

FLAVOR



Executive Chef Brandon McGlamery makes use of a burning ring of fire in one of Prato's two wood-burning ovens, appropriately dubbed "Johnny Cash." The other oven is named "June Cash," because together they make music – at least of the culinary kind.



Prato's Chefs Make Old Country Cuisine Taste Like New Again

AT PRATO, YOU WON'T DEMURELY NIBBLE AT A salad or twirl polite forkfuls of pasta. You'll eat with gusto at this Winter Park newcomer, eagerly scarfing the last bites of an arugula-radicchio-crispy pancetta toss, sizzling fried clams and hearty crostinis. A simple Italian meal is that satisfying at this rising star, which is run by the same folks who brought us neighboring Luma on Park.

Prato is nothing like the other Italian restaurants in town. It looks like a tavern, with wood, brick and slate as its decorative palette. Dominating the center of the room is a long, U-shaped bar, which is often packed with revelers downing boutique beer while watching football on one of several televisions. Servers wear plaid shirts, as they might in a barbecue joint.

And the food? Don't expect lasagna and chicken parmigiana. Some menu items are traditionally Italian, but many others are less familiar. "This is foodie food," says Matthew Cargo, the restaurant's chef di cucina. "It's foodie food *in an approachable way*," adds Brandon McGlamery, the innovative executive chef who oversees the culinary teams at both Luma and Prato. "We cook in an Italian style with an American mindset. We're not in any way disrespectful to Italian cuisine, but our food isn't 100 percent by the book. It's progressive."

At Prato's heart are two wood-burning ovens imported from Italy, made by a third-generation manufacturer who produces only a hundred or so units per year. Dubbed "Johnny Cash" and "June Cash" ("They make music," McGlamery explains), the ovens char not only hand-tossed pizzas but also meats and even vegetables used in sauces, soups and pastas. "The food [from the ovens] is more soulful," Cargo notes.

Prato's kitchen crew tests every element of each dish: Brian Cernell, the pastry chef, tried 50 ladyfinger recipes before hitting upon just the right one for tiramisu. The eggs are produced locally and holistically, as are most meats and vegetables.

In fact, the salumi begins as a pig; the culinary team turns a whole hog into prosciutto, pepperoni and fennel sausage. Even the cocktails have homemade elements; the vermouth (try it in a Negroni), amaretto and limoncello are made in house.

PHOTO: RAFAEL TONGOL



Prato's Widow Maker pizza (above left) is topped with salumi and sausage plus kale, egg and romesco sauce. The saffron conchiglie (above right) is a new dish on the menu featuring spicy Florida lobster and peekytoe crab.

So what should you order? You must start with the Campagna salad, in which rosemary-garlic-Parmesan almonds and sizzling pancetta cubes are tossed with greens in an ideally balanced balsamic dressing. Split it, though, because you'll also want to have the meatballs, possibly the most flavorful you'll ever try.

Add the chicken liver Toscana, consisting of creamy sautéed livers hand-chopped with garlic, capers and lemon zest, then spread onto grilled ciabatta bread and topped with pickled shallots and red sorrel.

And then there's the clams fritto, a better-than version of typical fried calamari. Here the batter is made with seasoned, finely milled farina. A lemon-piccante aioli with pickled chili pepper is the dip. The mussels are splendid-looking, with their sun-dried tomato cioppino, crostini slathered in garlic cream and ample sprigs of dill – though the flavor's a bit mild compared to the others.

Even if you're stuffed, you have to try the pasta, the varieties of which change regularly. You might be devastated to find that a favorite is gone, but thankful after sampling its replacement. Don't be put off by the rabbit in the cacciatore; it's shredded

(think: tastes like chicken). The tender meat is tossed with rigatoni, toasted almonds and castelvetro olives; a bit of orange zest brightens the dish in an intriguing way.

Although shrimp ravioli may sound bland, it's anything but. Perhaps that's because the shellfish is cooked with garlic and Meyer lemon, mascarpone cheese, wine and farm-fresh eggs, then enhanced with a garlicky scampi sauce and breadcrumb bits.

Then again, you might want to sample the robust trenne Amatriciana, with smoked pancetta and caramelized onion; the veal agnolotto with toasted fennel and Meyer lemon; or the hearty bigoli Bolognese, its sauce a rich ragu made with duck, Barolo wine and foie gras butter.

Those brilliant appetizers, fresh salads and handcrafted pastas are enough for a dinner, and the prices aren't bad: appetizers are around \$10, pastas \$8 for a half portion, \$15 for a full portion.

And then there are the entrées and pizzas. Prato's pizzas are crafted using crusts made with flour imported from Italy. The Americano, a veggie delight, features broccoli rabe, eggplant, tomato and provolone. The ominously named Widow Maker

PHOTOS: RAFAEL TONGOL

is loaded with salumi, sausage, kale, egg and romesco – a sauce made with garlicky roasted peppers and ground almonds.

During a quartet of visits, I tasted only one entrée, and then only because I knew I'd be writing this review. The starters, pastas and pizzas are so wonderful, and so affordable, that I'd seen no reason to splurge on the five "secondi," which range in price from \$18 to \$26.

But in the name of research, I splurged and went for the veal scaloppini, a generous plateful of tender veal, breaded and pan-fried, with pole beans, carrots and capers. The menu says that Meyer lemon is used, too: The dish needed more, as it cried for a dash of zing. Roasted chicken, slow-roasted pork, oven-roasted bronzini (fish) and braised beef short rib are other options.

A small, smart wine selection complements the menu. The wines are Italian and divided by color and region.

Don't consider leaving before dessert. First of all, that tiramisu with the house-baked ladyfingers is a creamy bit of heaven. Then there's the chocolate budino, a rich pudding made with olive oil. I like it best plain, while my prime dining buddy prefers the version infused with mint. Order whichever is available during your visit. The salted caramel gelato is also a sure bet. One simple scoop is enough to send you home smiling.

Prato accepts reservations, and I suggest you make them for dinner. The place is packed most evenings. I can see why. ●

PRATO

WHERE: 124 N. Park Ave.,
Winter Park

WHEN: Lunch Wednesday-
Sunday; dinner daily

HOW MUCH: \$\$-\$\$\$

WHERE TO CALL:
407-262-0050



The Magical Mystery Meatball

On one of many scouting expeditions they took while developing Prato, chefs Brandon McGlamery and Matthew Cargo sat down to eat at New York City's Ciano and asked the server for recommendations. When she suggested meatballs, the chefs thought, "Meatballs? We didn't come to Ciano to try meatballs!"

"By the first bite, we knew they were the best damn meatballs we'd ever had," McGlamery recalls. "Then we had to figure out how to re-create them."

The recipe for these flavor-packed orbs is highly guarded. That, however, didn't stop the two culinary detectives.

After much obsessing, they discovered that a friend of a friend worked at Ciano. From him they learned enough to get started. "It's all about the technique," Cargo says.

After much trial and error, McGlamery and Cargo developed their own recipe. Here's what they'll share: The appetizer is made mostly of veal with some beef and pork mixed in, all of it ground in Prato's kitchen. Onions, garlic, bread crumbs and egg are also involved.

The magic, however, involves not only the technique but also the braising liquid. Prato's includes red wine and tomato juice – but not just any tomato juice. This is what's left over after the chefs crush canned tomatoes while making pizza sauce.

And not just any canned tomatoes. The pair tasted more than 70 brands before making their selection. "If I saw a picture of canned tomatoes in a magazine or a cookbook, I'd ask my suppliers to find it," McGlamery says. "When I flew out of Rome, I took pictures of every tomato can in the duty-free shop and later got my hands on it."

At first, the chefs chose a prestigious San Marzano variety. But in the end, they found that a combination of two brands of California canned tomatoes – one from Salinas, the other from Central Valley – tasted best for their use. "They have the right acidity balance, which is important because the sauce is raw; we don't cook it," Cargo explains.

The pizza is a hit; Prato sells about 145 a day. Its tomato juice works swimmingly in the meatball recipe.

When you taste Prato's meatballs, you may wonder why they have so many more levels of flavor than the version you make for an easy weekday dinner. Now you know. At least, you know as much as Prato's chefs will tell.



COMPILED BY RONA GINDIN

FEATURED LISTING

CIRCA 1926

WHERE: 358 N. Park Ave., Winter Park

WHEN: Lunch and dinner daily

WHY: It's four restaurants in one, with a main dining room, a piano lounge, a dance club and a cozy pub.

CONTACT: 407-637-5903



AFRICAN

Nile Ethiopian 7048 International Dr., Orlando, 407-354-0026 / nile07.com. Locals willingly navigate International Drive to dine at Nile, a family-owned restaurant specializing in the exotic cuisine of Ethiopia. Order a few dishes to share and scoop up the intriguing concoctions with the eatery's signature spongy bread. End with a strong cup of aromatic, brewed-to-order coffee. **\$\$**

Sanaa 3701 Osceola Pkwy., Lake Buena Vista, 407-939-3463 / disneyworld.disney.go.com/dining/sanaa. Sanaa, one of Disney's most interesting restaurants, offers dishes based on cuisine from the Spice Islands, a coastal African area rich with Indian influences. Flavors are intense, but spicy only upon request. (Curry, the chefs insist, is a melding of flavors, not one particular spice.) The marketplace-style dining room boasts picture windows overlooking the Animal Kingdom Lodge's savannah, so you might spot zebra or wildebeest while

lunching on tandoori chicken or a vegetarian platter with stewed lentils and a vegetable sambar (stew). **\$\$**

AMERICAN

Bananas 942 N. Mills Ave., Orlando, 407-480-2200 / bananasdiner.com. Bananas has a split personality. It's a wholesome, family place to grab higher-quality versions of such classics as burgers, shakes and pancakes (the Buffalo Benedict is a surprise pleaser). Other times, it's a delightfully outrageous experience for more adventurous diners who enjoy the antics of cross-dressing servers. The Sunday drag gospel brunch ("Sinners welcome!") is like no church service you've ever attended. **\$\$**

Citrus 821 N. Orange Ave., Orlando, 407-373-0622 / citrusorlando.com. A clubby yet stylish restaurant in a convenient downtown Orlando location, Citrus features modern American cuisine with a nod toward regionally grown and produced ingredients. International influ-

ences also highlight the menu, from smoked chili aioli complementing herb-marinated chicken to balsamic rum glaze topping juicy pork chops. **\$\$\$**

Dexter's 808 E. Washington St., Orlando, 407-648-2777; 558 W. New England Ave., Winter Park, 407-629-1150; 950 Market Promenade Ave., Lake Mary, 407-805-3090 / dexwine.com. Central Florida has three Dexter's locations, and each has become a neighborhood magnet, drawing diners of all ages for hearty portions of creative American fare (at fair prices), good wine and, in some cases, live music. Casual dress is the rule. The brunches, and the pressed duck sandwiches, are especially popular. **\$\$-\$\$\$**

Emeril's Orlando 6000 Universal Blvd. Orlando, 407-224-2424 / emerils.com. Get a taste of New Orleans at Emeril's, a fine-dining restaurant at always-bustling Universal CityWalk. You'll find classics from celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse, including the signature barbecue shrimp, andouille-stuffed redfish, double-cut pork chops and banana cream pie. The service, of course, is superb. Consider sharing appetizers at the bar area. **\$\$\$\$**

Graffiti Junktion 900 E. Washington St., Orlando, 407-426-9503; 2401 Edgewater Dr., Orlando, 407-377-1961 / graffitijunktion.com. The Graffiti Junktions in Thornton Park and College Park are loud and purposely grungy looking, hence "graffiti" in the name. But this ultra-casual duo dishes up great burgers, wings and zucchini fries. Live entertainment ranges from performance art to trivia contests. Watch for daily happy-hour specials. **\$**

● **Hillstone** 215 S. Orlando Ave., Winter Park, 407-740-4005 / hillstone.com/hillstone. Formerly known as Houston's, this Winter Park mainstay is part of a high-end chain. Still, it grows its own herbs, bakes its own bread, grinds its own meat, cuts its own fish and whips its own cream. In nice weather, guests relax with a cocktail in Adirondack chairs overlooking Lake Killarney. Many proposals have been popped during dinners for two on the boat dock. **\$\$\$**



RONA GINDIN is a freelance writer specializing in restaurants and travel. A native New Yorker, she hosts the TV show *On Dining* celebrating local restaurants (Bright House Channel 300/Food & Drink), and is the author of *The Little Black Book of Walt Disney World*. She contributes to many national magazines.

PHOTOS: (FAR LEFT) GREG JOHNSTON; (RIGHT) RAFAEL TONGOL

Jernigan's 400 W. Church St., Orlando, 407-440-7000 / www.amwaycenter.com. Watch a Magic game in style at Jernigan's, a well-appointed buffet restaurant located on the Amway Center's exclusive club level. The reservations-only eatery, open to ticket holders, serves wholesome meals for about \$40. The menu of the day might offer slow-smoked barbecue ribs, grilled rib-eye steak, pasta pomodoro and Chinese chicken salad. Jernigan's is run by Chicago's Levy Restaurants, the team behind Downtown Disney's Portobello Yacht Club, Fulton's Crab House and Wolfgang Puck Grand Café. **\$\$\$**

● **Rusty Spoon** 55 W. Church Street, Orlando, 407-401-8811 / therustyspoon.com. Foodies flock to this Church Street gastropub, a warm and welcoming space at which meals are described as "American food. European roots. Locally sourced." Your salad will consist of über-fresh greens, your sandwich will be filled with slow-braised lamb, your pasta will be hand-rolled and your meat will be robustly seasoned. **\$\$-\$\$\$**

● **Seasons 52** 7700 Sand Lake Rd., Orlando, 407-354-5212; 463 E. Altamonte Dr., Altamonte Springs, 407-767-1252 / seasons52.com. A Darden concept founded in Orlando, the two local locations turn out creative and tasty meals in grand, bustling spaces. The food happens to be low in fat and calories; that's just a bonus. The wine selection is impressive and the itty-bitty desserts encourage sampling without guilt. **\$\$\$**

Shipyards Emporium 200 W. Fairbanks Ave., Winter Park, 321-274-4045 / shipyardsemporium.com. This ultra-casual brewpub has been packed night and day since it opened in 2011, and not just because it pours a great lager. To complement suds brewed both in-house and elsewhere, a from-scratch menu offers Buffalo chicken dip, amazing white-bean hummus, sandwiches, flatbreads and entrées, including étouffée and pot roast. Stop in any time to pick up a loaf of some of Orlando's best bread. **\$\$**

Tap Room at Dubsread 549 W. Par St., Orlando, 407-650-0100 / taproomatdubsread.com. One needn't play golf to dine at this historic course-side tavern, a College Park icon offering a varied menu – and a reputation for fine burgers. Options other than the famous half-pound patties include steaks, salmon, tequila-citrus chicken and a dandy Reuben sandwich. **\$\$**

TooJay's Various locations / toojays.com. When it's time for a taste of Jewish Brooklyn – pastrami on rye, latkes, blintzes, knishes – the six local outlets of this South Florida-based chain have it all. You'll also find diner foods such as omelets, sandwiches and pot-roast dinners. Take home some black-and-white cookies. **\$**

Yellow Dog Eats 1236 Hempel Ave., Windermere, 407-296-0609 / yellowdogeats.com. It's the lunch locale for the Windermere-Gotha crowd, who come for scratch-made sandwiches, hearty barbecue and wholesome baked goods. The menu also has a significant vegan-friendly section. The dining rooms are scattered throughout a funky, historic building that was once a country store. **\$**

ASIAN

Anh Hong 1124 E. Colonial Dr., Orlando, 407-999-2656. You'll receive a bundle of fresh herbs to tear into your soup at this Mills 50 Vietnamese eatery, and another bunch for a roll-your-own entrée that's like a DIY summer roll. Asian classics, such as grilled meats and scallion pancakes, are done exceptionally well here.

THE KEY

\$ Inexpensive, most entrées under \$10

\$\$ Moderate, most entrées \$10-20

\$\$\$ Pricey, most entrées over \$20

\$\$\$\$ Very expensive, most entrées over \$30

● indicates the restaurant is a

2011 Silver Spoon winner (Judges' Choice).

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ohlmag.com



which makes Anh Hong a top choice for local Vietnamese-Americans longing for a taste of home. **\$**

Dragonfly 7972 Via Dellagio Way, Orlando, 407-459-1892 / dragonflysushi.com. Stylishly attired 30-somethings regularly pack this oh-so-hip restaurant, where groups share sushi, grilled "robata" items, and tapas-style Asian foods such as soft-shell crab tempura, crispy black pork belly and shiso-wrapped spicy tuna. **\$\$**

● **Hawkers** 1103 N. Mills Ave., Orlando, 407-237-0606 / facebook.com/hawkersstreetfare. This Mills 50 mainstay, named for street vendors of Asian fare, serves up generous tapas-size portions of curry laksa (an aromatic Singaporean soup), roti canai (Malaysian flatbread with a hearty curry sauce), five-spice tofu, chilled sesame noodles, smoky mussels and sensational beef skewers with peanut satay dip. **\$\$**

Ming Bistro 1212 Woodward St., Orlando, 407-898-9672. Enjoy perhaps Orlando's best dim sum for dinner or, on a weekend morning or afternoon, select shrimp dumplings, beef balls, turnip cakes, sticky rice, barbecue pork buns and egg tarts one small dish at a time from carts that roll between tables. The a la carte menu features Hong Kong-style staples from stir-fry beef to chicken feet. **\$**

Sea Thai 3812 E. Colonial Dr., Orlando, 407-895-0985 / searlando.com. Start with a green papaya salad and beef yum, then feast on steamed whole fish with garlic chili sauce, pad Thai and green curry chicken. But you can't go wrong with any of the Thai classics offered at this welcoming East Orlando eatery. **\$\$**

Tasty Wok 1246 E. Colonial Dr., Orlando, 407-896-8988 / yelp.com/biz/tasty-wok-orlando. True, it's a humble spot, but Tasty Wok offers an array of satisfying dishes, among them roast duck and steaming soups. Try the beef chow fun, eggplant with minced pork, and salt and pepper ribs. A smaller menu of American-style Chinese dishes is also available. **\$**

BARBECUE

4 Rivers Smokehouse 2103 W. Fairbanks Ave., Winter Park; 1869 W. S.R. 434, Longwood; 1047 S. Dillard St., Winter Garden / 407-474-8377, 4rsmokehouse.com. A diverse array of barbecue specialties – from Texas-style brisket to pulled pork, smoked turkey and bacon-wrapped jalapeños – has gained this rapidly growing homegrown concept a large following. The Longwood outpost even includes a bakery and an old-fashioned malt shop featuring homemade ice cream. **\$**

BURGERS

Hamburger Mary's Bar & Grille 110 W. Church St., Orlando, 321-219-0600 / hamburgermarys-orlando.com. A colorful crowd is part of the fun at this Church Street hotspot, where bingo games, trivia contests and cabaret shows are among the events that vie for guests' attention beside the enormous and creatively topped burgers. **\$**

Johnny's Fillin' Station 2631 S. Fern Creek Ave., Orlando, 407-894-6900 / johnnysfillinstation.com. Neighbors gather for hearty burgers, along with wings, subs and wraps, at this homey spot in a residential downtown neighborhood. Beer flows, TVs broadcast big games, and families love the pool tables and dart boards. **\$**

Pine 22 22 E. Pine St., Orlando, 407-574-2160 / pine22.com. Burgers go chic at this fast-casual downtown, where every ingredient is special. The burgers are from happy cows, the eggs from free-roaming chickens, the pork from lovingly raised pigs. Mix and match your toppings over a patty of beef, turkey or black beans (or pulled pork), with options ranging from mango salsa to sautéed mushrooms. **\$\$**

CONTINENTAL

Venetian Room 8101 World Center Dr., Orlando, 407-238-8060 / thevenetianroom.com. Walk through a run-of-the-mill convention hotel to reach the AAA Four-Diamond Venetian Room, an elegant, domed-service, continental restaurant that hearkens to the heyday of unapologetic, butter-and-cream-enhanced fine dining. The lobster bisque is an absolute must. After that, try the filet mignon, duck à l'orange or Dover sole. **\$\$\$\$**

CREATIVE/PROGRESSIVE/FUSION

Chef's Table at the Edgewater Hotel 99 W. Plant St., Winter Garden, 407-230-4837 / chefstableat-theedgewater.com. Husband-and-wife team Kevin and Laurie Tarter are your personal servers at this intimate Winter Garden hideaway, where Kevin prepares the evening's three-course, prix-fixe meal and Laurie helps choose the wine. Both stop by every table to chat with guests. Adjacent, the Tasting Room offers tapas-size portions of international dishes and a full bar. **\$\$\$**

Circa 1926 358 N. Park Ave., Winter Park, 407-637-5903 / circa1926.com. Circa is four restaurants in one. The main dining room is a suave space serving trendy foods. The front lounge-like area is popular for its piano music. Some evenings, an upstairs area becomes a dance club with a DJ. And outside to the right, Circa Pub is a cozy hideaway offering simple fare. **\$\$\$**

Finesse 7025 County Road 46A, Lake Mary, 407-805-9220 / finesse-therestaurant.com. Talented chef Alex Brugger runs a remarkable kitchen at Finesse, a stylish Lake Mary restaurant with an ambitious menu. Begin with the tender duck confit encased in puff pastry, the complex black bean soup and whatever raw tuna appetizer happens to be on the menu. Continue with the creamy seafood paella, made with risotto, or the steak or pork with chimichurri and duck fat French fries. End with the chocolate-orange soufflé served with peanut butter anglaise. **\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$**

Funky Monkey 912 N. Mills Ave., Orlando, 407-427-1447; 9101 International Dr., Orlando (Pointe Orlando), 407-418-9463 / funkymonkeywine.com. Every meal begins with complimentary lime-garlic edamame at these eclectic eateries, known as much for sushi and intriguing wine lists as for creative American cuisine and an ever-changing menu. FMI Restaurant Group also owns Bananas, Nick's Italian Kitchen and Pricky Pear as well as a catering arm and the Funky Monkey Vault, a wine shop that also sells gifts, apparel and furniture. **\$\$**

Hue 629 E. Central Blvd., Orlando, 407-849-1800 / huerestaurant.com. Hue is a progressive American restaurant on a busy corner in trendy Thornton Park. Well-dressed 30-somethings sip colorful martinis at the bar and dine, indoors and out, on of-the-now items such as tuna tartare, duck breast with cranberry reduction and amaretto risotto, and grouper with smoked paprika olive oil. **\$\$\$**

● **K Restaurant** 2401 Edgewater Dr. Orlando, 407-872-2332 / kwinebar.com. Kevin Fonzo, the go-to chef in College Park since 2001, owns this homey eatery, which is, in fact, located in an erstwhile residence. The menu is mostly creative-American, along with Italian favorites celebrating Fonzo's heritage. Casual wine tastings and themed special dinners, along with a constantly changing menu, bring back regulars for singular experiences. **\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$**

Le Rouge 7730 W. Sand Lake Rd., Orlando, 407-370-0909 / lerougewinebar.com. This Restaurant Row hot spot is a sexy lounge with backlit lighting, a long bar and comfy sofas. It also features fine food. Guests can choose from among three-dozen tapas, including garlic shrimp and sautéed wild mushrooms, or enjoy

traditional entrées such as seared salmon with wine-lemon-dill sauce. **\$\$\$**

● **Luma on Park** 290 S. Park Ave., Winter Park, 407-599-4111 / lumaonpark.com. If there's pancetta in your salad, the salumi was made in the kitchen, by hand, starting with a whole pig. Most herbs are from local farms, fish from sustainable sources, pickled vegetables jarred in house and desserts built around seasonal ingredients. Luma's progressive menu, which changes daily, is served in a sleek and stylish dining room in the heart of Winter Park, under the passionate direction of Executive Chef Brandon McGlamery, Chef de Cuisine Derek Perez and Pastry Chef Brian Cernell. **\$\$\$**

● **Norman's** 4012 Central Florida Pkwy., Orlando, 407-278-8459 / normans.com. Celebrity Chef Norman Van Aken's restaurant at the Ritz-Carlton, Grande Lakes, turns out artistic New World cuisine combining the flavors of Latin America, the Caribbean, the Far East and the United States. The dining room is dramatic, the food astounding and the service polished. Be sure to begin with a Norman's classic: foie gras "French toast." And you'll be delighted with the Mongolian veal chop. **\$\$\$\$**

Park Plaza Gardens 319 S. Park Ave., Winter Park, 407-645-2475 / parkplazagardens.com. After 30-plus years, Park Plaza Gardens is practically an institution on Winter Park's tony Park Avenue. People-watchers gather at the small bar and sidewalk tables to linger over casual meals and cold beers, while those looking for an indulgent experience dine in the garden-like back dining room, which boasts atrium windows and plush décor. The menu features a melding of American, European and Asian flavors and cooking techniques. **\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$**

● **Ravenus Pig** 1234 N. Orange Ave., Winter Park, 407-628-2333 / theravenuspig.com. After leaving their hometown for serious culinary training, Winter Park natives James and Julie Petrakis returned to open the region's first genuine gastropub. Dinner reservations have been tough to snag ever since. The ambitious menu changes daily based on the fish, meat and produce that's available, and it's executed by a dedicated team that abhors shortcuts. Besides daily specials, The Pig always serves up an excellent burger, soft pretzels, shrimp and grits and a donut dessert called Pig Tails. **\$\$\$**

● **Victoria & Albert's** 4401 Floridian Way, Lake Buena Vista, 407-939-3463 / victoria-alberts.com. Indulgent, seven-course prix-fixe feasts are served in the serenely elegant main dining room, accompanied by live harp music, while 10 courses are offered in the more intimate Queen Victoria's Room. But what the heck? Why not go for 13 courses at the Chef's Table? Chef Scott Hunnel, Maitre d' Israel Pérez and Master Pastry Chef Erich Herbitschek travel the world to seek out impressive food and service trends, then adapt the golden ones locally. That's why V&A, at Disney's Grand Floridian Resort & Spa, is Orlando's only AAA Five Diamond restaurant. **\$\$\$\$**

EASTERN EUROPEAN

Hollerbach's Willow Tree Café 205 E. 1st St., Sanford, 407-321-2204 / willowtreecafe.com. If you like to indulge in a good schnitzel with a liter of hearty beer, head to Sanford. There you'll find Theo Hollerbach overseeing the *gemütlichkeit* while serving up authentic German foods from sauerbraten to a wurst sausage platter. Live music on select evenings gets the whole dining room swaying together in a spirit of *schunkelabend*. **\$\$**

Yalaha Bakery 1213 N. Orange Ave., Orlando, 321-800-5219; 8210 County Road 48, Yalaha, 352-324-3366 / yalahabakery.com. Fans of hearty German breads and scratch-made German pastries can drive to this hom-

ey outpost in rural Lake County, or they can pick up their loaves and sweets at an Ivanhoe District storefront. The Yalaha unit also sells sandwiches and hot lunches. \$

HAWAIIAN/POLYNESIAN

Emeril's Tchoup Chop 6300 Hollywood Way, Orlando, 407-503-2467 / emerils.com. Emeril Lagasse's Polynesian-fusion fare is executed by locally renowned chef Greg Richie. Within a dramatically decorated space, diners enjoy tropical cocktails, steamed dumplings and creative entrées such as pan-roasted duck breast with gingered pear chutney and umeboshi (pickled) plum glaze. \$\$\$\$

Roy's 7760 W. Sand Lake Rd., Orlando, 407-352-4844 / roysrestaurant.com. Hawaiian-fusion flavors enhance familiar and exotic fish dishes at this Restaurant Row pioneer, a link in a Honolulu-based chain owned by namesake chef Roy Yamaguchi. \$\$

INDIAN

Aashirwad 5748 International Dr., Orlando, 407-370-9830 / aashirwadrestaurant.com. Begin with kashmiri naan, a slightly sweet bread stuffed with nuts, coconut and raisins, and continue with chicken biryani, cauliflower in exotic Manchurian gravy and a mixed tandoori grill. Whole spices are roasted and ground daily on site, further enhancing the cuisine's authenticity. \$\$

Memories of India 7625 Turkey Lake Rd., Orlando, 407-370-3277; 3895 Lake Emma Rd., Lake Mary, 407-804-0920 / memoriesofindiaincuisine.com. Exceptionally good Indian fare draws diners in Dr. Phillips and Lake Mary to these twin restaurants, where dishes such as palek paneer (creamed spinach) and lamb masala in rich ginger-garlic gravy always satisfy. \$\$

ITALIAN

Antonio's 611 S. Orlando Ave., Maitland, 407-645-5523 / antoniosonline.com. Fine Italian fare comes at reasonable prices at Antonio's, proprietor Greg Gentile's culinary homage to his ancestors. The upstairs restaurant, recently remodeled and expanded with a balcony overlooking Lake Lily, is somewhat formal, although the open kitchen provides peeks of the chefs in action. Its downstairs counterpart, Antonio's Café, is a more casual spot that doubles as a market and wine shop. \$\$\$

Bice 5601 Universal Blvd., Orlando, 407-503-1415 / orlando.bicegroup.com. Bice, with 50 locations around the world, has a local outpost of ambitious Italian cuisine at the Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal. Homemade egg pasta is used for several dishes, such as spaghetti Bolognese; other choices include veal piccata and steak with a Gorgonzola-demi sauce. \$\$\$\$

Enzo's on the Lake 1130 U.S. 17-92, Longwood, 407-834-9872 / enzos.com. Long before Orlando became a serious foodie town, Enzo's was serving up lovingly prepared Italian specialties inside a converted Longwood home. Little has changed. Split a bunch of antipasto to begin your meal. After that, you pretty much can't go wrong, but standout dishes include homemade ravioli stuffed with chicken and spinach, veal with artichoke-caper-white wine sauce and possibly the best spaghetti carbonara in town. \$\$\$

O'Stromboli 1803 E. Winter Park Rd., Orlando, 407-647-3872. This innocuous neighborhood eatery isn't fancy, but the food is filling and fresh. That's why it has become a favorite of residents of Merritt Park, Rose Isle and Baldwin Park. The carbonara is particularly hearty and the fettuccini Alfredo is rich, buttery and

more than you should eat in one sitting. The homemade soups are always a dependable starter. \$\$

Prato 124 N. Park Ave., Winter Park, 407-262-0050 / prato-wp.com. This is one of Orlando's very best Italian restaurants, but don't expect a classic lasagna or chicken parmigiana. Executive Chef Brandon McGlamery and Chef di Cucina Matthew Cargo oversee an open kitchen in which pastas are made from scratch, pizzas are rolled to order, sausages are stuffed by hand and the olive oil is a luscious organic pour from Italy. Try the chicken liver Toscana, a satisfying salad Campagna with cubes of sizzling pancetta tesa, shrimp tortellini and citrusy rabbit cacciatore. Begin with a Negroni cocktail; it's possibly the best around. \$\$-\$\$\$

Rocco's 400 S. Orlando Ave., Winter Park, 407-644-7770 / roccositaliangrille.com. Calabria native Rocco Potami oversees this romantic Italian eatery, where fine authentic fare is presented in an intimate dining room and on a secluded brick patio. Classics include carpaccio (raw, thinly sliced beef with white truffle oil and arugula), ricotta gnocchi and a breaded veal chop topped with a lightly dressed salad. It's easy to miss, tucked away in a Winter Park strip center, but once you find it, you'll be back. \$\$\$

LATIN

Mi Tomatina 433 W. New England Ave., Winter Park, 321-972-4317 / mitomatina.com. This eatery bills itself as a paella bar, and indeed guests share a half-dozen varieties of the signature Spanish rice dish. Yet others come for a mellow meal over tapas (garlic shrimp, potato omelet, croquettes) and sangria, enjoyed while seated within a small contemporary dining room or outdoors overlooking Hannibal Square. \$\$-\$\$\$

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FLAVOR LISTINGS

Pio Pio 2500 S. Semoran Blvd., Orlando, 407-207-2262; 5752 International Dr., Orlando, 407-248-6424; 11236 S. Orange Blossom Tr., Orlando, 407-438-5677 / piopiointernational.com. Latin American-style marinated roast chicken is a mainstay at the three Orlando locations, each a dark, mid-scale den where families fuel up on heaping platters of pollo along with garlicky salad, fried plantains (sweet and green) and rice and beans. **\$\$**

MEDITERRANEAN

Anatolia 7600 Dr. Phillips Blvd., Orlando, 407-352-6766 / anatoliaorlando.com. Sensational Turkish food in an upscale-casual setting makes Anatolia a popular choice in the Dr. Phillips area. Start with any of the “cold salads” and a piping hot puffy lavash bread, then try chargrilled whole fish, tavuk doner (Turkish gyro), lamb chops or spinach-feta pide, sort of like a boat-shaped flatbread. **\$\$**

● **Bosphorous** 108 S. Park Ave., Winter Park, 407-644-8609 / bosporousrestaurant.com. This is the place for flavorful Turkish fare in either a white-tablecloth setting or alfresco along Park Avenue. Many couples fill up on the appetizer sampler with oversized lavash bread. For a heartier meal, try the ground lamb “Turkish pastry,” a shish kebab or a tender lamb shank. Outdoor diners can end their meals by smoking from a hookah. Or not. **\$\$**

Tavern Opa 9101 International Dr., Orlando, 407-351-8660 / opaorlando.com. The food is excellent, but that's only half the reason to visit Tavern Opa. On busy nights, the place is festive indeed: Some guests join a Zorba dance around the dining room while others toss white napkins into the air, joyously shouting “Opa!” Then there's the belly dancer. **\$\$**

MEXICAN/ SOUTHWESTERN

Cantina Laredo 8000 Via Dellagio Way, Orlando, 407-345-0186 / cantinalaredo.com. Modern Mexican cuisine in a spiffy setting draws lovers of cilantro, jalapeño and pico de gallo to this Restaurant Row eatery, where the margaritas flow, the guacamole is made tableside and the portions are generous. The spinach enchilada is a vegetarian-friendly treat. **\$\$**

● **Cocina 214** 151 E. Welbourne Ave., Winter Park, 407-790-7997 / cocina214.com. Tex-Mex food is top quality here (214 is the Dallas area code), with salsa, savories and even margarita flavorings made from scratch. The spinach-mushroom quesadilla and braised pork tacos with “orange dust” are especially noteworthy. **\$\$**

El Tenampa 11242 S. Orange Blossom Tr., Orlando, 407-850-9499 / eltenampaorlando.com. Many Orlandoans make El Tenampa part of their Costco shopping ritual, since the restaurant is located only a block from the OBT warehouse store. This authentic eatery features fresh fruit juices, spicy chicken chilaquiles (a Mexican breakfast, available all day long, made with fried tortilla pieces and a green sauce) as well as a satisfying shrimp quesadilla in addition to the standard enchiladas and fajitas. **\$**

SEAFOOD

Cityfish 617 E. Central Blvd., Orlando, 407-849-9779 / cityfishorlando.com. Feast on slabs of grilled, blackened or fried fresh fish at this hip Ts-and-flip-flops Thornton Park hangout. The atmosphere is ultra-casual and the sidewalk seating is great for people-watching. **\$\$**

Ocean Prime 7339 W. Sand Lake Rd., Orlando, 407-781-4880 / ocean-prime.com. Designed to evoke the ambience of an old-time supper club, Ocean Prime's white-jacketed servers offer sensational steaks and fish

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dishes along with creative options such as sautéed shrimp in a spectacular Tabasco-cream sauce, crab cakes with sweet corn cream and ginger salmon. End with the chocolate peanut butter pie. **\$\$\$\$**

Todd English's Bluezoo 1500 Epcot Resorts Blvd., Lake Buena Vista, 407-934-1111 / thebluezoo.com. Creatively prepared seafood is served in an over-the-top undersea setting at this fine-dining restaurant, located in Disney's Swan and Dolphin hotel. The fashion-forward choices might be a miso-glazed Hawaiian sea bass or fried lobster in a soy glaze. The desserts are among the best in town. **\$\$\$\$**

STEAK

Bull & Bear 14200 Bonnet Creek Resort Lane, Orlando, 407-597-5410 / bullandbearorlando.com. Orlando's Bull & Bear looks similar to New York's legendary steakhouse (except for the pool and golf course views), but ours has its own ambitious menu. Guests of the Waldorf Astoria's fine-dining spot can feast on traditional items such as veal Oscar and prime steak that's dry aged for 21 days, and intriguing ones like appetizers of gnocchi and escargot with crescents of black garlic, and shrimp and grits presented under a dome that, when removed, introduces a waft of aromatic smoke. The chocolate and lemon desserts are superb. **\$\$\$\$**

Capital Grille 4600 N. World Dr., Lake Buena Vista, 407-939-3463 / thecapitalgrille.com. Capital Grille tries to one-up its upscale steakhouse competitors by dry-aging its beef, an expensive process that results in especially flavorful meat. Try a beautifully unadorned chop or a more creative dish, such as citrus-glazed salmon or Kona-crusted sirloin. The setting is clubby; the wine selection is generous. **\$\$\$\$**

Del Frisco's 729 Lee Rd., Orlando, 407-645-4443 / delfriscosorlando.com. This Del Frisco's, owned by the Christner family since its founding in 1993, is only marginally related to the national chain of the same name. Locals have been choosing this prototypically masculine, dark-wood-and-red-leather enclave for business dinners and family celebrations for a decade, ending meals of USDA Prime, corn-fed Midwestern beef or Australian cold-water lobster tails with a slice of the restaurant's legendary mandarin orange cake. And there's a loooong wine list (6,500 bottles). On select nights, Kostya Kimlet hosts magic shows along with a prix-fixe menu in a private dining room. **\$\$\$\$**

Fleming's 8030 Via Dellagio Way, Orlando, 407-352-5706; 933 N. Orlando Ave., Winter Park, 407-699-9463 / flemingssteakhouse.com. Fleming's puts a younger spin on the stately steakhouse concept, featuring sleek décor and 100 wines by the glass along with its prime steaks and chops. The tempura lobster "small plate" with soy-ginger dipping sauce is a worthy pre-entrée splurge. For a taste of the old-fashioned, visit on Sunday, when prime rib is served. **\$\$\$\$**

Ruth's Chris 7501 W. Sand Lake Rd., Orlando, 407-226-3900; 610 N. Orlando Ave., Winter Park, 407-622-2444; 80 Colonial Center Pkwy, Lake Mary, 407-804-8220 / ruthschris.com. With three stately steakhouses and corporate headquarters by Winter Park Village, Ruth's Chris, a native of New Orleans, has become an Orlando special-occasion mainstay. Its service-oriented restaurants specialize in massive corn-fed Midwestern steaks served sizzling and topped with butter. **\$\$\$\$**

Shula's 1500 Epcot Resorts Blvd., Orlando, 407-934-1362 / donshula.com. Coach Don Shula, who led the Miami Dolphins through a perfect season in 1972,

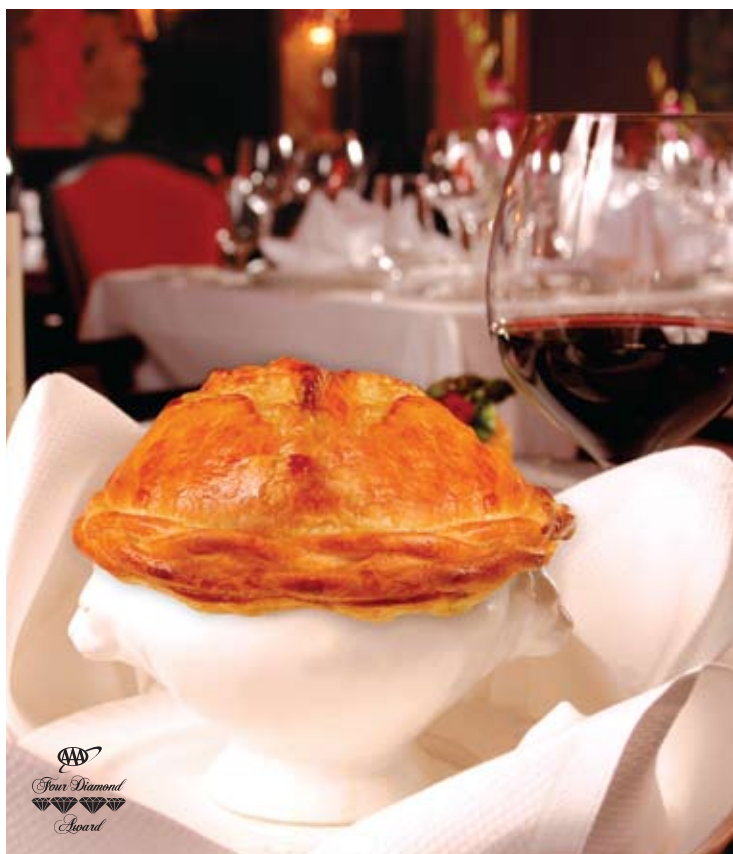
is now in the restaurant business. His Orlando outpost, located in Disney World's Swan-Dolphin resort, is a dark, tastefully sports-themed steakhouse where the menu is painted on a football. Offerings include Premium Black Angus beef as well as barbecue shrimp, wedge salad and crab cakes. **\$\$\$\$**

VEGETARIAN

Dandelion CommuniTea Café 618 N. Thornton Ave., Orlando, 407-362-1864 / dandelioncommunitetea.com. Proprietor Julie Norris meant to open a crunchy teahouse, but her organic, locally sourced foods were such a hit that the Dandelion is now a hot spot for lunch and a mecca for the "OurLando" movement. Even carnivores can't resist Henry's Hearty Chili, Happy Hempy Hummus, and wraps and sandwiches. As for dessert, Razy Parfait's vanilla soygurt is delicious, filling and healthful enough to be a meal. **\$**

Café 118 153 E. Morse Blvd., Winter Park, 407-389-2233 / cafe118.com. Raw foods – none cooked past 118 degrees – are the focus of this crisp Winter Park café, attracting raw foodists, vegans and vegetarians. The spinach and beet ravioli stuffed with cashew ricotta is an impressive imitation of the Italian staple. Thirsty Park Avenue shoppers might stop by for a healthful smoothie. **\$\$**

Ethos Vegan Kitchen 1235 N. Orange Ave., Orlando, 407-228-3899 / ethosvegankitchen.com. Orlando's Ivanhoe District is home to Ethos, a vegan restaurant with a menu that also satisfies open-minded carnivores. Fuel up on pecan-crusted eggplant with red wine sauce and mashed potatoes or a meat-free shepherd's pie, if salads, sandwiches and coconut-curry tofu wraps won't do the trick. **\$\$-\$**



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