

Best Dishes—2011

Larry's Albuquerque Metro Ten Favorite Dishes of 2011

2011 was a good year for outstanding dishes in Albuquerque and in New Mexico. I have put

together a list of my favorites. They are in random order. And here are a few more 2011 favorite

lists:



MinaYamashita

[Mina's Yamashita's](#) list of the best dishes of 2011. Mina is cool, and her tastes are much more elegant than mine. Mina writes the column Mina's Dish for The Weekly Alibi.



Gil Garduño Himself

Gil Garduño and friends have also weighed in with some of their favorites. They appear in a string of comments on his blog Gil's Thrilling (And Filling) Blog, which you should read every few days. To see his list and other users' lists in the Comments section, you need to [scroll around near the bottom of the page](#).

And then there is [New Mexico Magazine's](#) list for 2011.

You may also want to see my Top Ten List and Hall of Fame. The tabs on the navigation menu at the top of this page will get you there.

OK. Here we go.



OrviettoPasta

Orvietto Pasta—[Nicky V's](#).

I can't rave enough about Nicky V's Orvietto pasta. Pancetta, crimini's, peas, cavatappi noodles in a beautiful reduction of sauces, and finished with pinon and fresh herbs – amazing, spectacular, and all those other superlatives. Several gastronome friends have told me that this is the best pasta dish that they have had anyplace, and they'll get no argument from me.



Cubano

Cubano Sandwich—[Guava Tree Café](#). Roast pork is the soul of a Cubano. It must be perfect. The pork prepared by Anamargarita Otero, the vivacious and effervescent chef, has been lovingly marinated and slow roasted to enhance the flavor and retain the juiciness of the pork without rendering all the fat (which dries out the pork). This, together with sweet ham, nutty tasting Swiss cheese, thin pickles, and the correct mustard is placed on delicious bread (from TLC on Osuna) and finished off in a panini press until the cheese pulls it all together. Three napkins juicy. My first bite brought tears to my eyes — I have been searching for this kind of perfection for decades, and now I have found it.



Sweetbreads – Ris De Veau

Sweetbreads—[Blade's Bistro](#) (Placitas).

The word “sweetbread” is first attested in the 16th century, but the logic behind the name is unclear. “Sweet” is perhaps used since the thymus is sweet and rich tasting, as opposed to savory tasting muscle flesh. “Bread” may come from *brede* ‘roasted meat’.

There are many ways to cook sweetbreads, and you should read some of the [sewwtbread recipes](#).

Kevin's version is done in a rich and complex cream sauce with bits of apple that have softened during the cooking. Served with whipped potatoes, carrots, and red cabbage, I could have sworn that I had been transported to the French countryside. This is an outstanding French peasant dish that you need to try after you get over the notion that you are eating the pancreas of a veal.



Carne Adovada Stuffed Sopaipilla

Carne Adovada Stuffed Sopaipilla Smothered in Red—[Mary & Titos](#).

During our last return, Antoinette told me about the restaurant's appearance in the New York Times article [36 Hours in Albuquerque](#). Yet more fine and richly deserve accolades. [Read more](#) comments on this blog.

I again had my usual Carne Adovada Stuffed Sopaipilla (turnover, she calls it) and Jane had a

plate of Carne Adovada. Both with the best red in the universe.

This is New Mexico Mom and Pop at its very best. If you haven't been here, do it now.



Woolly Pig (Mangalitsa)

The Woolly Pig (Mangalitsa Pork)—[Jennifer James 101](#).

curly bristled Mangalitsa hogs are the most corpulent and unusual in a parade of breeds that has found favor among chefs for their richer taste and fuller fat content than the customarily meat-bred hogs that are the staples in American restaurants.

Woolly Pig was a special menu item (May 13-14) that we lucked into when we arrived at JJ101 for Chesapeake Bay soft shell crabs. This piece of pig had the most intense flavor of anything I have ever had from other pigs, including some of those peanut-fed porkers from Virginia. Ordered medium rare, it arrived with a slightly charred outside, very tender inside, and some of the most delicious meat fat that I have ever encountered. Superb. [BTW, the fat is more unsaturated than that from more common breeds.]



Soft Shell Crabs

Soft Shell Crabs — [Jennifer James 101](#).

Soft shell crabs are among the ugliest and sweetest tasting denizens of the salt water estuarine habitat. My all-time favorite seafood is simply sautéed soft shell blue crabs from the Chesapeake Bay, where I could get these treats any day during the summers while I was growing up. I hesitantly squeezed on some drops from the orange and took a forkful. A miracle occurred. This was the best soft shell I have ever tasted. Perfectly cooked, juicy and sweet, and the sweetness of the orange complemented the sweetness on the crab meat. And then I tried the slaw, fearing that the piquancy of the jalapeños would mask the delicate sweetness of the crab. Wrong again. Second miracle. The combination was almost orgasmic.



Carnitas ala Mex

Carnitas ala Mex—[El Bruno's \(4th St.\)](#).

Grilled sirloin cubes, two rolled cheese enchiladas (Christmas), beans, and a flour tortilla.

Every Carnitas plate that I have ever had until now has consisted of grilled cubed pork tenderloin, and I was somewhat hesitant about ordering sirloin Carnitas. I shouldn't have been. Perfectly grilled cubes done medium rare (yes, they ask and pay attention) were exceptionally tender, juicy, and tasty. The accompanying cheese enchiladas were also excellent, covered with Red and Green (Christmas). The red is complex and smoky, of medium piquancy, and the green was hotter, but not quite incendiary. Great chiles.



Ribeye

Ribeye—[Monte Carlo Steak House](#)

My 14-oz ribeye was perfectly medium rare and was the tastiest hunk of beef I have had outside of Lincoln, Nebraska. Juicy and fork tender. Served with fantastic fries, this meal was among the very best of any kind I have had here. Non-yuppie salads were pretty good, too — mostly iceberg with a delicious tangy Greek house dressing. Jane had a slab of prime rib that looked and tasted fabulous (her words, as she came up for air). Her baked potato was perfectly done.



Rack of Lamb

Talus Ranch Rack Of Lamb—[Bien Shur at Sandia Resort](#).

Asiago, Mission Fig, Asparagus, Potato Terrine, Red Wine Reduction, Cherry Gastrique.

[Talus Wind Ranch](#) is a 460-acre ranch located 30 miles southeast of Santa Fe in Galisteo, New Mexico. Humanely raised, transported and processed, their animals never see a feedlot. The result? Lamb that is tender and flavorful, animals that are well cared for, and local agriculture that is supported by New Mexicans.

This small rack is better than any lamb I have had, including that we had in Iceland. Forget Australia—this is the real thing. This entrée is silky smooth and tender, and has a taste that won't stop. Perfectly done medium rare, it outshone everything else in our meal.



Sous Vide Kurobuta Pork Chop

Sous Vide Kurobuta Pork Chop—[Bien Shur](#).

Cheddar & Chorizo White Polenta, Haricot Verts, Roasted Garlic Demi Glace.

This is a huge pork chop, about 1¼-in thick, and nicely frenched. The presentation and plating is gorgeous. The taste? I may never go back to supermarket pork chops again. The sous vide treatment results in a chop that is uniformly done throughout, remains juicy, and is smashingly tender. The polenta is as good as it gets, and the beans are delightful. There is a subtle hint of garlic here.



Dong Bo Pork

Dong Bo Pork (by Su Shi: 13th century)—[Budai](#).

Dong Bo Pork (???) instantly caught my eye. It is named after the famous scholar and poet Su Shi, alias Dong Bo, (1036-1101), who was a writer, poet, artist, calligrapher, pharmacologist, and statesman of the Song Dynasty, serving in the Court of Emperor Shen Zong.

In the highly capable and magic hands of Hsia Fang, this pork belly dish is, simply put, the best Chinese dish I have ever had. Perfectly cooked with a thick and complex red-brown sauce, it is like nothing else I have ever tasted on this planet. A new entry on my personal favorite list.

(So I can't count)

Extras:

1. Anything by Jennifer James 101
 2. Anything at Mary & Tito's
 3. Anything created by Marc Quiñones at Bien Shur
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Larry's New Mexico Ten Favorite Dishes of 2011



The World's Best Green Chile Cheeseburger. Really.

Green Chile Cheeseburger—[Sparky's Burgers & BBQ](#) (Hatch).

The World's Best Green Chile Cheeseburger. Really.

When you go to Hatch, you probably want a Green Chile Cheeseburger. Sparky's is the place where you need to get it. Anyplace else will serve you an imitation.

The beef is hand-cut, hand-ground, hand-formed, and cooked correctly to your desired degree of doneness. Add a slice of cheddar and Hatch Green (what else), embed the thing in a nondescript bun, and you have the best Green Chile Cheeseburger you are likely to get anyplace. This is not one of those designer Green Chile Cheeseburgers like many of those you'll get in the city. It is the real thing, Bubba.

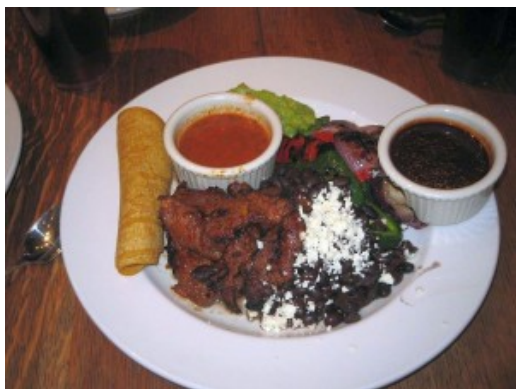


Rum Bread Pudding

Rum Bread Pudding—[Lambert's](#)(Taos).

Bread Pudding with Rum Sauce. I search the globe for the best bread pudding. I am a bread pudding freak, an affliction I share with my friend and fellow gastronome Gil Garduño. Lambert's version is currently in second place on my Bread Pudding hall of Fame. [It was first until it was edged out by Karen Todd's at The Dragonfly Cafe & Bakery. The laurels remain in Taos.]

Lambert's bread pudding is almost identical to that from my mother's kitchen, and I grew up with hers as the standard. Lambert's, with its intense rum flavor and creamy texture, trumps mom's.



Carne Asada

Carne Asada—[Cafe Pasqual's](#)(Santa Fe).

You really should treat yourself to a meal at Pasqual's. Get a reservation. Even then, you might have a long wait in the line that often stretches up the hill. It's worth it. If you do get in, you might be seated at the communal table where you can rub elbows with locals. Or tourists. Become friends. Everybody's happy here. This place is outrageously good.

The Carne Asada here is like no other that you will find anywhere in New Mexico. Made with quality beef, it is tender and incredibly delicious. One of my favorite dishes in Santa Fe.



Menudo Rojo

Menudo Rojo— [La Cocina De Doña Clara](#) (Santa Fe).

The Menudo Rojo is an excellent rendition of a classic dish. The tripe is cooked to exactly the correct texture, and absorbed the taste of the chiles nicely. The hominy is perfectly done, and the rojo is just right — neither too picante nor uninteresting. Served with chopped onion and lime wedges, this version is the best that I've ever had. Mexican oregano and ground cayenne are on every table for patrons to fine tune to their individual taste. My Chicharrón were excellent — not too fatty and not too crispy. Add a little salt and some pinches of cayenne to punch up the taste a bit. Be warned that these are *not* New Mexico style Chicharrón.



Blueberry White Chocolate Bread Pudding

Everything — [Dragonfly Café & Bakery](#) (Taos). Yeah, I know—that's a copout. But everything here is crazy good. The Dragonfly Café and Bakery is a European-style café and bakery located in the heart of historic Taos, New Mexico. Chef and Owner Karen Todd instinctively creates unique and inspired menu items that combine homemade flavors with exotic flair. She does it right. The blueberry White Chocolate Bread Pudding is truly sensational. It ranks number 1 on my Bread Pudding Hall of Fame.

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Plaza Posole

Posole—[Plaza Café Downtown](#) (Santa Fe).

The food ranges from very good to sensational. Posole and Menudo are excellent. Chicken Mole Enchiladas are sensational, with a rich and complex sauce that is probably better than what your Abuelita made. Try the Pumpkin Posole in the late fall—is is a real taste treat. Get the Menudo very spicy.

Plaza Cafe Downtown suffered a tragic fire in 2011, and will reopen in April 2012. I'll be there.



Moroccan Chicken

Moroccan Chicken—[Laughing Lizard Inn & Cafe](#) (Jemez Springs).

The Moroccan Chicken at Laughing Lizard started with a half chicken stewed (slow is the key) with spices with raisins and julienned carrots (about 1 mm.) and mushroom caps had been added. Since neither rice nor couscous are yet allowed on my diet (4 pounds to go!), I had the kitchen add steamed broccoli. The chicken was falling-off-the-bone tender and had absorbed much of the flavor of the stewing liquid. The sweetness of the raisins is a delightful complement to the savoriness of the spices. This is a complex and rich tasting sauce.

Steak Quesadilla

Steak Quesadilla—[Sugar Nymph's Bistro](#) (Peñasco).

Grilled Skirt Steak, BBQ Sauce, Onions Cilantro, Cheddar and Jack Cheeses in Crispy Flour Tortillas, Served with Salad dressed with a superb ginger-sesame dressing. Outstanding salad. But the quesadilla was like four crispy slices from heaven. The thin-sliced skirt steak was perfectly done. There was a small dish of house-made salsa with the plate, and it was vet fresh and tasty, complementing the gently crisped flour tortillas that housed the meat and cheese. I may never have quesadillas anywhere else because they *will* suffer by comparison to the Bistro's.



Green Chile Cheeseburger

Green Chile Cheeseburger—[The Horseman's Haven](#) (Santa Fe).

I had been told by gastronomes whom I trust that the Haven makes a really great GCCB, so there we were one Saturday afternoon staring at two of the loveliest looking GCCB creations that I have seen. The beef is properly fatty and not dry, but quite moist without being greasy. These are hand-cut and hand-formed beef patties with a tantalizingly irregular shape. No cookie-cutter patties here, Bub. The cheese was properly gloppy (with almost stick-to-your-teeth consistency.) Bun was great, not yuppie style with some seeds baked onto the top. I ordered two small dishes of the Green for comparison and experimentation. The regular Green is very high on the piquancy scale, which may be too hot for most tourists and gringos. This I put on one half of the burger, and covered the other half with a mixture (half and half) of the regular and the legendary level 2 stuff. Both halves were fantastic, but then I am a chilehead. This, my friends, is the real stuff.



Green Chile Cheeseburger

Green Chile Cheeseburger—[Cowgirl Café](#) (Santa Fe). Good live bluegrass jam on Saturday afternoons, too.

One of the best GCCB's around Santa Fe. Nicely grilled and very tasty beef (1/2 #) with whole

green chiles-both picante and smoky. Medium rare results in a two-napkin-juicy creation. The hand-cut fries were cooked just right, and had gobs of taste. This is a fun place in which to eat when you get tired from walking around the Railyards.



Larry and San Francisco de Asis outside Rancho de Chimayo.

Carne Adovada Stuffed Sopaipilla—[Rancho de Chimayo](#).

I asked our fine server if I could go off-menu and get a Carne Adovada Stuffed Sopaipilla smothered with Red. Sure enough, it showed up sitting atop rice and some of the best pinto beans I've had. The pork cubes were tender, tasty, and fell apart under my fork. The red chile is made from locally grown Chimayó chiles, and is the very best I have encountered in Northern New Mexico. By far. Rich, complex, deep, and just a shade short of fiery, it compares favorably with the world standard served at Mary and Tito's in Albuquerque, the acknowledged best in the universe. Superb plate of food.

¡Buen Provecho!

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