

Stephens, 504-366-7665. The best Vietnamese kitchen in town can feed you different concoctions involving catfish all afternoon long without frying even a little of it. The fish soup is particularly good.

4. **Crabby's Seafood Shack:** *Madisonville, 305 Covington, 985-845-2348.* This is Keith Young's first foray outside a menu dominated by beef and different from his steakhouse in every way except the quality of his food. This very casual place has beautiful small catfish fillets, fried so well that my wife—a major catfish fan—said, "Anybody who misses Bozo's can come here!" Out back of Spahr's and the bayou in which catfish and alligators play.

5. **Bistro Orleans:** *Metairie, 3216 W. Esplanade Ave., 504-838-9935.* This is one of the first restaurants to start buying wild-caught Des Allemands catfish when it became easily available a couple of years ago. When that happened, Bistro Orleans had already established itself as a fish-frying specialist. They even revived the old-style fried seafood boats, with catfish as one of the choices of seafood filling the whole loaf of hollowed-out, toasted bread.

6. **Spahr's:** *Des Allemands, 3682 US 90. 985-758-1602.* Driving away from New Orleans on US 90, you cross Bayou Des Allemands, which is to catfish what Empire is to oysters. Drive a few more miles, and you'll see what looks like a gas station on the left. In fact, it once was a gas station, and the long-dead pumps are still there. This is Spahr's, the most famous name in catfish restaurants in that rich catfish zone.

7. **Cafe Minh:** *Mid-City, 4139 Canal St., 504-482-6266.* Here is to be found a rare non-fried rendition of catfish that rivals the cornmeal-crusted version. It's Vietnamese barbecue catfish, vegetables, jasmine rice. Spicy and possessed of a wonderful fish flavor.

8. **Palace Café:** *French Quarter, 605 Canal St., 504-523-1661.* Catfish with pecans has been a signature dish at the Palace Cafe since it opened on Canal Street over 20 years ago. Two things about it separate it from standard fried catfish. First, of course, are the pecans, crushed into near-crumbs and encrusting the entire fish fillet. But just as important is the sauce, a medium-dark brown Creole meuniere, rich with butter, lemon and a little reduced stock.

9. **New Orleans Food & Spirits:** *Covington, 208 Lee Lane, 985-875-0432. Harvey, 2330 Lapalco Blvd., 504-362-0800. West End/Bucktown, 210 Hammond Hwy., 504-828-2220.* This three-restaurant, local chain has always excelled in their frying of seafood. Catfish is farm-raised, resulting in bigger fish than optimal. Nevertheless, we get some very nice fish here, with a fine cornmeal-pecan crust. They also are better at grilling and blackening catfish than most places.

10. **K Gee's Oyster Bar:** *Mandeville, 2534 Florida, 985-626-0530.* K Gee's has a family connection with the extinct Bozo's. The place buys wild-caught catfish exclusively and fries it very well. Good oysters, too.

11. **Cafe Reconcile:** *Warehouse District/Center City, 1631 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd., 504-568-1157.* Classic, basic cornmeal-coated fried catfish cooked and served by young people on their way up the culinary ladder.

12. **Annunciation:** *Warehouse District/Center City, 1016 Annunciation, 504-568-0245.* We don't think of an upscale gourmet bistro as the place to



go for fried catfish. Chef Steve Manning thought he'd give it a try when he arranged to bring in wild-caught Des Allemands catfish to fry. Not on all the time, but often enough. W



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