

# ACCENT

## Tops in taste

Our critic's choices for a good year on the local culinary scene

By Liz Balmaseda  
The Palm Beach Post

The buffet table that is Palm Beach County's dining scene is not only bigger this year, it's more tempting — and as my heaped plate can attest, I've made repeated trips to this buffet.

A small glimpse of 2018's tasty offerings:

Grandview Public Market brought downtown West Palm a funky food hall, the first in the county.

Clematis Street got global bookends: Peruvian Dr. Limon opened on the western end, Spanish-inspired Tapeo on the eastern end.

West Palm's Avocado Grill introduced a suburban sister, a Palm Beach Gardens spot that revved up the Downtown at the Gardens plaza.

In Jupiter, a restaurant co-owned by Michael Jordan proved to be a slam dunk.

Cucina Cabana gave north county a lively supper club, where diners feast on Italian classics as entertainer Ray Chang belts out the hits.

Boca got a cozy, new Haitian restaurant, opened by a former chain-restaurant chef with indie dreams.

Palm Beach got a taco joint named Coyo.

The crew behind Tequesta Brewing Company and Twisted Trunk brought Steam Horse Brewing to West Palm's budding Warehouse District.

There were some good-byes as well: Uncle Tai's, Relish, Hutton, Costa, Junior's, Mellow Mushroom at CityPlace, Max's Harvest, The Alchemist and others bid us farewell. And like a snap of flamenco, Basque, the charming spot in the Biba Hotel that cooked from a food truck, came and went — it's now confirmed that the restaurant will not reopen.

Overall, it was a good year for the local culinary scene. The talent pool deepened. Menus raised the bar. Chefs collaborated, popped up and stepped up. This collab trend is something I'm most eager to watch in the new year.

But before we get to the new year, let's applaud this year's standouts. The following list reflects the restaurants, chefs and staff that impressed me most. I could not dine at every new spot or visit some of the buzzy ones I had hoped to. This list is based on experiences I did have. Cheers to 2018!



Pistache in West Palm Beach, our critic's favorite place for brunch. [LIZ BALMASEDA/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



1000 North in Jupiter, our critic's choice for best restaurant of 2018. [DAMON HIGGINS/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



Havana employees Margarita Mora and Yadira Rodriguez talk with daily customer Mike McGrath. The Cuban eatery celebrated its 25th anniversary recently and is our critic's pick for best iconic restaurant. [THOMAS CORDY/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

### Best Restaurant

#### 1000 North, Jupiter

We were so ready to trash-talk this place, weren't we? Okay, maybe I'm speaking for myself. The place is expensive, celebrity-owned and clubby — upstairs is reserved for members — in an area known for casual, more

egalitarian spots. I expected hotel food. I could not have been more wrong. The food is outstanding. The service impeccable. Even without the best lighthouse view in the inlet area, the restaurant truly raises the bar.

**1000 North:** 1000 North U.S. Hwy 1, Jupiter; 561-570-1000

### Best Service

#### Marcello's La Sirena, West Palm Beach

Marcello and Diane Fiorentino know the secret sauce on service: Make guests feel as if they've come home. Share your knowledge of the food and wine. Keep the mood crisp and light. Never fawn. Wine Spectator calls this Italian restaurant, a Dixie Highway mainstay, a wine destination. The magazine awarded La Sirena its rare Grand Award for three consecutive years. But we know the success of the place extends well beyond the wine and Marcello's dreamy pasta.

**La Sirena:** 6316 S. Dixie Highway, West Palm Beach; 561-585-3128

### Best Waterfront Dining

#### BrickTop's, Palm Beach Gardens

What is lovely about dining at the Gardens location of BrickTop's, an upscale chain restaurant, is that one does not have to sit at the outdoor tiki bar or terrace to get a decent view of the Intracoastal. One can sit in the main room and still sneak a look at the leisurely parade of boats.

Also lovely: The view here is as sparkly by day as it is twinkly by night. I'll take the daytime views, preferably at Sunday brunch, while digging into BrickTop's chicken and waffles.

**BrickTop's:** 2373 PGA Blvd., Palm Beach Gardens; 561-530-4313

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