

CUISINE

RED HOTS

Artisanal hot dogs give better bite.

THE HOT DOG IS AN AMERICAN STAPLE, BUT THE PROBLEM IS THAT NEARLY EVERY FRANKFURTER CONTAINS mystery ingredients, and that's just unacceptable in today's food-conscious world. Happily, some of today's top chefs—just as they've done with meatloaf, grilled cheese, and pizza—have given hot dogs a touch of class. A new crop of high-end dogs, from gourmet twists on the norm to healthy artisanal franks free of nitrates and byproducts, has stepped into the spotlight, delighting gourmards and health nuts alike. Below, a coast-to-coast selection of some of the more prestigious foot-longs. —ADAM BAER



CHEZ PASCAL PROVIDENCE, R.I.

Matthew Gennuso, who has been selling his dogs for four years and can clear out 200 of them in three hours, offers garlicky 10-inch beef dogs with kraut braised in white wine and duck fat. "We boil the hot dogs as opposed to grilling them," he says. "I wanted ones that had the texture of natural casing and the feel of the old-school cart dogs, but I didn't want actually natural casings because that could get rubbery in boiled water. So far, no complaints." (www.chez-pascal.com)

LET'S BE FRANK SAN FRANCISCO

Sue Moore of San Francisco's two-year-old Let's Be Frank offers up the health-conscious wiener—but one that doesn't taste like spa food. Her \$5 organic, preservative-free beef variety (above left) is sold on organic buns from the city's hot dog carts, as well as at Willie's Dawgs in Brooklyn, N.Y. "Making a good dog is really hard, especially if you're not using fillers," says Moore, who is also a consultant for the famed Berkeley, Calif., eatery Chez Panisse. (www.letsbefrankdogs.com)

PALENA CAFÉ WASHINGTON, D.C.

In the nation's capital, chef Frank Ruta sells a \$10 spicy, grilled beef-and-pork-liver dog with liverwurst-like hints in a hog casing that he actually devised two years ago while making mortadella. "We do a lot of different charcuterie things—cooked and cured," he says. "I had some leftover emulsified meat mixture and piped it in casings, poached 'em and grilled 'em. It was just for friends. But now we can't make enough of them. I call it my gourmet rottweiler." (www.palenarestaurant.com)

WHIST SANTA MONICA, CALIF.

Last summer, chef Warren Schwartz debuted his \$16 Berkshire-pork dog (above middle) laced with fresh truffles—an earthy sausage-like creation—on a pretzel roll, and his L.A. customers raved. "People are amazed that I like junk food sometimes," he says. "But this twist on the hot dog is really savory and gourmet with lots of flavor, especially from the black truffles, which provide depth. And just in case this isn't junky enough, we serve the dogs with warm fennel potato salad." (www.viceroyssantamonica.com)

BOA STEAKHOUSE LAS VEGAS, NEV.

In true Vegas style, Boa Steakhouse in Caesar's Palace has embraced high-low decadence with their hot dog. Chef Paul Villa dips franks made of wagyu beef (the American version of the famed, tender Kobe), into a batter of whole wheat flour, cornmeal, honey, and buttermilk for a high-end corndog (above right). "There are no trans fats and it's completely uncured," he says. "It's not the same spicy flavor profile as a Hebrew National, but we wanted to do something natural and fun." (www.boasteak.com)

OTTO'S SAUSAGE KITCHEN PORTLAND, ORE.

This classic dog purveyor—the grandson of the original owner now runs the place—has kept its recipe intact since 1927. Their moist \$1.75 franks are created from local pork shoulder and beef hindquarter with a natural sheep casing for that classic snap. "We don't overpower anything with seasoning, we don't use garbage cuts, and we keep the fat content as low as we can," says Otto's co-owner Grethen Eichtopf. "We want you to taste the meat." (www.ottosausagekitchen.com)