

Our Favorite Things

We've done this before, but it's been some time, so we thought why not circle back and share a few of our favorite things with you. We cover entire restaurants with each issue, but at those restaurants, we certainly find things that we love going back for again and again. After all, it's our job, right?

Before we share a fresh list, let me revisit a few from the past. This is important so you don't think we're totally missing these if we don't mention them in the new list. These are already in the hall of fame, so stay calm. You can always go back to the well for these killer eats!

I've always said how much I love the Short Rib Stroganoff at Woodfire Grille at Diamond Jo Casino. It's savory love on a plate. The half-pound cheeseburger at the

Thumser's 19th Hole in East Dubuque, IL is the best burger around (BLT too). If you don't agree, you clearly have never had one. Dress it up how you like. Starting with a fantastic juicy patty of beef makes all the difference. The Pork Belly Bao Buns at Oolong Asian Cuisine are completely addictive. So is the Seared Sesame Tuna Bowl at Copper Kettle, but it got a little pricey since food prices went haywire this year. Same goes for the Chicken Salad Sliders on warm pretzel buns at Stone Cliff Winery. And there's the Lobster Lover Roll at Ichiban where the toasted leeks are the key! Carnitas at Los Aztecas are my jam, and the Caesar Salad at Pepper Sprout will light your mouth on fire in the best possible way. Brazen and L.May are always serving up amazing things, but the menus change regularly, so we can't pinpoint things that are always available.

So what do we have for you this time around? Bryce and Kristina from 365 will share a couple of our go-to food infatuations, and our two great food writers, Sunil Malapati and Danny Fairchild, will share a couple of theirs as well. So hopefully in there you will find an ace that you can keep, as Kenny Rogers would say. ■

Bryce's Picks



Shugga's Soul Cafe, Frannie's Barbecue, and Catfish Charlies: Fried Catfish

I've been on a fish kick lately, and these three places all serve up some ridiculously easy, crispy, and not-too-fishy catfish. It's not complex, but sometimes people just can't get it right, and I think each of them does. If you hit Shugga's, you'll want to compliment with that sticky mac and cheese, and the candied yams are basically a dessert item. Or go collard greens and pretend it's healthy. At Frannie's you gotta put some smoked meat with it, right? But do not skip the hushpuppies. And at Catfish Charlies, get the bowl full of catfish nuggets off the appetizer menu, and then a bowl of seafood chowder, and than probably a nap. You're welcome.



Bread & Vine in Galena: Pork Belly Tacos and Lobster Bisque

I know, I keep going to the pork belly, but there's a reason. It's taffy deliciousness. And when it's crispy and plentiful, oh baby. Bread & Vine gives you a good portion covered with slaw, fresh cilantro, and a spicy sauce. Good lawd! I'm not sure if they're permanent menu items, so don't dilly dally. Get over there! Oh, and the lobster bisque. Just die and go to heaven already. And when you come back to life, get some of their pastries for the trip back home to Dubuque. They have about 50 to choose from!

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Kristina's Picks



Birds. Food Truck: Spicy Bird Sandwich

These hefty chunks of chicken are fried to a golden perfection and plopped on a squishy-yet-substantial Hokkaido bun. Bread and butter pickles and mayo are peeking out of this stack, but the spice comes in with a slathering of Cry Baby Craig's Minnesota Hot Sauce. I don't find the heat to be overwhelming, but I also don't find black pepper to be spicy. Served with a side of fries, this chicky-potato combo is more than enough for a meal. Could I finish it in one sitting? Sure, maybe with some encouragement, but I'd be happy splitting it with a human friend.



Village Bar Supper Club: Chicken Parmesan

When you hear "Village Bar," you probably picture a cow-sized portion of prime rib, AYCE fish, and grasshoppers. But what about pasta? Specifically, chicken parmesan? Would you eat it in a bowl? Would it go in your mouth hole? Would you get it grilled or fried? Would you hope it'd be your bride? I'd wife it if I weren't already committed to some pocket shrimp. Wedding bells or not, I suggest transferring your chicken to the plate instead of trying to cut it up in the bowl. The sauce does the tomato good and isn't littered with bell peppers. It's a safe bet, and a filling one at that.

Danny's Picks



Yen Ching: Twice Cooked Pork
One of the first things I ordered when I moved to Dubuque was the twice-cooked pork at Yen Ching. That might be why it tastes like home to me, even though I claim no Chinese heritage. Because, you see... like the protein featured in this dish, I'm the other white meat. Twice-cooked pork at Yen Ching is absolute proof that there's no such thing as too much garlic. The sauce is more garlicky than garlic but also has some outside spiciness and well balanced acidity that elevates every piece of pepper, onion, carrot, and cabbage. And the veggies are still toothy, if not still crisp, like a stir-fry should be. And those tender morsels of pork taste like they've given you their all, what with being cooked and then cooked again. It's one of the most common cravings for me, and I'm not sure I could live without it. Nom.



Shot Tower Inn: Broasted Chicken
Lately I've been crushing on the broasted chicken at Shot Tower Inn. I've had an on-again, off-again relationship with their chicken dinners for years. When I worked in offices downtown, I would order it at least once a week for lunch or dinner depending on what shift I was working. I let the habit terminate with my employment, however. But my partner has been frequently craving Shot Tower Inn lately. She crushes hard on their boneless wings and, as a result, I've rekindled the affair with their broasted chicken. The chicken dinners are served with those good Shot Tower fries, coleslaw, and a dinner roll. Combine all that with some tender-to-the-bone broasted chicken, it's like eating at a supper club, but 'cept without grandma. I'm sorry. I know you miss her. We all miss her.

Sunil's Picks



Big Apple Bagels: Mediterranean Veg-out Sandwich
If I need a sandwich for lunch, the Mediterranean Veg-out sandwich from Big Apple Bagels is perfect. The bagel is firm enough not to get soggy with the crisp vegetables, and it is satisfying without feeling heavy in the middle of the day. I also love that their bagels have the right amount of chewiness. A few of those adorable mini-muffins will not go amiss either.



Oolong Asian Cuisine: Thai Basil Stir Fry
I usually go for Asian cuisines when it comes to ordering takeout for dinner. Stir fries and fried rice dishes are meant to be eaten immediately and do not keep well for the next day, so those are great for a nice dinner for that day. The Thai Basil Stir Fry from Oolong is an exception in that it tastes equally good the next day. The cabbage and bamboo shoots add a lot of texture, and I always ask for the hot oil that makes me a very happy, very sweaty man.





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