



## Nibbles: Taking a Bite Out of the Boulder Valley Empire

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Money factored in Louisville's good weather, family-friendly activities, strong economy and outdoor recreation opportunities when the magazine recently named the best small town in America.

Those are all fine attributes, but in reporting the accolade, CNN spotlighted Louisville's secret ingredient of civic success. The network footage showed the historic downtown's array of bakeries, watering holes and restaurants.

In fact, just the sight of the marquee for a true gem, **the Empire Lounge and Restaurant**, on national TV sent me scurrying to Louisville for a dinner of deviled eggs, crispy calamari salad, mole-spiced ribs with green chile and a dreamy blueberry tart. The Empire may look and feel like a neighborhood bar and grill, but the food tells you that there's a nationally acclaimed chef, Jim Cohen, making it taste spectacular.

"I just wanted to serve simple, recognizable food," said Cohen, who has ruled over famed fine dining temples in Vail, Phoenix and Las Vegas but now happily calls Louisville home. "As a chef, focus has gotten simpler, no big whoop-di-do any more. Just find great ingredients, prepare them really well and it doesn't have to cost so much," he said.

That integrity and lack of pretentiousness has become the hallmark of the impressive roster of bistros, bakeries, breweries, coffee roasters, farmers, chocolatiers and specialty grocers that now make Boulder County such a phenomenal place to dine and cook.

