

Esquire

Esquire's Best New Restaurants in America 2015

The restaurant world is changing. Thank God.

BY TED ALLEN OCT 13, 2015



Josh Ozersky was hungry. He looked like a man who could put it away. And put it away he did, for his own satisfaction, sure. But also for yours.

Because Josh Ozersky lived to chow and tell. He was hungry for whiskey and argument (always a good pairing); hungry for validation of his work, which he received but probably distrusted (writers are like that); hungry for camaraderie and song. And, of course, just plain hungry, for the new-school and the old, the salty and fatty, the crispy on the outside and juicy in the middle—especially if it once possessed four hooves and a tail. But deeper than his need to ingest great cooking was his hunger to share his discoveries and to soak in the pleasure of affirmation from his audience. In that sense, Josh possessed a drive like that of great chefs, equal parts generosity and need for applause—not just for praise but also for surety that the rest of us tasted his discoveries and understood.

MORE FROM THE BEST NEW RESTAURANTS IN AMERICA



WE DID THE BANG BANG FROM LOUIE WITH ONE EXTRA...



HOW GREAT CHEFS REMEMBER JOSH OZERSKY

Josh chose most of the restaurants herein and devoured as many of their delights as he could, just in time to exhaust the Best New Restaurants travel budget, but not in time, sadly, to write the stories. Every death is untimely, but Josh's was especially so, happening as it did when he was just forty-seven in the early hours of May 4, 2015, the very day he was supposed to cheer on his favorite chefs at the James Beard Awards in Chicago. So a team of Esquire pros and great new voices from all over the country, including Beard Award winners John Birdsall and John DeVore, picked up the fork and finished the job.

No tribute could be more fitting, because we are as blown away by these restaurants and the cultural shifts they represent as Josh was. There is something of a New Food Order emerging—the rules, like the complexion of the country itself, are changing.

The restaurant of the year, **Shaya**, serves Israeli cuisine—in, of all places, New Orleans. And if you doubt that pita and tabbouleh could merit such an accolade, consider that their elevation comes at the hand of a chef, Alon Shaya, who has cooked for NoLa revolutionary John Besh since his first of (now) twelve restaurants began transforming that former time-capsule culture of Commander's Palace and Brennan's. And if that's not enough, imagine sinking your teeth into a pomegranate-lacquered lamb shank, blackened and glistening from hours at the roast.

There is a restaurant that basically serves only birds. A restaurant on a bleak block in Harlem that no sooner saw success than it was shut down by a ridiculous rent increase. Yet somehow it managed to reopen ten months later, bringing its

beacon to a different careworn stretch of the city.

In more restaurants than ever, Latin Americans are not just rocking the line but also running the show, with confidence and style. Witness Ray Garcia: I went to his L.A. joint **Broken Spanish** in its ninth week, before it even had a sign out front. He takes familiar flavors and formats from the Mexican playbook and brilliantly interweaves them with surprises like black garlic and foie-gras butter.

Perhaps most important is that after a decade of tatt-sleeved male chefs whose primary concern was building empires rather than flavors, we are entering a new era of collaboration and cooperation that focuses more on cooking and less on big-swinging solo-artist brand development. Chefs who use the pronoun *we* when describing their creative process, like husband-and-wife chef-owners Nicole Krasinski and Stuart Brioza, of **the Progress** in San Francisco. These are craftspeople with their chests unpuffed and their heads down over their pots, developing loyal teams of homegrown cooks just as surely as they develop killer dishes—and upending the bro culture of the American kitchen.

If only Josh could have seen this through. The last memory anybody seems to have of him belongs to John Currence, a friend and the chef at City Grocery in Oxford, Mississippi. Having decamped from the Beards' annual Chefs' Night Out cocktail party in search of Jim Beam, the two, along with Charleston chef-kings Jason Stanhope and Mike Lata, found their way to a basement karaoke dive. "Nobody was singing, so Josh just started devouring the microphone and dragging people onstage." Among the selections: the duet "Islands in the Stream," with Stanhope. "It was really one of the most joyful things to watch."

Because for food, for whiskey, for one more song, Josh Ozersky was hungry. You're hungry. I'm hungry. Let's eat.

THE BEST NEW RESTAURANTS IN AMERICA 2015 LIST

Shaya, New Orleans

Townsmen, Boston

The Progress, San Francisco

Muscadine, Portland, Oregon

The Grey, Savannah

Jockey Hollow Bar & Kitchen, Morristown, New Jersey

B.S. Taqueria and **Broken Spanish**, Los Angeles

Momotaro, Chicago

Dolo Restaurant and Bar, Chicago

The Duck Inn, Chicago

Little Park, New York

Shuko, New York

Santina, New York

Mountain Bird, New York