

**Ann Abel** Contributor*I travel luxe but smart: I know what's worth shelling out for.*

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## The 16 Coolest Places To Eat In 2016

The food world has more than enough best-of lists. This isn't one of them. It's not a definitive statement on whether any place is better than any other place. It's not a reflection of which restaurants have the most hype.

There's not a Noma or a Celler de Can Roca anywhere in sight here. Maybe some of the restaurants on this list will someday reach the upper echelons of those high-profile lists. Maybe they won't. That isn't the point. These places are interesting right now, and (so far) undersung, whether because they're new or because they've been happily flying under the radar. Dining at them confers bragging rights, for whatever that's worth, without being as obvious as the usual suspects. They're worth our attention—especially those of us who are willing to travel for a good meal.

To compile this list, I asked three of the most accomplished eaters in the world where they would encourage friends to go. Restaurant critic Andy Hayler, who runs the useful [website of the same name](#), is the only person to have dined at every Michelin three-star in the world. Sommelier turned professional bon vivant Kristian Brask Thomsen hosts the traveling three-day [gastronomic blowouts known as Dining Impossible](#), which the *Telegraph* called the best dinner parties in the world. And James Beard Award—



winning journalist Matt Goulding is a chief editor of the [influential travel publication Roads & Kingdoms](#).

Here, in no particular order, are their coolest places to eat in 2016.



*A composition of “fish from the lake” at Taubenkobel: pike, carp, eel, catfish with its liver, rogggen and greens*

Taubenkobel, Austria

“It simply has *terroir*,” says Brask Thomsen of [this “hidden jewel”](#) in rural Austria near the Hungarian border. “The cuisine takes you through the storytelling of the area and the creative mind of Alain Weissgerber. The food has a deep feeling of countryside and is created, combined and executed in a way that both comforts and conquers the eye, heart, taste bud and belly.”

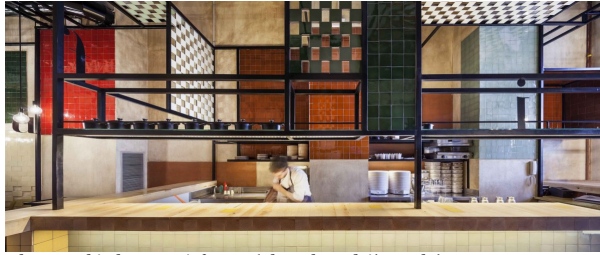
Jimbocho Den, Tokyo

“This is the kind of inventive, [deeply enjoyable dining](#) you don’t often find in the more serious corners of Japan’s food culture,” says Goulding. “But don’t let the playfulness fool you. Chef Zaiyu Hasegawa’s whimsical take on traditionally rigid *kaiseki* cuisine is driven by extraordinary skill and a gift for building layers of flavor.”

Taller, Copenhagen

The most interesting [new dinner ticket](#) in the famously food-crazy Danish capital, according to Brask Thomsen (who spent much of his career in that city), takes a major detour from the New Nordic route.

The Venezuelan gourmet restaurant from Noma alumni is “inventive, fun, foreign, tantalizing, clever and utterly delicious.”



*The open kitchen at Disfrutar (photo by Adrià Goula)*

#### Disfrutar, Barcelona

This year’s [most anticipated new restaurant](#) in Spain is helmed by three chefs who were part of the El Bulli creative core team throughout the reign of that restaurant that “changed the way we understand food today,” says Brask Thomsen, who is now based in Barcelona. Their new venture has already been awarded its first Michelin star. “It’s simply spectacular.”

#### Semilla, Brooklyn

Vegetables are finally having their moment. That’s one reason Goulding admires this Williamsburg newcomer, where he recently dined on thinly sliced raw cèpes dressed with a hearty *ragù*, a squash and goat cheese tart of “haunting savory depth” and the “justly famous bread course” of hot sourdough studded with whole grains. Not on the menu: dogma. [Semilla](#) is about “vegetable-driven cuisine with no prevailing ethos other than creating the most delicious and interesting food possible.”

#### Ibai, San Sebastián

The city’s most difficult reservation isn’t at one of its Michelin three-stars but at [this little basement restaurant](#), open only at lunchtime on weekdays. Chef-owner Alicia Garro’s ingredient-driven menus change daily. “The sole here is the finest I have eaten in any restaurant,” says Hayler, “and even the humble garden pea is elevated to a remarkable level.”

Les Prés d'Eugénie, France

"No matter how many times I eat here, I find new reasons to love the place," says Hayler, who thinks [the restaurant](#) isn't as well known outside of France as it should be. "Having held three Michelin stars for an unbroken 39 years, Michel Guérard could be thought to have earned a rest, but at 82 years old he is still very firmly planted in the kitchen. His cooking style is deceptively simple."

Beefsteak, Washington, DC

The U.S. has been flooded with healthy fast-casual restaurants, notes Goulding, who thinks [this one](#) will help shape the evolution of the industry. "The difference here is José Andres, captain of one of the world's most successful high-end restaurant regimes, who knows how to tease out unspeakable flavors from the plant kingdom."

Le Calandre, Italy

Massimiliano Alajmo, who runs the kitchen at [this restaurant](#) with an unlikely location about an hour from Venice, is the youngest chef ever to earn three Michelin stars (at the tender age of 28). He deserves them, says Hayler, for cooking classical and modern Italian food with equal dexterity. "His signature saffron risotto is a thing of beauty."

Taberna Pedraza, Madrid

The husband-and-wife chefs behind [this establishment](#) ate their way through the regional specialties of Spain to refine their vision for a casual but serious restaurant in the capital. "The menu represents the very best of Spanish cooking," says Goulding. "Category-killing *croquetas*, a textbook loose-centered tortilla and an off-menu plate of *patatas bravas* made with the rich meat-infused stock from *cocido madrileño*."



*Alaskan king crab, kalamansi, cucumber and lemon balm at Grace  
(photo by Michael Muser)*

### Grace, Chicago

You could easily pass [this restaurant](#), in an indifferent building on heavy-traffic West Randolph Street, but inside it's a different story. "Everything is a pleasure to experience: the sleek decor, the well-choreographed service, the playful tasting menus, the clever wine list, the alluring sound carpet and even the temperature of the room," says Brask Thomsen. "As a former restaurateur I admire the way every detail is taken into consideration to make guest feels special." The food is pretty beautiful too: "A culinary ballet."

### Hedone, London

Swedish lawyer and food blogger turned self-taught chef Mikael Jonsson chose competitive London for [his first restaurant](#). He was up for the challenge, according to Hayler (and many other reviewers and judges). "His obsession with ingredient quality is exceptional even among top chefs," says the critic. "The relaxed surroundings and open kitchen belie the rigorous culinary technique."

### Victor's Fine Dining by Christian Bau (Schloss Berg), Germany

Christian Bau takes his three Michelin stars so seriously that he has had them tattooed on his arm, notes Hayler. In a 12<sup>th</sup>-century building near Luxembourg he produces "[some of the best modern cooking](#) to be found anywhere in the world," refined food that brings Japanese influences to French classical technique.

### White Rabbit, Moscow

“You must go to Moscow,” declares Brask Thomsen. “Not only has the food scene evolved tremendously over the past five years; its fine dining now plays in the big league in shape of [White Rabbit](#).” Set in a fairy tale glass dining room atop a building that’s across from one of Stalin’s impressive Seven Sisters, the city’s best high-end restaurant brings new techniques and international ingredients to modernized Russian cuisine.



*The dining room at Florilege*

### Florilege, Tokyo

“Tokyo has many fine restaurants, but up-and-coming Florilege is particularly interesting,” says Hayler, who when this was published anticipated Michelin recognition for it soon. (He was right: It received a star in December.) The [French-Japanese restaurant](#) marries traditional cooking styles with today’s global dining sensibilities: guests arrayed around the open kitchen, dishes that change with the seasons and local ingredients in peak condition.

### Bar Brutal, Barcelona

Most out-of-town chefs and wine geeks head [here](#) first when they hit Barcelona, says Goulding, who lives part time in the city. “The hospitality is first-rate, and the list of natural wines is a thing of beauty for those who like their grape juice funky. But I keep going back for Kaya Jacobs’s refined seasonal cuisine—the type of light, sure-handed, boundless cooking I wish there was more of in Spain.”



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