

14 Cool Places To Eat And Drink On Ventura Boulevard

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By Zach Behrens & Danny Jensen

The past few years have been good to Ventura Boulevard and a great range of new options for dining and drinking have been popping up. Studio City's Sushi Row maintains its status, but has been paired with a growing cadre of places to eat and drink that don't necessarily involve rice and fish. Sherman Oaks' classic restaurant row on its eastern end is starting to make a comeback after feeling a bit stale over the last decade. Meanwhile, new places are opening westward, injecting a life to a part of town we don't often think of.



A glass of Chardonnay at Augustine. (Photo by Zach Behrens)

AUGUSTINE WINE BAR

It's like Bar Covell in Los Feliz grew up, had kids, and moved to The Valley—and that's not a bad thing. Owned by the same Covell team, Augustine has a quieter, cozier feel and a penchant for securing some of the best wine around. Its list is paired with a small menu of food, ranging from snacks like spiced nuts and tater tots to more complex items such as beef cheek crostini and braised octopus. The shoebox space offers a handful of bar seats and intimate two person booths, along with some larger spaces for small groups, including a sidewalk patio. A great place to consider for a date and catching up with friends. —Zach Behrens

[Augustine](#) is located at 13456 Ventura Boulevard, Sherman Oaks, (818) 990-0938.



Cocina Condesa's sidewalk patio. (Photo by Zach Behrens)

COCINA CONDESA

Billed as a mix of a Mexican street food spot and mezcaleria, Cocina Condesa's space has a more casual feel: plenty of high tops with the majority of standard tables on the sidewalk patio. The menu hosts a trio of guacamole options (normal, spicy, and with toasted crickets) and a punchy octet of tacos (like kale/cauliflower, garlic marinated grilled shrimp, and pork shoulder). But it's not all tacos and chips: think street corn, empanadas, chicken mole enchiladas and more. If you're looking burritos, this is not the spot, unless it's the weekend and you're there for brunch, when the menu offers up some fun takes on normal breakfast fare.

—Zach Behrens

[Cocina Condesa](#) is located at 11616 Ventura Boulevard, Studio City, (818) 579-4264.



Spare ribs - Salmon Creek Farms (Photo by Sierra Prescott)

BARREL & ASHES

What do you get when you take a former chef de cuisine at one of the country's most famous restaurants and let him loose to do barbecue? Meet Barrel & Ashes, headed up by Timothy Hollingsworth of Thomas Keller's French Laundry. He headed south to open [Otium](#) at the [recently opened Broad Museum](#) and, as that was under construction, took on his Texas roots in Studio City with Rory Hermann, another Keller alumnus. This spot, with its Frito pies, hush puppies, brisket, spare ribs, and so much more (including the boastful The Best Damn Chick'n Sandwich Ya Ever Had), has done so well since its opening, one of the biggest complaints has been the crowds. That said, a reservation and some savory patience may help. —*Zach Behrens*

[***Barrel & Ashes***](#) is located at 11801 Ventura Boulevard, Studio City, (818) 623-8883.



"That's My Jam" at The Fiscal Agent (via Facebook)

THE FISCAL AGENT

Nestled above Barrel & Ashes is one of L.A.'s best new cocktail bars, which offers a super creative drink line-up in a classy and intimate hideaway. The Fiscal Agent is cocktail wizard Julian Cox's first standalone spot, which he unveiled in October of 2015 before [heading to Chicago](#) and leaving behind an indelible impression on numerous L.A. bars. He also recruited a team of other cocktail pros to craft clever, vintage-inspired concoctions in cool glassware. The cocktail list is known to rotate with new experiments, but think unexpected gems like Flight of the Concords, a frothy blend of Plymouth gin, violet, Concord grapes and anise hyssop, or An Officer and a Gentian made with scotch, Saler's Gentian, Meyer lemon and lemongrass air. The standard list of drinks range from \$12 to \$18, though you'll definitely want to inquire about the secret menu, which will open up the possibilities for the night. You'll also find plenty of tasty bites to tide you over, including charcuterie and cheese to Peruvian scallops and duck breast with pistachio gremolata. Reservations are strongly encouraged as the small space fills up quickly. —*Danny Jensen*

[The Fiscal Agent](#) is located at 11801 Ventura Boulevard, Studio City, (818) 623-8088.



Bone marrow toast with mushrooms at Scratch Bar & Kitchen (Photo by Danny Jensen/LAist)

SCRATCH BAR AND KITCHEN

Current Top Chef contest Phillip Frankland Lee opened up Scratch Bar and Kitchen on Ventura late last year after closing the original version on La Cienega last summer (don't be confused by the space they're still clinging to the name). Scratch Bar offers a super intimate and personalized chef's tasting menu with deliciously creative and beautifully plated small plates. You won't find any servers at the cozy space—instead Chef Lee or his kitchen team will seat you and help guide you through the a la carte menu, based on your preferences, restrictions, and what's seasonally available. They also offer three, very reasonably-priced tiers of tasting menus, which we definitely recommend trying, along with sitting up at the chef's counter facing the custom wood-fired oven. Imagine great bites like Camembert with cashew curry and veggies, bone marrow with spiced mushrooms on mini bone-shaped toast points, and sea urchin with pork belly and sushi rice. You'll also definitely want to save room for dessert, like house ice cream sandwiches with sea salt chocolate chip cookie. As you might guess by the name, nearly everything is made in-house, including cheeses, bread, and charcuterie. The impressive wine selection showcases very limited production runs that you might otherwise not have access to unless you belong to a club. Also, further down Ventura, you should check Chef Lee's vegan outpost, The Gadarene Swine. —*Danny Jensen*

[Scratch Bar and Kitchen](#) is located at 16101 Ventura Boulevard #255, Encino, (818) 646-6085.



You can order tacos from a VW bus from within the bar. (Photo via Ceremony)

CEREMONY

I first noticed Ceremony with a double-take when driving by. Never had I seen this edge of Studio City's main commercial district with so much life: a large window open to the sidewalk with throngs of people enjoying drinks, a skull emblazoned on a column above. Owner and chef Frank Leon, who runs the classic La Loggia Ristorante next door (open for about 30 years now) and The Village down the street, has added Ceremony to his plate. The Mexican, Cuban and European influenced menu includes a Cuban sandwich (pork leg and ham), several tacos options (made and served from a VW bus), and a healthy dose of seafood like grilled red snapper and manila clams. Drink-wise, a list of cocktails inspired by Tulum, Mexico is in order. —*Zach Behrens*

[Ceremony](#) is located at 11814 Ventura Boulevard, Studio City, (818) 985-9222.



The Chile Relleno de Siete Mares is made of poblano chile, shrimp, scallops, mussels, fish, clams, calamari, tomato-chile broth, and ciabatta (Photo by Gilbert Buenaventura)

MARADENTRO

While Ceremony features seafood items on its menu, Maradentro swims in it. Take, for example, the dish in the above photo, Chile Relleno de Siete Mares; its ingredients are poblano chile, shrimp, scallops, mussels, fish, clams, calamari, tomato-chile broth and ciabatta. If you're familiar with one of the three Mercado locations, this is the team's seafood take on Mexican (their other concepts are El Arco Iris in Highland Park and Yxta Cocina Mexicana in downtown). But seafood isn't the only thing to walk away from here raving about. The healthy amount of guacamole was addicting and the spicy margarita lived up to its promise. —*Zach Behrens*

[Maradentro](#) is located at 11929 Ventura Boulevard, Studio City, (818) 358-3423.



Beer selection at The Woodman (Photo by [Daniel Messier](#))

THE WOODMAN

This laid-back, roadhouse-inspired spot offers a solid selection of craft beers, including several unique and hard-to-find offerings—along with bacon-Kobe burgers and other hearty fare. Their happy hour also delivers a great deal with \$4 select beers, wine and well drinks from 4:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. every day. Their brunch selection is pretty great as well with tasty dishes like the praline pecan French toast and Bubba's Country Benedict with biscuits, ham and eggs. Pull up a stool or a hand-carved wooden seat and enjoy a bite and a drink while catching a game, or enjoy a bit of sunshine out on the patio. —*Danny Jensen*

[The Woodman](#) is located at 13615 Ventura Boulevard, Sherman Oaks, (818) 386-9401.



On a weekend night, this room is abuzz with drinks and joysticks. (Photo via The One Up)

THE ONE UP

The One Up is an arcade bar that offers free games to paying customers. Each console is a classic arcade set-up, programmed with hundreds of classic and unique games. When it comes to food, however, the One Up serves twists on comfort food, including goat cheese tots, pork belly pepper jack mac & cheese, Southern fried chicken bahn mi sliders, Cap'n Crunch wings and house-made Twinkies. They also do brunch. If you're thirsty, they've got a full bar with craft beer and hand-made cocktails. —*Juliet Bennett Rylah*

[The One Up](#) is located at 13625 Ventura Boulevard, Sherman Oaks, (818) 849-5181.



Inside MidiCi. (Photo via Medici)

MIDICI

The growing trend of build-your-own Neapolitan pizza places arrived on Ventura Boulevard last year with the arrival of MidiCi, which offers an upscale twist to the more casual quick-fire pizza options. Beneath a vaulted, warehouse ceiling, you'll find a beautiful 4,000-square-foot space with a curved bar wrapping around two gleaming white, wood-fired ovens imported from Italy. Adding to the charm and serenity is a 21-foot olive tree. In true Neapolitan fashion, the pizzas feature high-quality ingredients from Italy, which are quickly cooked to deliver a flavorful pie with chewy, yet crisp crust. Rounding out the menu is delicious, artisanal burrata, along with salads and small antipasto dishes. They've also got a great wine selection with some reasonably priced glasses and bottles, along with beer and a thorough coffee and tea offering. MidiCi was launched by the CEO of Menchie's frozen yogurt with designs for many more locations, so you'll likely see plenty more in the future.

—*Danny Jensen*

[MidiCi](#) is located at 14612 Ventura Boulevard, Sherman Oaks, (818) 788-2178.



Crispy pork rilette (Photo by Marie Buck)

THE BELLWETHER

We've been [fans](#) of The Bellwether (and their [cool bathroom](#)) since [they opened](#) their bright red doors onto Ventura Boulevard. Run by Chef Ted Hopson and Beverage Director Ann-Marie Verdi—both of whom spent time at Father's Office—the charming, neighborhood dining spot with a great seasonal and shareable menu. Though the menu is frequently tweaked with the help of their "R&D" test menu, some of the highlights have included tempura cauliflower with a Thai chili sauce, pork and beef meatballs with ricotta and marinara, and stewed chickpeas with tomato-date ragout, harissa, lebni and za'atar. You'll also want to explore the cocktails—which include housemade infusions—like the the Smoked Salty Dog with grapefruit-infused gin and the White Negroni. They also recently launched a great brunch line-up with hits like the Nashville Hot Chicken Sando, the Ploughman's Burger, "Eggs in Purgatory" and some killer sticky buns. —*Danny Jensen*

[The Bellwether](#) is located at 13251 Ventura Boulevard, Studio City, (818) 285-8184.



The patio at Añejo. (Photo via Añejo Cantina and Grill)

AÑEJO CANTINA & GRILLE

Añejo Cantina & Grille brings a modern and upscale twist to some classic Mexican favorites, and while the portions are generous, the prices are reasonable. Grab a seat on the spacious outdoor veranda or head to the colorful interior where the nightly live music—including flamenco and mariachi bands—might inspire you to hit the dance floor. They also have a large banquet room for private parties. There's an extensive menu with familiar bites like enchiladas and tamales, as well as bigger options like carne asada with shrimp or chile verde with pork. You can sample their lengthy tequila and mezcal options or try one of their great cocktails like the habañero-infused Añejo Margarita or the Paloma Negra with tequila, house agua de Jamaica and lime. And you should definitely take advantage of their happy hour, which happens daily from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. with discounted small bites, \$3 gold margaritas, \$5 wells and \$4 sangria, beer and wine. —*Danny Jensen*
[Añejo](#) is located at 14755 Ventura Boulevard, Sherman Oaks, (818) 380-3180.



Inside Local Ice (Photo by Zach Behrens)

LOCAL ICE

Local Ice is where you can satisfy your sweet tooth with their selection of organic ice cream or Italian ice. Their flavors are often quite traditional—think vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, mint, java—but they have a few fun flavors that pop up, like lemon blueberry or apple pie, too. The Italian Ice is great for the lactose intolerant and comes in a number of fruity flavors, plus chocolate. All of their ice cream is made on-site in small batches with a small number of organic ingredients. —*Juliet Bennett Rylah*

[Local Ice](#) is located at 12747 Ventura Boulevard, Studio City (it's near the back of the strip mall), (818) 505-8111.



The Front Yard feels more backyard, but we're not complaining (Photo by...)

The Front Yard

The Front Yard, situated inside NoHo's newly renovated Garland Hotel, is certainly pretty. Its airy front patio dining space gets plenty of natural light, while the spacious interior offers more seating options. You can sip cocktails poolside by day or cozy up to the fireplace on their spacious patio at night. Much of the menu here is sharable, and many of the elements are made in-house, sourced locally and even grown on-site at their expanding kitchen garden. They've got excellent flatbreads—honey roasted pears and duck ham is an option, or you can try the gruyere and prosciutto—and if that's not filling enough, they also offer massive plates of olive-braised lamb shank and sliced dry-aged Angus ribeye for dinner. Being within a hotel, they also offer a solid breakfast menu, plus salads and sandwiches for lunch. —*Juliet Bennett Rylah*

[The Front Yard](#) is at [The Garland hotel](#), 4222 Vineland Avenue, Studio City, (818) 255-7290

***Zach Behrens** is a freelance outdoors writer, but all that hiking gets him hungry. Follow his adventures [on Instagram](#).*