

Top 10 new E.V. restaurants of 2008 (so far)

By **JESS HARTER**
GET OUT

With the first six months of 2008 in the books, it's time for a midyear look at the best restaurants that have opened in the East Valley. Despite our economic doldrums, it's been a banner year.

Here, in alphabetical order, are the 10 new restaurants that have most impressed me, taking into consideration their respective categories and niches, with the disclaimer that I've visited a couple of them only once so far:

BAR TEPO

This stylish yet casual New American eatery from Valley restaurateur Steve Short (Basis, Atlasta Catering) offers unusual treats, such as roasted artichoke and Boursin cheese puffs with a bacon fondue or brown sugar hoisin chicken tacos with mango salsa. 1652 S. Val Vista Drive, Mesa, (480) 633-0155, bartepo.com.

BOURBON STEAK

Taking over the former space of the Fairmont Scottsdale resort's well-regarded Marquesa, celebrity chef Michael Mina brings the American steakhouse into the 21st century with three tiers of beef, topped by a \$175 Japanese "A5" Kobe New York strip. 7575 E. Princess Drive, Scottsdale, (480) 513-6002, michaelmina.net.

CORK

Robert and Danielle Morris' ambitious small-plates restaurant and wine bar in Ocotillo offers delicious nibbles including lobster, pheasant, antelope and ostrich. Traditional-sized dishes are served for lunch and Sunday brunch. 4991 S. Alma School Road, Chandler, (480) 883-3773, corkrestaurant.net.

CULVER'S

Yes, it's a fast-food restaurant. But this Wisconsin-based chain's famous ButterBurgers — the buns are buttered, then toasted — are the epitome of fast-food burgers. Delightful frozen custard desserts cap off this guilty pleasure. 1909 S. Country Club Drive, Mesa, (480) 733-5330, culvers.com.

DIGESTIF

Restaurateur Peter Kasperski (Cowboy Ciao, Sea



EDDIE'S HOUSE

Saw, Kazimierz World Wine Bar) adds another jewel to his empire with this SouthBridge eatery, which sets chef Payton Curry's rustic "Cal-Ital" menu to an indie music vibe. 7114 E. Stetson Drive, Scottsdale, (480) 425-9463, digestifscottsdale.com.

EDDIE'S HOUSE

Chef Eddie Matney's first public foray into the East Valley presents his eclectic versions of American comfort foods in a comfortable, casual atmosphere. Look for Matney bantering with guests and handing out samples nightly at the chef's counter. 7042 E. Indian School Road, Scottsdale, (480) 946-1622, eddiehouse-az.com.

FINE'S CELLAR

Michael Fine, founder of Sportsman's Fine Wines & Spirits, started with a great wine list — also available in the barrel-vaulted restaurant's retail shop — then tasked chef Cullen Campbell to create an all-day menu of gourmet sandwiches and entrees to match it. 7051 E. Fifth Ave., Scottsdale, (480) 994-3463, finescellar.com.

HUMBLE PIE

This cozy pizzeria and wine bar at Hilton Village makes delicious 11-inch, wood-fired pizzas topped with locally produced meats and farm-fresh vegetables, complemented by wines and beers selected by co-owner Tom Kaufman (Rancho Pinot Grill). 6149 N. Scottsdale Road, Scottsdale, (480) 556-9900, humblepieusa.com.

LATITUDE EIGHT

Novice owner David Fliger's simple yet modern Thai grill is the latest gem in restaurant-rich downtown Chandler. The family-run eatery — Fliger's mother oversees the kitchen — boasts a wonderful five-course tasting menu for a mere \$13. 11 W. Boston St., Chandler, (480) 722-0560, latitude-eight.com.

ROKA AKOR

Trendy London restaurant Roka chose Scottsdale for its first North American spinoff, where marinated meats, seafood and vegetables are cooked over oak charcoal on a large robata grill. Sushi and Japanese kitchen dishes are also available. 7299 N. Scottsdale Road, Scottsdale, (480) 306-8800, rokarestaurant.com.



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