



25 Dishes We Love

We've eaten, nibbled, sipped and gobbled. Here are our favorites.

by John Lehndorff
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Over the last 12 months, the restaurants of the North Metro area have taken us on a culinary thrill ride of epic proportions. We've produced a Top Chef and a Gayot Top 40 restaurant. We've seen national acclaim—with the Wall Street Journal calling Boulder the best small city for food in the country and Louisville's "best place to live" ranking putting the spotlight on eateries like Waterloo and Empire. Restaurants throughout the community have continued to wow us with seasonality, locally grown produce and locally nourished protein; with flavor-focused, well-balanced dishes; and with continued style and swagger, even in disconcerting economic times.

While the dishes to follow are 25 of our favorites, they by no means embody all the amazing meals we've experienced in the last 12 months. It's truly been a good year to be a foodie.

Empire, Louisville

Crispy Calamari Salad

Calamari's become ubiquitous on appetizer menus but more often than not it's forgettable, limp and doughy. Empire's version is like another species entirely. Hot-from-the-fryer, lightly battered baby squid rings are tossed with fresh greens. The vinaigrette sparked with miso and balsamic vinegar is the ideal tart complement to the seafood. Don't let Empire's cool, casual lounge atmosphere fool you. Acclaimed owner/chef Jim Cohen rules the kitchen insisting on only the best ingredients and fine dining flavors.

