BOSTON'S BEST
OUR ANNUAL GUIDE to the CITY'S FINEST SHOPS, BARS, RESTAURANTS and MORE

REAL FAMOUS
BETHENNY FRANKEL'S START TURN

Celebrating 20 Years
EXCESS IS HUMAN. Why else do people chase gold medals, world records and Kim Kardashian? Our appetite for superlatives is insatiable. Hence the theme of this issue, our annual Boston’s Best. In it, we applaud the finest the city has to offer in food, drink, shopping, culture and services. Doing this is no small task. We’re blessed with a wealth of world-class businesses, the greatest hospitals and schools in the country and, of course, the glorious Bruins (not to mention the Red Sox, Patriots and Celtics). Bostonians are spoiled for choice.

TO MAKE OUR SELECTIONS, we assembled a group of well-informed judges from all walks of life and every conceivable area of expertise. Then we wined and dined them at hot spot Strega on the Waterfront while making them fill out an extensive ballot. Our editorial staff tabulated the votes, took potential conflicts of interest into account and threw in their own two cents. And voila! The Improper’s 2011 Boston’s Best issue.

WE’RE SURE YOU’LL AGREE with some of our choices and disagree (passionately enough to write in) with others. Please do. It’s just a reminder of how lucky we are to live in a town where worthy steak houses battle for supremacy, bartenders woo us with their latest creations and our neighbors are just as experienced, wise and opinionated as we are.
LUNCH

MYERS + CHANG

THERE'S SOMETHING here for every variation of Asian-food craving. Must-haves from the dinner service include tea-smoked ribs, wok-roasted mussels and Indonesian nasi goring, while dim sum go-tos include pork belly buns and pot stickers. If your idea of lunch necessarily comes between two slices of bread, try the short rib—with-Asian pear banh mi, washed down with a glass of sweet, house-made cherry-ginger soda. And no one should miss the delectable Chinese chicken salad.

1145 WASHINGTON ST., BOSTON | 617-542-5200 | MYERSANDCHANG.COM
BARBECUE
Formaggio Kitchen
Not many people think of their local cheese shop when they're jonesing for brisket, but Formaggio Kitchen has always been much more than a source for rare French bleus. Line up early on Saturdays for grill master Eric's dry-rubbed pork ribs, gorgeously charred chicken quarters, huge Pearl hot dogs in hollowed-out baguettes, cumin-scented baked beans and the always-sells-out pulled-lamb sandwich on brioche.

244 HURON AVE., CAMBRIDGE | 617-354-4750 | FORMAGGIOKITCHEN.COM

BISTRO
Gaslight Brasserie
French bistro menus can lose their novelty after the umpteenth onion soup gratinée and steak frites. Gaslight, however, remains in vogue. From his South End kitchen, chef Chris Robins prepares the classics as well as more inspired plates: asparagus and goat cheese salad with wildflower honey, local clams roasted with pork sausage, and Tuesday night's Sichuan take on roast duck with peppercorn sauce.

560 HARRISON AVE., BOSTON | 617-422-0224 | GASLIGHT560.COM

BREAKFAST
Mike's City Diner
The breakfast plates at this South End institution are, to put it mildly, hearty. Load up on hash and eggs, grits, ham carved off the bone, hot linguica or, for the most daring, the Intensive Care: a three-egg, 10-ounce sirloin special. Fortunately, the food is so good it's worth the caloric intake—and, well, Boston Medical Center is right around the corner.

174 WASHINGTON ST., BOSTON | 617-267-5933 | MIKESCITYDINER.COM

BURGER
Craigie on Main
You want the Craigie burger? It's not easy to find. In fact, it's not even listed on the menu anymore. After popularity skyrocketed last year, chef/owner Tony Maws couldn't meet the demand due to the limited resources from prestigious small-scale supplier Hardwick Beef. (His recent James Beard Award doesn't help matters, either.) But don't fret. The carefully calibrated patty—short rib, flat meat, brisket, suet, bone marrow and dehydrated miso paste—is still available. You just have to ask. Don't get complacent, though; Maws only makes about 20 per day, so go on the early side of dinner (or brunch) service.

853 MAIN ST., CAMBRIDGE | 617-497-5511 | CRAIGIEMAIN.COM

BREAD
Clear Flour Bread
BLACK SESAME STICKS with herbed garlic are one of the cruel temptations just out of reach of the patrons queuing for entry into this diminutive storefront. Besides daily offerings like crusty baguettes and buckwheat-walnut loaves, check the weekly schedule to see what artisan bakers Christy Timon and Abe Faber have rising. Options include pumpernickel on Wednesdays, dense German volkornbrot on Fridays and Saturdays, and soft pretzels (recommended warm with mustard butter) on Sundays.

170 THORNEIKE ST., BROOKLINE | 617-739-0060 | CLEARFLOURBREAD.COM

BURRITO
Anna's Taqueria
Several factors come into play when crafting the ideal burrito. The
flour tortilla must be warm, flexible and with the proper chew. Cheese must be evenly distributed and fully melted. The main protein must be steeped in flavor and fall-apart tender, and the wrap-job must be effective enough to hold the weight of a packed interior. Anna’s prowess in all of the above categories, plus reliable consistency, makes it the go-to spot for a foil-wrapped treat.

1412 BEACON ST, BROOKLINE | 617-739-7200 | ANNASTAQENIA.COM

CHINESE-AMERICAN
Bernard’s
Chinese food die-hards can be dogmatic about authenticity, but we’d bet that anyone who loves Sichuan dry-fried chicken and chili oil–doused bamboo shoots also has a soft spot for the Americanized standards, if done well. We love this Chestnut Hill outpost for its delicious Sunday dim sum brunch (one of the few in the area), sautéed beef with Mandarin barbecue sauce and fresh, stir-fried pea pod stems.

THE HALL AT CHESTNUT HILL, 159 BOYLSTON ST, CHESTNUT HILL | 617-969-3300

CLAM CHOWDER
Legal’s Sea Foods
Legal’s chowder is preceded by its reputation: The creamy, clam-filled soup has been served at every presidential inauguration since 1981. Cape Cod–sourced clams and a healthy dose of herbs set apart this version of the New England classic—and thanks to the opening of Legal Harborside this spring, diners can now order the standby in classy new digs, while checking out the picturesque Waterfront views.

270 NORTHERN AVE., BOSTON | 617-477-2900 | LEGALSEAFOODS.COM

COCKTAIL
Clio
With tools like a centrifuge, fire-in-a-can, a mini hibachi grill and a sugar cane extractor at his disposal, you’d think that Clio barman Todd Maul would be more comfortable working at a lab counter than behind the bar. He looks to the chefs in the Clio kitchen to help inspire his creative ice infusions and flavor combinations, ensuring that the drinks in his 32-page mammoth of a cocktail book are unlike anything else you’ll find around town.

STRA COMM. AVE., BOSTON | 617-336-7200 | CLIORESTAURANT.COM

BOSTON’S BEST

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

1996

RESTAURANT TO KEEP AN EYE ON

Metropolis Café
Fifteen years ago, Seth Woods’ early venture won our award for promising new restaurant. We had no idea that it was the start of a restaurant empire. Woods, along with Matthew Burns and Jeff Gates, now boasts six venues in the hugely successful Aquateine Group, including Gaslight and Union. As for Metropolis, the asparagus tartare is new, but the crowd of loyal patrons remains the same.