

Drinking  
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It Was *This* Close:  
Minnesota's (Almost)  
Presidential Moment

Fall Fashion:  
Boots Made for  
Walking—and More

# Minnesota

Monthly

— Bonus —  
**600+**  
Dining  
Listings

# Best Restaurants

(FOR ANY BUDGET)

INCLUDING:

RESTAURANT ALMA  
PORTER & FRYE  
VINCENT  
BARRIO  
LOS CAMPOS  
CORNER TABLE  
LUCIA'S WINE BAR  
SANCTUARY  
LA BELLE VIE  
AND 20 MORE...



**Robyne Robinson**  
on the State's  
Newest Art Star

NOV. 2008 | mmo.com | \$4.50



PICTURED: The Twin Cities' newest hot spot, Barrio Tequila Bar.

PHOTOGRAPHS *by* TERRY BRENNAN

— *Best Restaurants 2008* —

# True Values

FROM TAQUERIAS TO FINE-DINING  
HOT SPOTS, THESE 29 RESTAURANTS  
OFFER THE MOST BANG FOR YOUR DINING  
DOLLAR IN THE TWIN CITIES

BY DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL



— The Dish —

## Steak

THE TWIN CITIES' TOP SPOTS FOR THRIFTY CARNIVORES

## Saffron

BEST FOR: DATE NIGHT

Saffron is without question the most ambitious Middle Eastern restaurant in the Twin Cities.

If you read restaurant reviews, you know chef Sameh Wadi is a critical darling beloved for his approach, which fuses fine-dining technique with southern and eastern Mediterranean flavors. But did you know Saffron has been offering a "tasting for two" menu Monday through Saturday? It's true: \$60 gets two people a selection of mezze (little appetizers); an entrée of lamb tagine with Medjool dates, almonds, and couscous; and a grouping of fragrant house sorbets and ice creams, such as dark chocolate with *ras el hanout* ice cream, cardamom-yogurt sorbet, rose and almond ice cream, or a poached pear with *garam masala* sorbet. If you're feeling especially strategic, know that Mondays are also the restaurant's half-price wine night. 125 Third St. N., Minneapolis, 612-746-5533

## Jax Café

BEST FOR: HOMESICK NEW-ENGLANDERS

Believe it or not, there are live Atlantic lobsters to be had on a budget in the Twin Cities. During Live Lobster Sundays at Jax Café, in fact, \$30 will get you a whole lobster (most are a pound and a quarter to a pound and a half), soup or salad, vegetable and potato. The only hitch? You have to call and reserve your lobster, or they won't be able to guarantee one for you. 1928 University Ave. NE, Minneapolis, 612-789-7297

## La Belle Vie

BEST FOR: A SENSIBLE SPLURGE

The four-course tasting menu in the lounge at La Belle Vie has become something of a cult sensation, equally beloved by twentysomethings and the price-is-no-object Kenwood crowd. What's not to like in a four-course meal harnessing the peerless skill and extraordinary sourcing of the state's finest kitchen—for \$40? Heck, a typical

With steak prices at some places creeping toward triple digits, thrifty carnivores have been left in the dust. Or have they? If you really know your meat, you'll find there are still a few good bargains out there. King of the budget steak houses has to be **Carpenter's**, going strong since—this isn't a typo—1891, in Hugo. How does a restaurant

survive the Great Depression, two world wars, and the birth, death, and re-birth of New Kids on the Block? By offering steaks at prices that no one can believe. For instance, the "Chef Tony Special," a 16-ounce, big, juicy well-charred steak costs an astonishing \$13.95. The Chef Tony steak has great flavor, but it's off the bone. If you're a steak purist seeking a rib eye, Carpenter's has it for \$18.95. The downside? Carpenter's is relocating

next spring to a new building a few hundred feet from the current one, which means they've stopped all improvements on the soon-to-be-demolished original. Expect an interior that looks like it's been rode hard and put away wet. It's a place to bring your best friend, not your best girl.

Closer into the city is a place where you can bring your best girl: northeast Minneapolis's **Red Stag Supper Club**, home of the best metro-area steak to be had for under \$20—namely, their top sirloin. If you haven't been to the Red Stag since it opened a year ago, it's worth a revisit. When Kim "Bryant Lake Bowl" Bartmann opened the place, it was ambitious in many directions. The space was as green as green could be, LEED-certified and full of bells and whistles you couldn't eat, like future-forward hand-dryers. What you could eat was ambitious, but unfocused. Chef Bill Baskin seemed to have a hundred muses. Now it has mel-

lowed into a much more usable supper club. The star appetizer, a pile of simple, delicious fried smelt, remains. The meaty, fresh little bites arrive in a cone big enough to share; skip the tartar sauce in favor of a little squirt of lemon and you'll find the true taste of north country. The Red Stag's top sirloin is served sliced across the grain, allowing the mellow, berry-like, grass-fed taste to shine through. Sides of creamy,

apparently textured mashed red potatoes and a summer squash ratatouille are delicious. The wine list is better than ever, too; add a glass of a food-friendly bargain such as Peterson Winery's Zero Manipulation Rhone blend to the table, and you're living the supper club dream of a previous generation: The food you want to eat at the price you want to pay. I guess every generation really does need to reinvent the wheel.

Other top steaks for thrifty carnivores? **Grumpy's** in downtown Minneapolis has a \$15.95 filet mignon; St. Paul's **Strip Club** offers a \$16 beef "eye of round"; and **Jax**, the legendary steak house in northeast Minneapolis, offers a \$17.95 cut of prime rib at lunch and as an early bird dinner special till 6 p.m. There's also **Casper's Cherokee Sirloin Room** in West St. Paul, which has a great steak at \$20.99, the one they call "The Steak of the Millennium."

## Carpenter's

14559 Forest Blvd. N.  
Hugo  
651-426-8107

## Red Stag Supper Club

509 First Ave. NE  
Minneapolis  
612-767-7766

## Grumpy's

1111 Washington Ave. S.  
Minneapolis  
612-340-9738

## The Strip Club

Meat & Fish  
378 Maria Ave.  
St. Paul  
651-793-6247

## Jax Café

1928 University Ave.  
NE, Minneapolis  
612-789-7297

## Casper's Cherokee Sirloin Room

886 Smith Ave. S.  
West St. Paul  
651-457-2729