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Dining

BEST EATS FOR 2005

It was a tasty year

BY JOAH REMINICK STAFF WRITER

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In an area as ethnically diverse as Long Island, one can dine out regally without having to remortgage the family palace. These, alphabetically listed, are my 10 favorite newcomers.



Azerbaijan Grill

1610 Old Country Rd., Westbury, 516-228-0001. The food of Azerbaijan, rife with Turkish, Persian and Mediterranean influences, is as reassuring as it is invigorating. Most memorable were chef-owner Saeid Sheiklar's fluffy tabbouleh drizzled with cherry syrup and bits of pomegranate and his supernal long-stewed lamb shank. Read the review.

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Photo



Mac's Steakhouse (Photo by Newsday / Thomas A. Ferrara)



Trevi (Photo by Newsday / Bill Davis)

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Foody's - 760 Montauk Hwy., Water Mill, 631-726-FOOD. The scent of the cherrywood-burning oven fills the air of this informal Italian eatery hidden away in a Water Mill shopping center. I still recall chef-owner Bryan Futerman's spicy-cool watermelon and red pepper gazpacho. His marinated, partially boned chicken and St. Louis ribs were smoky, juicy, tender. Pizza topped with sausage cooked on the cherrywood grill was a pie to remember. Read the review.

Lazy Clam - 101 E. Main St., Smithtown, 631-360-9846. At his funky little fish-focused restaurant, Tom Mulzoff changes the blackboard menu daily, guided by the market and personal whim. The results are almost always compelling. Past favorites include jerk shrimp, seafood gumbo and catfish stuffed with an alluring mix of rice, crawfish and alligator meat. Read the review.

Pine Aire Fish & Deli - 149 Pine Aire Dr., Bay Shore, 631-231-4467. The seafood of El Salvador gets star treatment at this bright and friendly new restaurant attached to a fish market. Not to be missed: the tender grilled calamari and the rich pork and cheese-stuffed corn cakes called pupusas. Other favorites include cilantro-laced sopa de pescado, a heady seafood soup, and a sensational Salvadoran-style shrimp scampi. Read the review.

Sarge's - 236 W. Jericho Tpke., Syosset, 516-677-1900. It's a major mitzvah, this new and nosh-worthy Jewish deli. The hot pastrami is peppery and piled high on chewy rye bread. Even the turkey meat loaf is a treat. And the brisket? Its chef deserves a mazel tov. Read the review.

Sil La Joung - 1087 Jericho Tpke., Commack, 631-543-6790. At last, Long Island has a Korean restaurant that does justice to an underrepresented multifaceted cuisine. Among the standouts are the fluffy seafood and vegetable pancakes and the smoky jap chae bokum (a stir-fry of cellophane noodles, beef and vegetables). Clarity of flavor and texture define the san chae bibim pan, cold rice and vegetables with spicy sauce on the side. Read the review.

Thai Angel - 1812 Veterans Hwy., Islandia, 631-348-2555. This surprising new Thai restaurant, embedded in the suburban sprawl of an Islandia shopping center, is bigger and more elegant than its exterior lets on. The food excels. Here, calamari are tiny, tender and fried in an ethereal batter. A salad called larb, made with ground pork, mint leaves and cilantro resonates. Another winner is the fragrant orange duck with roasted orange peel, ginger and cashews. Read the review.

Trevi - 3357 Merrick Rd., Wantagh, 516-783-6837. Chef Christopher Vacca gets the most from his restaurant's wood-burning oven. I've enjoyed glorious crisp-crustured clam pizza that combined garlicky tender clam meat with chunks of pancetta. I harbor fond memories, too, of cannelloni filled with a lush spinach-ricotta mixture, of smoky roasted chicken with crunchy Tuscan fried potatoes and of addictive bucatini carbonara made, the Roman way, with eggs and pancetta and Vacca's filip of fresh herbs. Read the review.