

Best Restaurants in San Diego, 2018

The city's top restaurant owners, chefs, and bartenders
name their favorites



Campfire was the restaurant scene's favorite spot in San Diego

Jaime Fritsch

Restaurant people hate choosing favorites. But I made them. Or, rather, begged until they acquiesced and spilled their favorites. To take the temp of San Diego's dining scene in 2018, I asked the city's top chefs, restaurant owners, and bartenders: What's your favorite restaurant that's not your own?

So this is the list of the best in the city, according to the people who run the food and drink scene.

By far, [Campfire](#) was the favorite among their peers. The Carlsbad project of three talents—owner John Resnick, chef Andrew Bachelier, and bartender Leigh Lacap—has served as a beacon for the once-sleepy Carlsbad, and their new French concept, [Jeune et Jolie, is now up and running.](#)

In this fickle come-lately restaurant world, [ramen shop Menya Ultra](#) managed to stay relevant on the pros' minds. Founder Takashi Endo spent 20 years in Japan developing the concept, opening his first U.S. location in Mira Mesa in 2017 (Andrew Zimmern called it the best ramen in the country).

For sushi, restaurant people seem to agree that [Sushi Todokoro](#) and [Wrench & Rodent](#), where chef Davin Waite has become one of the foremost sustainable sushi chefs in the country. The experts were also smitten with newcomers like [Chiko](#) (the Chinese-Korean fast-casual concept that originated in Washington, D.C.), [Lola 55](#) (the fast-casual better-taco joint in East Village), and [Dija Mara](#) (the hip Indonesian restaurant in Oceanside). And when it comes to a steak dinner, the consensus has been the same for years, and continues to be Cowboy Star.

We even got a recommendation for the best restaurant in Vietnam, plus Vegas and Temecula.

THE BEST RESTAURANTS OF 2018, ACCORDING TO THEIR PEERS

Brian Malarkey, chef-owner, Herb & Wood: "[Trust](#) and [Campfire](#)."

Sami Ladeki, owner Sammy's Woodfired Pizza/Pisco Rotisserie: "[Market Restaurant + Bar](#), [Mister A's](#), [The Winery](#), and [Mille Fleurs](#)."

Terryl Gavre, co-owner Market Del Mar/Bankers Hill Bar + Restaurant, owner Cafe 222: "[Bleu Bohème](#). It's such a romantic spot, and I enjoy sitting at the bar next to candelabras."

Frank Vizcarra, owner Lola 55: "[Wrench & Rodent](#)."

Davin Waite, chef-owner, Wrench & Rodent: "Two standouts that opened this year that I always look forward to are [Dija Mara](#) and [Lola 55](#). For next year I'm super excited for [Jeune et Jolie](#), the new John Resnick and Andrew Bachelier project."

Claudette Zepeda-Wilkins, chef-partner, El Jardin: "[Tribute Pizza](#)."

Johan Engman, owner, Fig Tree Cafe/Breakfast Republic/El Jardin: "Right now [Hane Sushi](#) in Bankers Hill. I'm sure it will be different next week."

Brian Gruber, chef-owner, Notorious Burgers: "[Yamariki Sushi](#)."

Kevin Templeton, exec chef, Barleymash/The Smoking Gun/Spill the Beans: "[Kettner Exchange](#), no question about it."

Brian Redzikowski, exec chef, Kettner Exchange/The Grass Skirt: "[China Poblano](#) in Vegas. It's basically two restaurants in one, you have your Chinese concept on the left that serves dishes like buns, soup dumplings and stir fry. On the right, you have your Mexican cuisine. The Chinese

concept is definitely my favorite. I visit at least 2-3 times a day when I'm in town and aim to be in Vegas at least once a month."

Juan Pablo Sanchez, owner Super Cocina: "[Dobson's](#)."

Jeffrey Jake, exec chef, Fairmount Grand Del Mar: "[Zuni Café](#) in San Francisco and the local [OB Surf Lodge](#)."

Angelo Sosa, chef, Death by Tequila: "[Chiko](#)"

Brandon Sloan, chef de cuisine, Provisional Kitchen: "[Grand Ole BBQ Y Asado](#) in North Park. I love a good BBQ spot and there really aren't enough of them in San Diego."

Ted Gibson, spirits specialist at Rancho Valencia: "[Cucina Urbana](#)."

Amanda Colello, chef, Harrah's Resort Southern California: "[The Bazaar](#) by Jose Andres in Beverly Hills, [Toast](#) in Temecula, and [Underbelly](#) here in San Diego."

Valentina di Pietro, co-owner, Bencotto/Monello: "[Sushi Tadokoro](#)."

Mario Cassineri, culinary director of upcoming Blade 1936: "[52 Kool](#) in Tijuana."

Jonathan Hale, exec chef, The Prado: "Shout out to Hanis Cavin at [Pioneer BBQ](#) in La Mesa and Jesse Paul at the [Wooden Spoon](#) in Escondido. Great chefs, both doing it from the heart and right."

Tim Kolanko, exec chef, Blue Bridge Hospitality: "[Jayne's Gastropub](#)."

Steven McGlynn, GM Viewpoint Brewing Co.: "[Menya Ultra](#), [O'Briens Pub](#), [The Joint](#)."

Gunna Plantar, exec chef, Viewpoint Brewing Co.: "[Chiko](#), [Campfire](#), [Menya-Ultra](#)."

Geraldine Riduara, owner, Holy Matcha: "[Ironside](#). I've been going there every week for the last couple of years."

Jesse Ross, bar manager, Sycamore Den: "[Cowboy Star](#), [The Friendly](#), [Hinotez](#), [Bivouac Ciderworks](#), and [The Lion's Share](#)."

Adam Carruth, owner + winemaker, Carruth Cellars: "Toss up between [Campfire](#) and [Dija Mara](#). One is our neighbor, so we may be a little biased, but Dija Mara is epic. Oceanside is lucky to have them."

Simran Soin, co-owner, Dija Mara: "[Cuc Gach Quan](#) in Ho Chin Minh (Vietnam) and [Wrench & Rodent](#) in San Diego."

TJ Majeske, bar manager, Charles & Dinorah: "[Herb & Wood](#)."

Dario Gallo, owner, Civico 1845: "[Maestoso](#), [Lola 55](#), and [Campfire](#)."

Marco Maestoso, chef-owner, Maestoso: "[Addison Del Mar](#). It's not for everyone's pocket, but by far the best establishment in San Diego."

Andrew Santana, exec chef, Charles & Dinorah: "Here in San Diego, anything [Campfire's](#) John, Andrew, and Leigh touch."

Joe O'Donnel, COO, Urban Plates: "[Cucina Urbana](#)."

Amar Harrag, owner, Tahona: “[Sushi Tadokoro](#).”

Mike DiNorscia, CEO, Grain & Grit Collective (Little Italy Food Hall): “[Civico 1845](#).”

Serena Romano, co-owner, Monzu Fresh Pasta: “[Himitsu](#).”

Ryan Johnston, Chef-partner, Whisknadle: “[Taisho](#).”

Jacqueline Coulon, co-owner, Little Lion: “[Cowboy Star](#). If I own a restaurant 80 percent as good as theirs, I will be proud of myself.”

Garth Flood, bartender, Cowboy Star: “[Turf Club](#).”

Victor Jimenez, chef-partner, Cowboy Star: “[Georges at the Cove](#) and [Nine-Ten](#).”

Chris Simmons, F&B director, Green Acre/Farmer & the Seahorse: “Despite all the newcomers, you still can't beat [Cantina Mayahuel](#). I think it's important to celebrate local owners who've managed to not only navigate the increasingly difficult business of restaurant ownership but have created a mecca for agave lovers from across the country and around the world. It's a credit to Larry and his whole team.”

Kory Stetina, owner, Kindred: “[Campfire](#) or [Tiger!Tiger!](#)”

Anthony Schmidt, beverage director, Consortium Holdings (Craft & Commerce, Ironside, Born & Raised, et al): “[Fernandez Restaurant](#) for birria. [La Fachada](#) for Carnitas Mulitas. [Shirihama](#) for soosh. [The Friendly](#) for cheeseburgers. [Taisho](#) for date night with boo and meat sticks (lol). [Kiko's](#) for fish taco sesh. [Panchita's Bakery](#) for queso Oaxaceño and pickled jalapeno rolls in the am on the way to work (you catch ‘em hot at 9am. Best breaky in SD).”

Saransh Oberoi, chef-owner, Masala Street: “[Ironside](#).”

Richard Walker, Jr., owner, Richard Walker’s Pancake House: “[Village House Kalina](#), authentic Ukrainian/Russian.”

Gina Frieze, owner Venissimo Cheese: “[Buona Forchetta](#). I love the Italian staff. I love that we can bring our 130-pound dog on the patio. I love that they planes fly overhead. I love that I can drink a carafe of wine out of a tumbler. I love that the wine doesn't cost \$15 a glass.”