

# CULVER CITY & VENICE

## AK RESTAURANT + BAR

The gravlax and herring dishes at Conny Andersson's casual sophisticate of a restaurant point to his Scandinavian roots. Seasonings are done with a deft hand in the chile-laced coppino and the *dukka*-spiced lamb sirloin (as tender and non-gamy a cut as we've ever had). The circle-backed fabric chairs give one kind of comfort in the indoor-outdoor space; the focus on organic and sustainable foods lends another. » 1633 Abbot Kinney Blvd., Venice (310-392-6644 or akinvenice.com). D Tue.-Sun. Full bar. Organic **\$\$\$**

## AKASHA ★

Akasha is a sceney, hip spot—what in L.A. shorthand might be called a “black shirt” restaurant, but this one has its feet firmly planted in a pair of Birkenstocks. The menu goes beyond chef Akasha Richmond's former vegetarian repertoire, offering meat and popular dishes like mac and cheese. But the tenets of organic, well sourced, and local serve as a launching point for an entire ecological vision. When the dishes work, whether it's a bowl of quinoa and *edamame* or hemp seed-crusting tofu salad, they radiate an earthy integrity. Creamy *cannellini* bean hummus invites dipping with warm flatbread, and a turkey burger spiked with olives and jalapeños has the kick of a classic. » 9543 Culver Blvd., Culver City (310-845-1700 or akasharestaurant.com). L Mon.-Fri, D Mon.-Sat. Full bar. New American **\$\$\$**

## FATHER'S OFFICE

Visiting the Culver City sequel to Santa Monica's minuscule gastropub spurs a range of emotions. There's hope as you get in line. Jealousy as you view patrons munching sweet potato fries on the expansive front patio. Awe as you take in the wall of 72 taps dispensing craft beers, plus more taps for kegs of wine, plus a list of throwback gin cocktails. Satisfaction with starters of smoked eel with horseradish *crème fraîche*

and asparagus with crispy *serrano* ham. And something close to nirvana as you bite into that dripping, caramelized onion-topped burger that makes the whole wait worth it. » 3229 Helms Ave., Culver City (310-736-2224 or fathersoffice.com). L Fri.-Sun; D nightly. Full bar. Also at 1018 Montana Ave., Santa Monica (310-393-BEER). D nightly. Beer and wine. Gastropub **\$**

## FRAÏCHE ★★★

Soaring ceilings, a crowded terrace, stone walls—this place could have been here when the Munchkins were staying across the street at the Culver Hotel. Thierry Perez runs the front with a martinet's eye; his business partner, Jason Travi, heads a kitchen whose lodestar is Italy. The homemade *ricotta* reveals an artisanal proclivity. *Passatelli in brodo*, noodles soft from being made with bread crumbs, subtly nurtures. Travi's approach to cooking is big-bodied, and his wife Miho's desserts close the meal on a gentle note—the Paris-Brest is a classic preparation. » 9411 Culver Blvd., Culver City (310-839-6800 or fraichrestaurantla.com). D Tue.-Sun. Full bar. French-Italian **\$\$\$**

## GJELINA ★★

Low-key moneyed Venice flocks to this corner spot, and the cooking of Travis Lett is the main draw. The chef goes to a lot of trouble for farmers' market ingredients, and he's devoted to cooking with an open flame. Grilled *radicchio* is served with aged balsamic or paired with bacon and fontina on a pizza. Squash and farro make a soup of peasant goodness, and they're also in the risotto, a wondrous base for the lamb shank. We adore the *margherita* pizza, which, yes, is a weightless “gastronomic” pie—with little more than tomato sauce and cheese, it has a restraint that hints of nostalgia. With its earthy menu and fresh design (a Bauhaus take on the Tyrolean lodge), Gjelina captures the neighborhood. » 1429 Abbot Kinney Blvd., Venice (310-450-1429). L Mon.-Fri; D nightly; brunch Sun. Beer and wine. New American **\$\$\$**

## JOE'S RESTAURANT ★★

Long before there was a Pinkberry on Abbot Kinney, there was Joe Miller's landmark. The beach-chic restaurant is still the best on the strip, serving salads

that feature basil *gelée* or duck sausage and entrées like escaper with miso-yogurt sauce or sirloin with red pepper juice. The bar is friendly, brunch is a scene, and there's no beating the \$18 lunch special. » 1023 Abbot Kinney Blvd., Venice (310-399-5811 or joesrestaurant.com). L Tue.-Fri; D Tue.-Sun; brunch Sat.-Sun. Full bar. Cal-French **\$\$\$**

## SEED KITCHEN

Forget those typical macrobiotic joints pushing durian shakes and overgarlicked **NEW** mung beans that render you unfit for human company. Eric LeChasseur, onetime chef to Madonna and Gwyneth, opened this bright café with his wife, Sanae Suzuki. They offer complex, aromatic curries along with salads (Asian kale and jicama tossed in miso-sesame dressing and topped with a fistful of roasted almonds), *panini*, and a Southwest bean-and-grain burger with fries that, honest to God, will have you rethinking In-N-Out. After the cupcakes or Madonna's coconut mousse, you'll be rethinking macrobiotic altogether. There are only a few tables, and because of the takeout-only license, everything is served in recyclable containers. » 1604 Pacific Ave., Venice (310-396-1604 or seedkitchen.com). L-D daily. No alcohol. Macrobiotic **\$S**

# SANTA MONICA

## ANISSETTE BRASSERIE ★★

Those anticipating the food with which chef Alain Giraud (Citrus, Bastide) made his name have to rejigger their expectations. Anisette is an everyday restaurant. But the menu is full of hearty French dishes that have prevailed through generations of fickle trends. The dining room—a painstaking brasserie replication down to the mismatched light fixtures—buzzes with tourists, business folk, shoppers, and fans of Giraud. The Santa Monica farmers' market is just one block away, and it shows. Even sweetbreads are enlightened by vegetables. Seafood dishes like *moules marinière* and black cod