

ESSENCE

THE HAIR ISSUE

BEAUTY,
TEXTURE &
SELF-LOVE



NAOMIE HARRIS
MARSAI MARTIN
ASHTON SANDERS
ASHLEY BLAINE
FEATHERSON
MISS AMERICA,
MISS USA &
MISS TEEN USA

**TRACEE
ELLIS ROSS**
THE QUEEN OF
NATURAL CHIC

Crown Yourself



Houston

Treat yourself to the finest dining money can buy in one of America's most diverse cities

BY DWIGHT BROWN



01

Indigo

htxindigo.com

This 13-seat tasting menu restaurant is the brainchild of Jonathan “Jonny” Rhodes, who has created a unique, utterly delicious neosoul dining experience. “We focus on the historical context of food, whether it be social, political or economic,” he says. Rhodes serves cuisine based on African-American traditions, like Okra Seed Coffee. The dishes on the rotating five-course menu (Carnivore, Herbivore or Classic) are cooked over an open flame and served with a big helping of knowledge.

Our picks: 1. “Afro-futurist” Pecan Soup. 2. Smoked Wild Boar Ribs. 3. Banana Republics of America Avocado Parfait.

02

Brennan's Houston

brennanshouston.com

Houston and New Orleans have many connections, including this classy eatery, which is an offshoot of the Brennan family restaurant dynasty in NOLA. Expect top-quality Texas creole cuisine and equally excellent service. The vibe and splendid comfort food are enough to inspire you to try cooking the dishes at home. How do you get started? “Your plate is your canvas,” says general manager Carl Walker. “Consider, *What do I have lying around?* Then add your creative self.” Imagination is indeed a key ingredient at this hot spot.

Our picks: 1. Ginger Pear Snap cocktail. 2. Snapping Turtle Soup. 3. Crawfish Boudin Stuffed Quail. 4. Bananas Foster.

03

Hugo's

hugosrestaurant.net

The welcoming aura at one of H-Town's toniest Mexican restaurants is fostered by its humble executive chef, Hugo Ortega. He emigrated from Mexico to Houston, worked as a dishwasher and a busboy and was homeless for a short while before meeting his wife, Tracy Vaught. She helped him go to culinary school and fulfill his dream of offering a dining option that celebrates the cooking he did with his family. “We make our own nixtamal and roast and grind our own cacao beans,” he shares. His establishment's authenticity is bolstered by the freshest homemade ingredients.

Our picks: 1. Lechón (braised pig with crisp skin). 2. Callo de Hacha (pan-seared scallops). 3. Churros Rellenos con Dulce de Leche.

04

Georgia James

georgiajamessteak.com

Chef Chris Shepherd lusts for innovation. He's put his own ingenious spin on a steak house in this vast, industrial-designed restaurant named in homage to his parents. Push the envelope? Have you ever heard of Bacon Sausage? “I had the idea to cure the pork belly like bacon, grind it, stuff it into a casing and smoke it, so you have the delicious taste of bacon—but as a sausage,” says Shepherd. His smart tips on cooking steak? “Seasoning with an adequate amount of salt and pepper and temperature control.”

Our picks: 1. Fondrèche Cinsault Blend Rosé wine with Viet-Cajun Roasted Oysters. 2. Ribeye Steak or the Coriander and Cumin Lamb Chops. 3. Corn Bread Pudding. 4. Cheddar Cheese Ice Cream.

DREAMY DESSERTS

Give your taste buds a thrill and indulge

Sweet-Chicken-Sweet

Run to Sam's Fried Chicken and Donuts for Donuts with Praline Bacon and Caramel Icing or sample the chicken and donut sandwich.

Goey Is Goode

Goode Company BBQ makes the softest, most delicate pecan pie you'll probably ever have.

Blinged-Out Soft Serve

Stop by Aqua S for its sublime Sea Salt or Tarte Lemonade soft serve (flavors change often). Crown your cone with grilled marshmallows, sweet popcorn or popping candy.

Soft as a Cloud

The Puchas, three Ecuadorian brothers, created the charming Maison Pucha Bistrot. The signature dessert, Soufflé en Noir et Blanc, is delicate and elegant.

Crowd Sourcing

The Bayou Goo Cream Pie (above) at House of Pies is equally appealing to the billionaires and bohos who show up at 3 a.m. ☞

FROM LEFT: CAROLINE FONTENOT; DEBORA SMALL; PAULA MURPHY; JULIE SOEFER PHOTOGRAPHY; COURTESY OF HOUSE OF PIES.