



2011 in Review: The best in food

by Neil Charles



The pickle plate at Black Market. [Mark Lee](#)

Since I moved back to Indianapolis in June (after a nine year absence), at least a dozen new independent restaurants have opened their doors to good reviews and brisk business. Over the intervening years, the independent dining scene has exploded, and its ripples have begun to be felt in the suburbs, a sure sign that the movement is really taking root. Aided enormously by the enthusiasm that food lovers have shown for their local farmers' markets, the independents are on their way to sharing the rewards with their corporate rivals.

Obviously we'll never rid ourselves of the chain restaurants, however desirable that may be. But we are right now witnessing a turning point in the culinary culture of this once sleepy town. I'll eat and drink to that. Locally, of course.

Here's a round-up of the restaurants that have grabbed my attention over the past six months.

At the top of the list, without any shadow of doubt, is [Black Market](#). Owners Ed Rudisell and Micah Frank are really pushing the envelope and have me almost giddy with anticipation every time I sit down to eat there. The pickle plate, the Welsh Rarebit, the veal marrow bones and the pork schnitzel ... they really get it. Enough said.

[The Libertine](#): Having nailed classic pizza at [Pizzology](#), cutting-edge chef [Neal Brown](#) has opened a post-Prohibition-style cocktail bar, focusing on upscale small-plate comfort food. Service here is cool and somewhat hipster, but it's slick and chic and not to be missed.

[Late Harvest](#): Amidst the maelstrom of corporate chain restaurants at the Fashion Mall, chef Ryan Nelson's bijou eatery offers ambitious food and impeccable service in a striking environment. Not to be missed is the Salt Cod Brandade, the pork cheeks, or the truly awesome Sticky Toffee Pudding.

[Maxine's Chicken and Waffles](#): Exceptional soul comfort food, great prices and a really lively atmosphere. Ingredients are fresh and vibrant, service is prompt and friendly; and, quite frankly, this is one of the best lunches you could possibly enjoy for its honesty, quality and

simplicity.

Harry & Izzy's: With everyone's time being in such short supply these days, a good three-course lunch has become a luxury in which few of us can afford to indulge. Should the opportunity arise, however, I can think of few better places to do so than at Harry & Izzy's. We've sampled most of the menu, both at lunch and dinner, and have found the food to be exceptional.

Mama Irma: Never had Peruvian food before? Me neither, until this recent visit to the newest addition to Fountain Square. The result? I'm counting the days until I go back. The dishes were perfectly explained and the food was straight from the heart. This was some of the most enthralling, enticing and richly appealing cuisine that we've tried in ages.

Chef Joseph's at the Connoisseur Room: The newest addition to the power-lunch dining scene (a la Mad Men), Chef Joseph lets his palate and talents loose with a constantly changing lunch menu that reflects his many culinary interests. This is the place for an unhurried three-course meal and a couple of glasses of wine, or the hearkening of the old three-martini business lunch. The décor is striking, but the menu prices extremely fair. Evenings are reserved for private dinners and special events.

Clay Oven: Excellent, authentic Indian cuisine from a chef/owner with experience in top Indian restaurants in London. This is the real deal. The lunch buffet is a steal at \$7.99!

On Time: We loved this dim sum restaurant, with over 50 exquisite small-plate dishes featuring a variety of seafood, dumplings and rice. If you don't get over to the Westside very often, you need to make a visit because this is a unique experience in this town.

The Local: The ambition is almost matched by the achievement. The Local works hard to satisfy all tastes with some unique menu items like frogs' legs and local beers. This is a must visit for the Northsider.

Tags: Dining Out, Year in Review 2011, cuisine, restaurants, Black Market, The Libertine, Late Harvest, Maxine's Chicken and Waffles, Harry & Izzy's, Mama Irma, Chef Joseph's at the Connoisseur Room, Clay Oven, On Time, The Local, Feature

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