

# 38

by [Bill Addison](#), January 13, 2016


When I set out [last year](#) to compile the first-ever National 38 list, a roundup of the restaurants that shaped and defined American dining, I faced a thrilling — if daunting — task. This year's job was no less ambitious: Just as the 38 lists on Eater's city-specific sites grow and change with their restaurant scenes, editors rotating out some quality restaurants and introducing fresh names to the roster, so does this one. There's no shortage of outstanding places in every tier of every scene that help answer the question, "What is essential dining?" Still, some kitchens speak more clearly to this moment than others.

Here, you'll find many restaurants from our inaugural list that have re-earned their place, but of the nearly 450 meals I ate on the road this year, 13 stood out as culinary accomplishments so vibrant and so necessary that they demanded inclusion on this list. (You'll see them marked with a blaze.) They include an iconic Tampa steakhouse, two local favorites in New Orleans, a Phoenix pizzeria that started a revolution, a Los Angeles taco truck, and a Russian restaurant in Portland whose food had me smitten from the first bite.

To qualify for the National 38, restaurants must be open at least 18 months; they're presented here in alphabetical order. These restaurants are essential to my dining life — but more importantly, they're essential to everyone's.

== AMERICA'S ==  
**ESSENTIAL**  
**RESTAURANTS**  
== 2016 ==

KANSAS CITY, KS

**Bluestem** 

In the last dozen years, Colby and Megan Garrelts's restaurant has matured into a fully realized vision of Midwestern tasting-menu dining. In their 28-seat space, guests mix-and-match dishes to create three-, five-, or ten-course dinners informed by the couple's close relationships with nearby farms. Desserts like strawberry-rhubarb tart conclude meals with polished hominess, a reflection of Megan Garrelts's spot-on pastry sensibility, a wonderful contrast to the food sent out by chef de cuisine Andrew Longres, who plates ingredients with the precision of a jeweler setting gemstones. [More on Kansas City's vibrant dining scene.](#)



Tortellini at Bluestem