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GREEN CHRISTMAS AT ANTHOLOGY (Story page 38)

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A GASTRONOMIC GUIDE TO NORTH PARK

BY FRANK SABATINI, JR.

North Park's ongoing renaissance has spawned a healthy portion of restaurants ranging from quaint and casual to unique and hip. The trail of breadcrumbs zig-zags through a sizeable district bound by El Cajon Boulevard to the north, Balboa Park to the south, Interstate 805 to the east and Florida Street to the west. University Avenue cuts through the heart of North Park, buzzing with an influx of cafes, bars, boutiques, galleries, performance venues and other cultural outlets. Delving into every eatery on Restaurant Row that flourishes along 30th Street would be a mouthful. Here are the prime cuts.



THE RITUAL (PICTURED)

4095 30th St. » 619.283.1618 » ritualtavern.com

Sporting the charm of an Old World pub, The Ritual creates a convincing atmosphere that can save Europhiles a trip overseas. The ambience is dark yet welcoming, suitable for dishes such as Shepherd's pie, fish-n-chips and burgers topped with Dubliner cheese. Everything is constructed with fresh, seasonal ingredients, and the bar stays fully stocked with more than 50 different beers and ales from around the globe.



CARDAMOM CAFÉ & BAKERY

2977 Upas St. » 619.546.5609

Neighborhood newbie Joanne Sherif introduces an indoor/outdoor café that grabs you by the nose with its homemade pastries, rolls and signature Cardamom bread. The bakery goods are complemented by comforting American fare available for breakfast and lunch. Warm, vibrant colors plaster the walls and chairs, setting the stage for Green Goddess chopped salads, chorizo omelets with jalapenos and hummus platters with bulgur wheat. Closed on Mondays and Tuesdays.



URBAN SOLACE
 3823 30th St. » 619.295.6464
 urbansolace.net

Locals began singing the praises of Chef Matt Gordon when he brought back "duckaroni" and braised beef cheeks, two neighborhood faves, to commemorate Urban Solace's first anniversary. A Southern twist in the midst of North Park's culinary surge, the restaurant evokes the spirit and culture of New Orleans' French Quarter. Beyond the leaded glass doors and beneath windows trimmed in ornate wrought iron, Patrons are greeted inside by an elegant craftsman motif. The soul-warming menu includes winter seafood stew, Dungeness crab "pop tarts" and grass-fed flat iron steak.



MAL
 Illinois St. » 619.294.8292
 alsd.com

Too fast and you might not notice this quaint, family-owned eatery, which blends into its industrial surroundings rather seamlessly. Once inside, however, you'll discover quality dishes that aren't nearly every region of San Diego, at pre-inflation prices. The wine list is exceptional, and the service is top-notch. A goat confirms that you're dining at El Torito. Hospitality is warm in an atmosphere warmed by copper suns, Art Deco wall art and replica paintings by the legendary muralist Diego Rivera.



SPREAD
 2879 University Ave. » 619.543.0406
 spreadtherestaurant.com

Spread earned its name for incorporating peanut butter into nearly all its dishes. Today, the tasty eatery is lauded for serving up some of the most inventive vegan and vegetarian meals in San Diego (the nutter butters not entirely excluded). Bubble chairs hang suspended in an atmosphere that baby boomers describe as "groovy." Gen Xers prefer "retro-modern." Regardless of your generation, Spread's sparse design is unmistakably cool.



HAWTHORN'S LOUNGE
 2895 University Ave. » 619.295.1688
 hawthornssd.com

Hawthorn's is located in the front of the historic Birch North Park Theater, where a grand welcome is provided by ornate architectural details and illuminated photographs of playhouse scenes. Expect fine-dining meals at neighborhood prices, or sample casual bistro fare in the restaurant's adjoining dining room. Seared filet mignon and an ultra-thick pork chop drizzled in cranberry-Port reduction are among the encore dishes carried over from the restaurant's former days at Fifth and Hawthorn.



SEA ROCKET BISTRO
 3382 30th St. » 619.255.7049
 searocketbistro.com

Fresh ocean victuals pulled from local waters are all the rave at Sea Rocket, a new seafood joint with a bohemian air. An open kitchen presides over bare wooden tables, cement flooring and funky green walls. The grilled sardines are joyfully novel. And if you've never tried sea urchin before, this is the place to open your mouth and mind.