



OregonLive.com
Everything Oregon

Portland's sweetest comfort food

Published: Friday, October 03, 2008, 9:54 AM Updated: Friday, October 03, 2008, 2:43 PM



The OregonianNostrana's butterscotch budino pudding with salted caramel sauce.

When the going gets tough, the tough go for puddings, panna cottas, pot de cremes and any other desserts that squish and jiggle in deeply satisfying, undemanding ways. This is comfort food supreme, and you'll find them on many menus all over the city -- simple, soft, deliriously satisfying, seductively creamy, melt-in-your-mouth nursery dreams. We recently scoured Portland to find the best -- some classics and new twistlers that rise like outrageous cream to the top of the heap. Spoon in!



The OregonianNostrana owner-chef Cathy Whims enjoying her work.

Butterscotch Budino With Caramel Sauce at Nostrana: This seemingly simple pudding, adapted from Nancy Silverton's version at Los Angeles hot spot Pizzeria Mozza, actually involves layers of sweet abundance. It begins with a brown sugar-based caramel, spiked with rum and enriched with butter, then transformed into butterscotch; layer two is more butterscotch, this time a caramel-icious sauce, enhanced with enchanting vanilla bean and rich cream; and the top receives a flaky flurry of Portuguese sea salt and whipped mascarpone. Delight in its decadence. (**Nostrana**, 1401 S.E. Morrison St., 503-234-2427; \$7)

--Michael Zusman

Chocolate Mousse at Navarre: Rich but lighter than a cloud. Soft but thick and more intense than Christian Bale. Which is to say: This chocolate mousse is miles from the cliché that once helped Julie Child overthrow Chef Boyardee. Rooted in the Rhone Valley, it has none of the cream or egg yolks that obscure the chocolate in more familiar versions. Just chunks of potent, unsweetened Schokinag chocolate melted with hot coffee, then whipped into a sensuous lather with farm-fresh egg whites and minimal sugar. It's all in the wrist -- and superior ingredients. (**Navarre**, 10 N.E. 28th Ave., 503-232-3555, \$5)

--Karen Brooks



The OregonianCaffè Mingo

Panna cotta at Caffè Mingo: This silky refreshing dessert that hails from Piedmont is the perfect finisher after a filling Italian meal. If you're tired of the ubiquitous creme brulee, then panna cotta (literally "cooked cream") will

delight you. There are more quivery versions in town, and you can find ones made with honey, ginger, chocolate, maple and lemon, but Mingo's is as good as they come. Slightly dense (the superb cream is thick), it comes with the perfect touch -- seasonal fruit, like late summer's juicy blackberries. (**Caffe Mingo**, 807 N.W. 21st Ave., 503-226-4646; \$7)

--Roger Porter



The Oregonian Banana pudding at Belly Timber.

Banana Pudding at Belly Timber: It takes moxie to admit your signature dessert begins from a box, but the vanilla pudding powder on which this Southern dessert is based beats any other beginning chef David Siegel could muster in multiple experimentations. To the humble starter, Siegel adds sweetened condensed milk, a slew of banana slices, a crush of vanilla wafers and then, his own twist, a crown of thick, ultra-crispy candied applewood-smoked bacon. Sweet, simple, honest -- and awesome. (**Belly Timber**, 3257 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd., 503-235-3277; \$6)

--Michael Zusman

Honey Panna Cotta at Firehouse: An old Portland firehouse, all about bricks and flames, doesn't seem the obvious spot for something as airy and delicate as a panna cotta, a floating balance of silk and sweetness. But pastry chef Gretchen Glatte nails it and sets off its hypnotic smoothness with the bite of fresh fruit and the crunch of one of her biscotti. These days at Firehouse, nobody asks, "Where's the fire?" But people do ask for the panna cotta. (**Firehouse**, 711 N.E. Dekum St., 503-954-1702; \$6)

--David Sarasohn

Pot De Creme at 23Hoyt: Whatever the season, an impressive custard stars on the dessert menu at this sophisticated Mediterranean restaurant. Flavors are ever-changing, with an ambrosial butterscotch version giving way to a Turkish coffee interpretation. But the real keeper may be the bittersweet chocolate, sometimes paired with

chantilly creme and a chocolate cookie just crying to scoop up the rich stuff. Watch for it. (**23 Hoyt**, 529 N.W. 23rd Ave., 503-445-7400; \$8)

--Grant Butler

A Paddle of Puddings at 50 Plates: The new pan-American place in the Pearl -- focusing on regional signature dishes from all over the United States -- has the pudding-for-dessert idea all figured out. Instead of one larger bowl, they dish up four sample-size servings, line them up on a paddle and let diners conduct their own mini-tasting right at the table. Proponents of the creamy and vanilla-y "Banilla" pudding -- their spelling -- can square off with chocoholics and argue which is best. In truth, both are nicely done, but the best is the nutty-sweet butterscotch, with the too-chunky rice finishing fourth on my scorecard. However you rank them, this is a fun and flavorful light dessert for two. (**50 Plates**, 333 N.W. 13th Ave., 503-228-5050, \$7.50)

--Michael C. Zusman

© 2010 OregonLive.com. All rights reserved.