

HOLY COW!

ANYTHING GOES AT THESE (5) BURGER HOT SPOTS



Lettuce, tomato, cheddar, onion, and Lindy's chipotle sauce

LINDY'S MAC & CHEESE BURGER

Beef patties

Kraft Macaroni & Cheese



CONSIDER THE HUMBLE HAMBURGER, AMERICA'S BEST-KNOWN FOOD EXPORT. IT'S BEEN A POP CULTURE ICON FOR DECADES,

a constant companion to Wimpy in the *Popeye* strips, the centerpiece of John Belushi's classic *Saturday Night Live* "Cheeseburger, Cheeseburger" skit, and the object of Lolcat desire in the viral *I Can Has Cheezburger* blog (ask any teenager). A backbone of the fast-food industry, it's also a staple of upscale steakhouses. It's even covered by vegetarians, who demanded and got faux versions.



THE BURGERS: Inset photos, clockwise from upper right: Clint's "Almost Famous" Vegetable Burger from Zinburger, smoked cheddar and bacon burger from Monkey Burger, Lindy's bacon cheeseburger topped with a sweet honey bun

Good news for aficionados of the chopped-meat patty. As a former cow town turned foodie mecca, Tucson has major burger clout. We've got hamburgers in every incarnation—sporty, sophisticated, whimsical, collegiate, even national media darlings—all conceived and created locally.

One place that embraced Tucson's special relationship with the hamburger early on is **Risky Business**, celebrating the 16th anniversary of its first restaurant in November. At first glance, the restaurants—there are now three in town—look like typical sports bars, with large-screen TVs, lots of dark wood, and a friendly buzz. But upon closer inspection, you'll see details that confer a distinct sense of local place (and no, it's not just the Wildcat-abilia, though you didn't think that would be missing, did you?). These include the colorful abstract murals by



Build your own burger with bacon, avocado, and a fried egg

ZINBURGER

Burger, topped with pepper jack, guacamole, and pico de gallo. The focus at Risky Business has always been on fresh, organic, and local—even before it became trendy—so it's no surprise that the buns come from Viro's Bakery in Tucson, while several of the beers are Arizona microbrews, including Barrio (Tucson), Thunder Canyon (Tucson), Four Peaks (Tempe), and San Tan (from Chandler). Almost all the other ingredients used in the kitchen are from Shamrock Foods, founded in Tucson in 1922 and still family owned.

High-quality local ingredients are also emphasized at **Zinburger**, which taps into the nostalgia for childhood comfort food with its gourmet burgers. Those who have lived in Tucson since the mid-2000s will remember when Fox Restaurant Concepts replaced Bistro Zin, a local favorite for special occasions, with the more casual Zinburger. The room was opened up and a tongue-in-cheek mural of grazing cows—yes, they are dairy cows, not meat cows; get over it—was added. But the Zin (as in Zinfandel) aspect of the restaurant was also honored, which means you can

enjoy a nice glass of wine along with whatever burger—or salad or ahi sandwich—you choose. A bonus: When you're in a restaurant that has cow murals, not to mention images of paparazzi in the women's bathroom, no one will look down on

you if you order Chardonnay with your red meat.

The same attention to detail that was observed in Bistro Zin's fine-dining kitchen is also directed to Zinburger's. The restaurant has a cooler with custom-built tables inside to prepare all the meat—including, for one burger, Kobe beef—which is chopped fresh three times a day. Anyone who has tasted ground meat direct from a butcher shop, as opposed to a grocery store, will understand the difference. Recipes are similarly detail oriented. The signature Zinburger, for example, features Zinfandel-braised onions and Manchego cheese, a Spanish variety chosen for its nutty flavor, and one of the optional toppings is truffle aioli.

And then there are the milk shakes, floats, and cream pies. Like the burgers, the desserts evoke a nostalgia for childhood, but here they are raised to a level of adult sophistication. You'll find flavors like crème brûlée, bananas Foster, and strawberry cheesecake among the shakes, all made with genuine ice

THE DESSERTS EVOKE A NOSTALGIA FOR CHILDHOOD.



Zinburger's strawberry cheesecake shake and double truffle fries (opposite page, inset)

LINDY'S DINER ON 4TH

Grilled cheese sandwich

Two Finger Peek-a-Boo Burger with mushrooms, onion rings, Swiss and cheddar cheese, lettuce, tomato, and Lindy's sauce

Another grilled cheese sandwich



cream. Something to consider: This restaurant is popular with families, so there's a generation of kids growing up in Tucson who will look back on crème brûlée milk shakes as their early comfort food.

The words "comfort food" and **Lindy's Diner on 4th** often turn up in the same sentence. One of the most popular burgers at this kicked-back university-area diner and bar comes smothered in mac 'n' cheese and tater tots. In contrast, the restaurant's name and the phrase "adult sophistication" don't easily roll off the tongue together. Owner and frequent line chef Lindon "Lindy" Reilly, who started working in Tucson restaurants when

he was about 13, has no problem with that. He geared his burgers to a collegiate crowd, and they ended up attracting the attention of TV food shows known more for fun than finesse.

The first time a Lindy's burger put in a national appearance was in late 2009, when Adam Richman, host of the Travel Channel's *Man v. Food*, tackled the OMG burger—nine patties and three pounds of beef topped with cheddar and Swiss, lettuce, tomato, onion, and Lindy's chipotle sauce—and prevailed. This \$20 monster is on the house if you finish it in 20 minutes or less. Richman didn't, but his 45-minute victory over the burger put his photo on the wall of fame. Lindy's second bout of small-screen stardom came in spring 2011, when the Food Network's Rahm Fama of *Meat and Potatoes* downed a Two Finger Peek-a-Boo

Fine-dining FLAIR*

Find this gourmet burger—made with foie gras, mushrooms, caramelized onions, bacon, and manchego cheese—at **Downtown Kitchen + Cocktails**, 135 S. 6th Ave., 520-623-7700, www.downtownkitchen.com.



HE ATTRACTED TV FOOD SHOWS KNOWN MORE FOR FUN THAN FINESSE.

Burger. Here the heft is not in the beef patties—Fama opted for a modest two—but in the bun substitute: two grilled cheese sandwiches made with thick Texas toast.

Grilled cheese sandwiches are not the only out-of-the-box burger enfolders on the menu. The Fat Bastard, featuring a fried egg, bacon, cheddar, lettuce, tomato, onion, and mayo, comes on a honey bun. Perhaps the most unusual burger combo, however, is the Blue Suede Cow, which includes peanut butter, bacon, and pepper jack. Name aside, I'd say it's Las Vegas Elvis, as opposed to Memphis Elvis, that this burger channels.

Like Lindy Reilly, who initially created his chopped-meat extravaganzas just to please himself and his friends, Matthew Stricker of **Monkey Burger** started making elaborate burgers for himself and his kitchen staff when he was working at the fine dining room of the Driskill Hotel in Austin, Texas. It was several years and a few more jobs at upscale restaurants, including stints at The Dish and McClintock's in Tucson, before Stricker realized that burgers were an ideal vehicle for merging his down-to-earth personality with his gourmet talents.

If the signature Chef Mattie Burger, with roasted poblanos, sautéed mushrooms and onions, bacon, cheddar, Swiss, lettuce, and tomato, is a de facto nod to Austin, where it was conceived, other burgers use distinctive ingredients to pay tribute to their nominal locales. The Chi-Town, for example, features Kryptonite sweet pickle relish, a condiment of an electric-green hue rarely seen in nature or outside of Chicago; the South Shore's ginger BBQ glaze alludes to the Hawaiian island of Oahu; and the Sonora's shredded cabbage and avocado salsa give a shout out to northern Mexico. The side dishes, all made in-house just as the toppings are, also get

(PLACES FOR PATTIES

- **LINDY'S DINER ON 4TH** 431 N. 4th Ave., 520-207-6970, www.lo4th.com
- **MONKEY BURGER** 5350 E. Broadway Blvd. #128, 520-514-9797; 47 N. 6th Ave., 520-624-4416, www.monkeyburgerrestaurant.com
- **RISKY BUSINESS** 6866 E. Sunrise Dr., 520-577-0021; 8848 E. Tanque Verde Rd., 520-749-8555; 250 S. Craycroft Rd., 520-584-1610, www.riskybusinessstucson.com
- **ZINBURGER** Joesler Village, 1865 E. River Rd., 520-299-7799; new second location: 6390 E. Grant Rd., 520-298-2020, www.foxrc.com

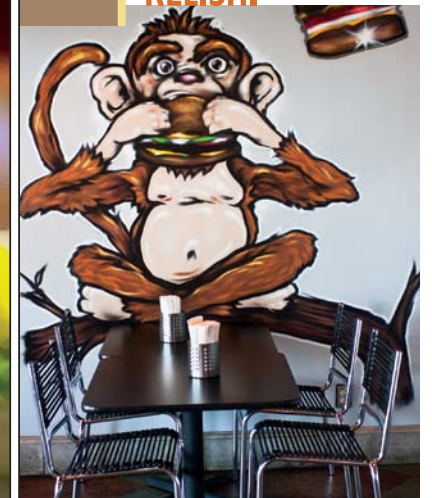


MONKEY BURGER



Which brings us to the nonedible art in both restaurants: Rocky Martinez's graffiti-style murals of burger-eating monkeys, kissing condiments, and cityscapes punctuated by flying burgers. They're a reminder that hamburgers are the entertainers of the meat family, its class clowns, even when they're

HE CHI-TOWN FEATURES KRYPTONITE SWEET PICKLE RELISH.



Custom-made burger (opposite page, inset) and fried pickles (above, inset) at Monkey Burger

made of Kobe beef or contain foie gras among their ingredients. Of course, America is famed for rock & roll, jazz, and Hollywood films, so why wouldn't our best-known food be entertaining too?

After researching this story, Tucson Guide Contributing Dining Editor Edie Jarolim was surprised to find herself wanting to sample more burgers, including the one that comes on two grilled cheese sandwiches. She doesn't plan to try for the OMG burger hall of fame, however.

a cosmopolitan spin. The roasted corn on the cob is dusted with chili powder, the sweet potato fries are waffle cut, and the fried pickles come with garlic herb mayo and bourbon remoulade dipping sauces.

The presentations also demonstrate that there's a serious chef in the building—or, rather, buildings; there are two Monkey

Burgers in town. The sides come wrapped in paper cones and served in aluminum dry measuring cups, while the burgers, carefully constructed towers that maintain the distinctness of each colorful ingredient, are works of art (think Andy Warhol) until you attempt to eat them (think Jackson Pollock).