



Jonathan Gold's 99 Essential L.A. Restaurants

By [Jonathan Gold](#)

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As we've said before, an essential restaurant is one that reflects Los Angeles in a startling and unusual way, that uses fresh local ingredients in a fashion that respects the land in which they were grown, that showcases cooking echoing both foreign-trained chefs' region of origin and the hypercharged mosaic of the L.A. dining scene. An essential restaurant moves people, inspires them to think about food in a different way, inspires them to think about Southern California as a great agricultural region, a great port, a builder of the shiny symbolism that is a large factor in how the rest of the world thinks of itself. And it's also a damned good place to eat. —J.G.

Rustic Canyon

If you spent the morning browsing through the Santa Monica farmers market, you have a pretty good idea of what you're going to see on the menu at Rustic Canyon that night. Like so many other restaurants on the Westside, the food at this wine bar owes less to the standard bistro playbook than it does to the kind of cooking French guys don't consider cooking at all: basically a sackful of glamorous produce collated with artisanal cheeses, sustainable meats and lovingly handcrafted pastas. As cynics might say, that's not cooking, that's shopping. On the other hand, it is also more or less the strategy followed by places like Lucques and Chez Panisse. And when executed by a chef as skilled as Rustic Canyon's [Evan Funke](#), whose goat cheese *tortellone* with fresh mint, duck breast with peaches, and sliced sunchokes sautéed with garlic are so fine, it seems like the only possible way to eat — the ratatouille is the essence of summer, and his roasted root vegetable shepherd's pie couldn't have been better if it were made with hare in place of the roasted turnips. The rustic pastries of Zoe Nathan, who also runs Huckleberry across the street, have won a national reputation, and when you taste her fresh corn cake with corn ice cream or her hot, cinnamon-scented doughnut spheres with stone-ground hot chocolate, you will understand why. 1119 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, (310) 393-7050, rusticcanyonwinebar.com. Sun.-Thurs., 5:30-10:30 p.m., Fri.-Sat., 5:30-11:30 p.m. Beer, wine. Valet parking.