

# Arizona Hot Spots



## THE PRICE IS RIGHT

**HAVANA CAFE** ☆☆  
Havana Cafe is casual and bright with bold tropical-print table linens and gutsy food that is mainly Cuban.

Notable dishes include a pan-fried Cuban-style steak, marinated in lime juice, garlic and herbs and accompanied with sautéed sweet Spanish onions; *ropa vieja*, shredded braised beef tossed with onions, tangy sweet peppers and tomatoes; and fried potato-like yucca. The black bean soup is one of the best in town.

Service can be uneven at times. A few bottles of wine are available, but the best beverage is Cristal, a Peruvian beer. [4225 E. Camelback Road, Phoenix; 602-952-1991. Lunch entrées \$3.95 to \$10.95. Dinner entrées \$7.50 to \$14.75. No reservations are taken. AE, DC, MC, V.]

Going out to eat in Phoenix and Scottsdale once meant having to choose between enchiladas, chop suey, steaks, burgers and beans. No more. The area is now home to chefs who are using ingredients and cooking styles from around the world.

**CHRISTOPHER'S BISTRO** ☆☆☆  
Although many so-called bistros have popped up around Phoenix and Scottsdale, none rivals Christopher's Bistro. Under the meticulous direction of Christopher Gross—named one of "America's 10 Best New Chefs" in 1989 by *Food & Wine*—the bustling restaurant, adjacent to Gross's flagship restaurant, Christopher's, has earned national attention.

The setting is comfortable, with rich cherrywood paneling, pink marble floors and black leather booths. There are wine and floral displays set about the room, and the kitchen is open to view.

Christopher's Bistro has a vast collection of wines, and there is a recommended selection for each dish.

Admirable first courses include *harissa*-dressed couscous studded with bacon bits and served with slices of grilled chicken on the side and a salad of mixed field greens—mizuna, red oakleaf, Bibb and arugula—sprinkled with

*Chef Christopher Gross of Christopher's Bistro.*

By Donald Downes

a garlic-thyme vinaigrette and topped with two slices of roasted goat cheese. A glass of the suggested 1991 L.A. Cetto Petite Sirah, \$4.50, pairs well with the salad.

Christopher's version of steak *frites* is a grilled beef sirloin with a mix of russet and sweet potato fries on the side. The recommended wine is 1989 Fetzer Barrel Select Zinfandel at \$5.50 a glass. A roasted chicken leg comes stuffed with a wild mushroom mousse. The rich osso buco rests on a generous portion of house-made spinach and tomato fettuccine. Perfectly grilled ahi tuna steak tops a bed of steamed baby bok choy in a red wine sauce. Try it with a glass of 1991 Louis Latour Chardonnay, \$4.75.

Don't leave Christopher's Bistro without indulging in one of the desserts, especially his chocolate tower, a cylinder of white chocolate filled with a creamy chocolate mousse, wrapped in a dark chocolate lattice and circled with an espresso-vanilla sauce. Armagnac, Cognac, brandy, port and dessert wine fanciers will applaud the *(continued)*



## DINING OUT

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extensive offerings. The wait staff is attentive and knowledgeable. If the weather is good, book a table on the patio. [Biltmore Financial Center, 2398 E. Camelback Rd., Phoenix; 602-957-3214. Lunch entrées \$5.95 to \$12.95. Dinner entrées \$14.95 to \$21.95. AE, CB, MC, V.]

### EDDIE'S GRILL ☆☆☆½

Eddie's Grill is a handsome, high-tech place with light gray walls, black-steel railings, granitelike tabletops and a glass-fronted kitchen.

The chef and co-owner Eddie Matney likes to bring several flavors together in one dish. A plate of grilled Portobello mushrooms with roasted corn relish and black beans is a fine starter, as are the toasted wontons stuffed with seafood and set in a raspberry sauce that has a touch of jalapeño heat. Diners have three pizza options. The New England comes with shrimp, clams and three cheeses; the Heartland with roasted corn, barbecued chicken and Wisconsin Cheddar; and the California with sun-dried tomatoes, goat cheese and flecks of basil.

Matney takes an old favorite—meat loaf—and invigorates it with a dash of basil. The twin-tuna plate consists of two medium-rare grilled ahi steaks, both encrusted with sesame seeds. One sits atop steamed Swiss chard; the other crowns a mound of stir-fried vegetables and soba noodles glistening with sesame oil. Matney's take on steak and potatoes is a sirloin, seared, folded and encased in mashed potatoes that are coated with Parmesan and Romano cheeses and lightly deep-fried. Sauced with a Burgundy demiglace, the softball-shaped package is a hit.

Desserts change often but always include a silky crème brûlée and Eddie's Whoopie Pie, a chocolate mousse and chocolate cake combination in a rich raspberry sauce. The wines are mainly Californian. Look for the 1991 Carmenet Edna Valley Meritage White (\$19) and a 1987 Jaeger Inglewood

Napa Valley Merlot (\$29). The young service staff is enthusiastic and attentive. [4747 N. 7th St., Phoenix; 602-241-1188. Lunch menu changes daily; entrées \$6.95 to \$10.95. Dinner entrées \$9.95 to \$18.95. AE, DC, MC, V.]

### Z' TEJAS GRILL ☆☆☆

Z' Tejas Grill brings together Tex-Mex, Southwest and Cajun-Creole ingredients in what it calls South by Southwest Cuisine. Each of the walls is a different color—powder blue, peach, light yellow and pale green. The booths have old-fashioned park benches and wooden tables; shutters painted bright yellow, orange or green are fastened to the walls above them.

#### STAR SYSTEM

☆☆☆☆	Exceptional
☆☆☆	Excellent
☆☆	Very good
☆	Good

Two standout openers are sliced, house-smoked pork tenderloin, doused with chipotle cream, and a rolled flour tortilla packed with smoked trout, Jack cheese and black beans. Cornmeal-dusted and deep-fried catfish beignets, on the other hand, are disappointing.

Three particularly good entrées are grilled mahimahi with a pecan pesto cream sauce; enchiladas wrapped around house-smoked chicken or duck, shredded roast pork or a vegetable mixture and served with a mole *verde* sauce; and medallions of Angus beef tenderloin stuffed with pumpkin-seed pesto, roasted peppers and Jack cheese and lavished with ancho chile cream.

Ancho chile fudge pie is Z' Tejas's specialty dessert, with just a hint of heat from the chile. California wines dominate the short list and include a 1991 Zaca Mesa Syrah (\$21), which is a match for the spicy dishes. Service is brisk and generally attentive, though

it can falter at peak times. [7014 E. Camelback Rd., Scottsdale; 602-946-4171. Lunch entrées \$4.75 to \$9.75. Dinner entrées \$8.75 to \$15. AE, DC, MC, V.]

### CAFE TERRA COTTA ☆☆☆½

Café Terra Cotta is upbeat and artsy. Bright southwestern paintings hang on tan walls, potted cacti adorn tables dressed with cocoa-brown linen, and mint-green wooden chairs circle the tables on the terra-cotta-painted concrete floor.

Sure-bet appetizers include a jalapeño-fired black bean chili with shreds of char-grilled sirloin and Asiago cheese and a velvety garlic custard sauced with a salsa vinaigrette and sprinkled with roasted hazelnuts. The avocado vichyssoise is done in by a heavy-handed dose of mint.

Pork tenderloin *adobado* is a clever twist on pork and beans. A grilled and sliced juicy pork tenderloin, with a kicky *adobado* coating of brown sugar and chili powder, is paired with black beans topped with a sweet, citrusy apricot-chile conserve. The café's subtly smoked lamb chops are served medium-rare, and the sun-dried cherry sauce injected with chipotle chiles adds an appealing bite.

A pair of sorbets—prickly pear and lime tequila—are delicious, and a house-made cappuccino hazelnut torte with Baileys chocolate sauce is rich and satisfying. The wines (mainly from California) on the café's small well-selected list flatter the food and are available by the bottle or glass. Several dessert wines, Cognacs and Armagnacs are also available. An Arizona 1987 Soñoita Private Reserve Cabernet, \$6 a glass, is surprisingly charming. Service is generally knowledgeable and consistent. [6166 N. Scottsdale Rd., Scottsdale; 602-948-8100. Same menu lunch and dinner. Entrées \$6.95 to \$20.95. AE, DC, MC, V.] ■

*Donald Downes is the restaurant critic for "Phoenix" magazine.*