

Minneapolis Restaurant Recommendations

Fellow ACC attendees—

Minneapolis has a vibrant and diverse dining scene ... alright, I may be slightly biased. Listed below are some of my favorite restaurants; the starred ones are especially recommended. I've limited the selection to downtown or nearby locations, with one exception, and all are locally owned—I'll let you seek the chains yourselves! All distances are from the Hilton. Enjoy!

—*Tariq Samad* (samad@ieee.org)

★ *Vincent*; www.vincentrestaurant.com; 1100 Nicollet Mall; (612) 630-1189; 1 block.

You're just a block or so away from Cahors, France! Vincent Francoual takes his native cuisine and incorporates influences from elsewhere—the Midwest even. The menu changes regularly and occasionally features a “Something Strange but Good” item for the adventurous diner. I still recall those wonderful calf brain fritters I once had for lunch.... Extensive selection of French wines. \$\$\$

Brit's Pub; www.britspub.com; 1110 Nicollet Mall; (612) 332-3908; 1 block.

Very English pub with lawn bowling on the roof. The food is, well, English, but thanks to Brick Lane influences a decent meal can be had. (Rhetorical question: Why is it that cultures with good beer have mediocre-at-best food?) High tea served 2-3:30 p.m. by reservation—a reason to skip that M session? \$\$

Masa; www.masa-restaurant.com; 1070 Nicollet Mall; (612) 338-6272; 1 block.

Newly opened high-style nouvelle Mexican restaurant—if good Mexican food in the U.S. means chimichangas served in hole-in-the-wall shops to you prepare to be surprised. The latest establishment of the D'Amico group, who also own *Café* and *Bar Lurcat* (see below). High marks for the very shareable appetizers in particular. \$\$

Dakota Bar and Grill; www.dakotacooks.com; 1010 Nicollet Mall; (612) 332-1010; 1 block.

The *Dakota* features national and international jazz acts in a space that is designed for listening to music while dining, with seating at two levels around a stage area. The fare is frills-attached comfort food—meat and potatoes and fancy ingredients! All-American wine list. Late night menu features appetizers and bar food. No cover charge if you're having dinner, regardless of who's on the ticket. So come for the food, stay for the jazz. \$\$\$

Solera; www.solera-restaurant.com; 900 Hennepin Ave. S.; (612) 338-0062; 0.5 mile.

Chic, electric-hued happy hour hangout and tapas bar, but the food's a lot better than you'd expect from the party scene. Owned by the same local restaurateurs who have brought us the “best restaurant in the history of Minneapolis” (see below). Opens 4 p.m. weekdays. \$\$

★ *Pizza Luce*; www.pizzaluce.com; 119 N. Fourth St.; (612) 333.7359; 0.7 mile.

In the heart of Minneapolis's warehouse district, where the bars close at 2 a.m. and *Luce* serves some of the best pizza in town until 2:30 or later. If you head to the warehouse district also check out our brand new Cesar Pelli-designed library—Fourth Street between Hennepin Avenue and Nicollet Mall! \$

★ *112 Eatery*; www.112eatery.com; 112 N. Third St.; (612) 343-7696; 0.8 mile.

Also in the warehouse district. The kitchen runs until 1 a.m. and the menu has something for both the gourmet and the discriminating late-night reveler—where else could you wash down a bacon, egg, and harrisa sandwich with a Beaucastel Chateaufort du Pape (not that I'm suggesting you should). Voted best or best new restaurant in the Twin Cities by several critics last year. Dinner only. \$\$

Café Brenda; www.cafebrenda.com; 300 First Ave. N.; (612) 342-9230 ; 0.8 mile.

Long-established favorite of vegetarian and vegan diners downtown—the hip, not the hippie, set. Seafood selections also. \$\$

Bar Lurcat; www.cafelurcat.com; 1624 Harmon Place; (612) 486-5500; 0.8 mile.

With its open, airy, plant-filled interior that looks out on Loring Park through floor-to-ceiling windows, this trendy hotspot is the best-looking space in town. The menu features “small plates” that are an elegant variation on usual bar fare. 30+ wines by the glass. If you're in the mood for dinner proper, first go to the companion elegant restaurant next door, *Café Lurcat*. Opens at 4:30 p.m. daily. Live music Thursday–Sunday. \$\$

★*Origami*; www.origamirestaurant.com; 30 N. First St.; (612) 333-8430; 0.9 mile.

Minneapolis must be about as far from an ocean as you can get in North America, so who would think you could get excellent sushi here! I like to start with saba sashimi, end with toro if the staff recommends it that day, and take advantage of the liberal glass-and-saucer sake pours in the interim.... \$\$

★*La Belle Vie*; www.labellevie.us; 510 Groveland Ave.; (612) 874-6440; 1 mile.

Sometimes being referred to as the best restaurant in town just doesn't do justice. One local reviewer has called this paragon of classic-yet-contemporary French cuisine the "Best restaurant in the history of Minneapolis!" No arguments from me. Go early and wait for your table in comfort and elegance in the lounge—where a smaller, less-expensive menu is also available. Dinner only, reservations in advance usually necessary. \$\$\$\$

★*Sapor*; www.saporcafe.com; 428 Washington Ave. N.; (612) 375-1971; 1 mile.

A hidden gem in the warehouse district—so reservations are rarely needed. The small menu tends to feature inventive combinations of ingredients from different cuisines. Sapor's mission may be to bring the global village to Minneapolis; if so, it succeeds—you can go around the world in half-a-dozen entrees! Small but well-selected wine list. Good at accommodating vegetarian and vegan diners. \$\$\$

20.21; info.walkerart.org/visit/dining.wac; 1750 Hennepin Ave. S.; (612) 253-3410; 1.1 miles.

The new Herzog and de Meuron wing of the Walker Art Center (20th and 21st century art—get it?) includes a signature Wolfgang Puck restaurant. Asian/Californian fare served with the flair you'd expect in a museum. The outdoor sculpture garden is free (don't miss the Jenny Holzer "benches"), and you can walk over the freeway traffic on the poetry-inscribed pedestrian bridge on the way to and from downtown. Reservations usually necessary, even for lunch. \$\$\$\$

Yummy; 2450 Nicollet Ave. S.; (612) 870-8000; 1.3 miles.

If you head south on Nicollet Mall/Ave. about a dozen blocks you'll end up on "Eat Street," the culinary manifestation of the increasing ethnic diversity of the city. Take *Yummy* for instance—an authentic Chinese restaurant that's within conceivable walking distance of downtown (although a taxi might be more convenient). Communication can be a problem (unless you speak Mandarin) but does it matter what you're eating if it tastes good? Dim sum daily, until 3 p.m. \$\$

★*Peninsula*; 2608 Nicollet Ave. S.; (612) 871-8282; 1.5 miles.

One of the latest arrivals on Eat Street, and instantly popular. Flavorful, well-prepared Malaysian food—itsself a fusion of international influences—in an attractive, industrial-modern interior that, despite its size, is often full of grateful diners. Let the friendly staff help you navigate the complex menu. \$\$

Quang Restaurant; www.quangrestaurant.com; 2719 Nicollet Ave. S.; (612) 870-4739; 1.5 miles.

Your Eat Street tour continues.... *Quang* is a bustling Vietnamese restaurant that's especially popular with the local Vietnamese community. The fare includes rice vermicelli salads with grilled pork or beef, pho and other noodle soups, and combination rice plates. Go early for dinner because they tend to run out of pho and they close at 8:30 p.m. No alcohol but several bubble tea flavors! \$

Fugaise; www.fugaise.com; 308 E. Hennepin Ave.; (612) 436-0777; 1.5 miles.

Head the other direction (i.e., north) from the Hilton and you'll end up in "Nordeast," a historically blue-collar neighborhood of the city which is now well and truly gentrified. Hence *Fugaise*, which features creative French fare with seasonal and regional produce, in the midst of traditional Eastern European restaurants like *Nye's Polonaise Room* (where to head for polka, I'm told). Small menu, but does "saddle of lamb with fava bean and ham risotto, preserved lemon, and lamb jus" make your mouth water? \$\$\$

★*Heartland*; www.heartlandrestaurant.com; 1806 St. Clair Ave., St. Paul; (651) 699-3536; 8 miles.

Can you say you've been to the Twin Cities if you've only been to one of them? *Heartland* demonstrates that "Contemporary Midwestern Cuisine" isn't an oxymoron. The menu changes daily and always includes fixed-price "fauna" and "flora" (i.e., nonvegetarian and vegetarian) options. There's also a wine bar next door with two-dozen-plus by-the-glass selections. Dinner only. \$\$\$