's private dining rooms offer a sophisticated setting to enjoy their prime beef, fine wines and excellent service. Convenient valet parking. Call for hours; Reservations recommended. www.bobs-steakandchop.com. (6K)
★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 520 Meyerland Plaza; (713) 665-2226.** In the mid-1800s, Salt Grass Trail was known for the best beef in Texas. We recapture campfire flavor with Certified Angus Beef™ chicken and seafood chargrilled to perfection. Breads, soups and desserts from scratch daily. Call-ahead seating available. Visit www.saltgrass.com. (6M)

GREENWAY PLAZA/UPPER KIRBY/RIVER OAKS

ITALIAN

★ **LA GRIGLIA, 2002 West Gray, Houston, TX 77019; (713) 526-4700.** Enjoy New Italian cuisine in a stylish setting. Located in River Oaks Shopping Center.

★ **PESCE, 3029 Kirby Dr., Houston, TX 77098; (713) 522-4858.** Enjoy beautiful seafood with Asian, Creole and Mediterranean influences. The glamorous scene features elegant lighting, sleek woods and shiny marble to complement our sensational appetizers, fabulous entrées and superior service. (7K)

JAPANESE

★ **RA SUSHI BAR RESTAURANT, 3908 Westheimer Rd., Houston, TX 77027; (713) 621-5800.** There's never a dull moment in the RA. Freshly prepared sushi and Japanese fusion cuisine with an atmosphere that is as stimulating as a big bite of wasabi. Located in Highland Village. www.rasushi.com. (7K)

HWY. 59 SOUTH/SUGAR LAND

JAPANESE

★ **BENIHANA GRILL, 2579 Town Center Blvd., Sugar Land, TX 77479; (281) 565-8888.** See listing in Downtown area. (1P)

STEAKS

★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 9110 Southwest Fwy.; (713) 771-1777.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com. (4M)

WESTSIDE

JAPANESE

★ **BENIHANA, 9707 Westheimer Rd., Houston, TX 77042; (713) 789-4962.** See listing in Downtown area. (7K)

SEAFOOD

★ **LANDRY'S SEAFOOD HOUSE, 22215 Katy Fwy., Houston, TX 77450; (281) 392-0452 and at 8816 Westheimer at Fondren, Houston, TX 77063; (713) 975-7873 (4K).** Featuring fresh seafood from the Gulf of Mexico; enjoy gumbo, blackened snapper and shrimp Creole. Grilled or broiled flounder, snapper or shrimp. For a dining experience on a water setting, visit locations in Kemah and Galveston. &

STEAKS

- ★ **BRENNER'S STEAKHOUSE, 10911 Katy Fwy., Houston, TX 77079; (713) 465-2901.** A Houston Tradition since 1936! Known for warm atmosphere, prime beef, chicken and seafood specialties. In collaboration with the original owner, we offer the popular Crunchy German Potatoes, Homemade Roquefort salad dressing and the incomparable Apple Strudel, while adding exciting items such as Australian rock lobster tail and a jumbo lump crab cake. www.brennerssteakhouse.com. (6I)
- ★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 8943 Katy Fwy.; (713) 461-6111 (4I), and at 21855 Katy Freeway; (281) 647-9400.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com.

NORTH SIDE/GREENSPPOINT/FM 1960

STEAKS

- ★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 20090 Hwy. 59 N.; (281) 540-5116 (12A), and at 14909 I-45 North; (281) 872-4545 (7A).** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com.

THE HEIGHTS

- ★ **RAINBOW LODGE, 2011 Ella Blvd., Houston, TX 77008; (713) 861-8666.** Celebrating our 30th anniversary at a fabulous new location! Houston's original lodge restaurant features seafood and wild game. Our historic log cabin offers three fireplaces, as well as dining on the deck, overlooking a peaceful ravine and hillside. Lunch, dinner and Sunday Brunch. Ella Blvd. and East TC Jester, inside Loop 610. www.rainbow-lodge.com. (7H)

NORTHWEST

STEAKS

- ★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 17275 Tomball Pkwy.; (281) 477-0952.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com. (4C)

CONROE/THE WOODLANDS

JAPANESE

- ★ **BENIHANA, 1720 Lake Woodlands Dr., The Woodlands, TX 77380; (281) 292-0061.** See listing in Downtown area.

SEAFOOD

- ★ **LANDRY'S SEAFOOD HOUSE, 1212 Lake Robbins Dr., The Woodlands; (281) 362-9696.** See listing in Westside area. &

STEAKS

- ★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 19533 I-45 S., The Woodlands; (281) 298-7527.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com

BAY AREA HOUSTON

MEXICAN

- ★ **THE CADILLAC BAR, #7 Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-9049.** The Cadillac Bar offers authentic Mexican food, world famous margaritas, lively music, a fun, casual atmosphere and great service. Great for your banquet, meeting or party. Where else can you write on the walls? Leave your mark at The Cadillac Bar! (18B)

SEAFOOD

- ★ **THE AQUARIUM, #11 Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-9010.** Dine on sensationally fresh seafood and expertly prepared salads and steaks as you watch more than 100 species of fish in a 50,000-gallon artificial reef! Our desserts look as good as they taste. Taking seafood to new depths! (18B)

- ★ **THE CRAB HOUSE, #3 Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-3366.** The Crab House is the place for East Coast-style seafood! Along with a full selection of fresh fish, we offer Chesapeake Bay Style crab cakes and New England clam-filled chowder! Our trademark seafood salad bar features smoked salmon, ceviche, marinated mushrooms, oysters, bean salads and more. (18B)

- ★ **THE FLYING DUTCHMAN, #9 Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-7575.** The Flying Dutchman is the longest running restaurant at the Kemah Boardwalk. The Legend of The Flying Dutchman recounts an 18th-century sailor condemned to sail the seven seas without rest. Our fresh seafood and comfortable atmosphere at The Flying Dutchman are no legend, you can count on that. (18B)

- ★ **JOE'S CRAB SHACK, #5 Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-2881.** The deck is the perfect place to sit and feel the breeze as you break into freshly boiled crabs and a cold one. The sign on the building sums it up: "the crabs are always free tomorrow!"

- ★ **LANDRY'S SEAFOOD HOUSE, #1 Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-2513.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. (18B)

- ★ **WILLIE G's, Kemah Boardwalk, Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 334-0192.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. (18B)

STEAKS

- ★ **SALTGRASS STEAK HOUSE, 20241 Gulf Fwy.; (281) 338-9778. 213 Kipp Ave., Kemah, TX 77565; (281) 538-5441.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com.

GALVESTON

AMERICAN

- ★ **FUDDRUCKERS, 111 23rd St., Galveston, TX 77551; (409) 765-8000.** Billed as the "World's Greatest Hamburger" and known for its large-sized hamburgers, sandwiches, salads and more, Fuddruckers, located at 23rd and Harborside, is one of Galveston's family favorites. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

- ★ **RAINFOREST CAFE — GALVESTON, 5310 Seawall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77551; (409) 744-6000.** Discover the most realistic indoor rainforest ever created, complete with cascading waterfalls, lush vegetation, tropical rainstorms, beautiful aquariums, trumpeting elephants and entertaining gorillas. The menu features pastas, seafood, salads, signature entrées, sandwiches, and delectable desserts. Get swept away on the Rainforest River Adventure Ride!

SEAFOOD

- ★ **FISHERMAN'S WHARF, Harborside Dr. at Pier 22, Galveston, TX 77551; (409) 765-5708.** Ideally situated next to the Historic Strand District, you can enjoy famous shrimp kisses, fresh red snapper, seafood combination platters, savory chicken dishes, pastas and Certified Angus steaks in one of the many dining rooms all of which boast splendid views of the bay. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

- ★ **FISH TALES, 2502 Seawall Blvd. (at 25th St.), Galveston, TX 77551; (409) 762-8545.** Break away from the beach and enjoy the wholesome fare of Mama Rosie's Fried Shrimp or Flounder with Crabmeat Stuffing on the most popular beachfront balcony on the Seawall. Afterwards, indulge in our large assortment of ice cream and desserts. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

- ★ **LANDRY'S SEAFOOD HOUSE, 1502 Seawall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77550; (409) 762-4261; and 5310 Seawall Blvd. at The San Luis, Galveston, TX; (409) 744-1010.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. & (22G)

- ★ **WILLIE G'S, 2100 Water St. at Pier 21, Galveston, TX 77550; (409) 762-3030.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. & (23F)

STEAKS

- ★ **SALTGRASS STEAKHOUSE, 1502 Seawall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77550; (409) 762-4261.** See listing in Uptown/Galleria area. www.saltgrass.com.

- ★ **THE STEAKHOUSE (at The San Luis Resort), 53rd & Seawall Blvd., Galveston, TX 77551 (409) 744-1500.** Featuring USDA Prime Midwest grain-fed beef and live Maine lobster served amid hand-crafted mahogany woodwork, leather furnishings and luxurious amenities. Live entertainment Tuesday through Saturday by resort favorite pianist-vocalist Angelo Tolentino. Recipient of AAA Four Diamond Award and selected No. 2 on the "Texas Top Ten" by Tom Horan. www.sanluisresort.com. ■