

A taste of (someone else's) home

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Please accept this cliche image of Thanksgiving as a representation of Austin's culinary melting pot.

By Justin Davis November 25, 2010

It's no secret that Austin shelters expatriates from all parts of the world. With the city dominating in arbitrary magazine rankings of U.S. cities in every category from **employment opportunities** to "**Most Sex-Happy**" to "**drunkest**," can you blame them? And while Austin is the capital of the proudest state in the union (with all the "completely secure in our superiority" truck jingles to prove it), the city's eateries make plenty of concessions to its transplanted citizenry's culinary homesickness. With Thanksgiving on the horizon, *The A.V. Club* spoke with three prominent, nonnative Austinites about foods that remind them of home, and where they go in Austin to find those foods.

The expat: **Arthur Simone**

Previously lived in: New Orleans, Louisiana

Background: Co-founder, **ColdTowne Theater**; abstract expressionist painter; one-time winner of the following performance-based contests: the O. Henry Pun-Off World Championships, regional Air Guitar Championship, and Air Sex World Championship.

Simone most misses the pervasiveness of great food in New Orleans, and reminisces about his hometown specifically "during crawfish season, where you could count on even a run-down hardware store to somehow make the perfect boil." Sadly, some great restaurants come and go too quickly in Austin, as was the case with Gene's New Orleans-Style Po' Boys And Deli.

"I desperately miss Gene's, which, hands down, had the best po' boys in town," Simone said. "There's something about this damn Texas air that makes cooking good French bread seemingly impossible, but Gene's had the magic touch."

However, there's at least one more spot in Austin that conjures Simone's fond memories of the Crescent City.

"I can always always count on **Quality Seafood Market** (5621 Airport Blvd., 512-454-5827) to make me feel like I'm home," he said. "The crawfish etouffee is readily available and delicious, the hush puppies are good boys, and you know their specials are fresh as can be. The decor is campy and over the top, and quite a welcome change from the overly polished and planned restaurants I'm told I should like."

The expat: Colleen Bell

Previously lived in: Madison, Wisconsin

Background: Known to roller derby fans as "Crackerjack," pivot/blocker for the **Hotrod Honeyes**, 2010 **Texas Rollergirl** champions.

Coming from a large farming state, Bells has an understandable longing for her hometown's huge farmer's market that can take up to four blocks and where "everything is from less than an hour away." Bell also has a preternatural taste for cheese, ingrained within all Wisconsinites.

"When I need a Sconnie fix, I need fried cheese curds," she said. "I like them with ranch dressing and a PBR. Yes—I eat like a derby girl. Work out 10 hours a week and you get to eat whatever you want."

Luckily, the **Black Sheep Lodge** (2108 South Lamar Blvd., 512-707-2744) curbs that cheese curd craving.

"I go to the Black Sheep because the curds are delicious, the PBR is cheap, their service is rock solid, the bartenders are good looking, and it's a cute little spot."

The expat: Carla Estevez

Previously lived in: Mexico

Background: Manager, **Birds Barbershop**, Burnet location (6800 Burnet Rd., 512-454-1200); lived in Mexico for a year-and-a-half after high school, and still visits the country every summer.

Estevez pines for days wandering outdoor Mexican markets to find fresh foods from pozole (classic Mexican stew) to tortas (a Mexican sandwich). Austin doesn't have as many markets full of Mexican food, but Estevez visits Taqueria Arandas (multiple locations) to find good and cheap tacos to serve as reminders of her father's homeland. But "just be ready to use a little Spanish when you walk into that spot." She also recommends the relatively new East Austin spot, Takoba (1411 E. 7th St., 512-628-4466), for its impressively authentic tortas and the restaurant's

homemade Micheladas. You might need a siesta to sleep off all that food, though.

The expat: **Matthew Sturges**

Previously lived in: A whole bunch of places

Background: Writer; comics credits include the acclaimed Vertigo series ***House Of Mystery***, Eisner Award-nominated ***Jack Of Fables***, and DC's ***JSA All-Stars***. He is also the author of fantasy novel *Midwinter* and its sequel, *The Office Of Shadow*.

Sturges moved around a lot while growing up, so it's difficult for him to feel nostalgic for the cuisine of any of his former hometowns.

"I wanted to say something like how the crab cakes at **Chez Zee** (5406 Balcones Drive, 512-454-2666) remind me of a place we used to go to in Annapolis, or about how some burrito someplace reminds me of Taqueria Cancun in the Mission in San Francisco—but the truth is they really don't."

That's not an indictment of food in Austin, but praise rather for what it's like to move here from somewhere else.

"I honestly can't think of a dish that I eat here in Austin that reminds me of home, because Austin feels more like home to me than anyplace else."

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