Eating

Grandma pizza, Roman ribs, and tangy crispy beef.

Pizza
LOARING PLACE
21 W. 8th St., nr. Fifth Ave.
212-388-1831

▶ We know. An entire Loring Place grandma pizza served in a mini sheet pan is about the size of a Di Fara Sicilian slice. And it costs $17. Yet Dan Kluger’s foray into the world of the square has resulted in something unique and wonderful. Yes, it’s topped with the customary tomatoes, fresh mozz, garlic, basil, dried chiles, and a sprinkle of Parmesan. But it’s the crust, made from a blend of house-milled flours including heirloom emmer and whole wheat, that sets the thing apart from your local slice joint. The edges are crisp, the crumb is springy, and most impressive of all, the flavor is unusually pronounced—toasty, tangy, wheaty, fresh. It’s a grandma pie that reminds you that pizza is first and foremost about the bread.

Ribs
VINI E FRITTI
30 E. 30th St., nr. Madison Ave.; no phone

▶ Of all the snacks you expect to find in a Roman wine bar (or Danny Meyer’s fantasy of one), pork ribs do not spring to mind. But what distinguishes these baby back ribs from the ones at Meyer’s nearby BBQ joint, Blue Smoke, is seasoning as much as setting. “Very few things are more Roman than porchetta,” says chef Joe Tarasco, who applies a rub of fennel fronds, rosemary, and garlic. Then, he bypasses the southern smoker ritual for an overnight sous-vide followed by a quick deep-fry. After a toss in a sticky mix of Calabrian chiles, honey, vinegar, and the Italian fish sauce colatura, they emerge tender with just enough bite, sweet and sour, and as elegant a plate of finger food as you’ll encounter in the Eternal City or a Nomad hotel.

Burger
CAFÉ ALTO PARADISO
AND FLORA BAR
234 Spring St., at Sixth Ave., 212-923-0638
346 Madison Ave., at 76th St., 212-559-1893

▶ No chef of Ignacio Mattos’s caliper wants to be known for his burger, but judging by his first professional attempt, served in slightly different guises at Flora Bar and Café Alto Paradiso, that could be his fate. Though they share basic DNA (Wagyu blend, fish-sauce-and-chile lacquer, raw onion, compressible milk bun), the fully accessorized burgers vary in cheese and condiment (Gorgonzola and radicchio mostarda downtown, Taleggio cream and pepper marmalade uptown) and are as painstakingly conceived as anything in his repertoire. Alto’s fatty fries have the edge, but Flora Bar’s kitchen hides house-made potato chips under the bun for extra crunch. And don’t overlook the uptown plate’s palate-cleansing ramp-vinegar-dressed lettuce wedge. Anywhere else it would be a throwaway; here, says detail-oriented Mattos, “it might be the best part.”

Chicken Wings
THE LOBSTER CLUB
56 E. 53rd St., nr. Park Ave.
312-373-9001

▶ How do you take a tired, populist recipe and update it with a sense of style and panache without losing the qualities that make it popular in the first place? For Tasuku Murakami, who runs the kitchen at the Major Food Group’s competent new midtown fusion joint, the answer is to take seven kinds of curry powders and spices, dust them over a batch of chicken wings, and sizzle the results to a perfect crisp. But the key, we could respectfully argue, is the dipping sauce, which has a lighter, more confectionary quality than what you get with Buffalo wings, thanks to Kewpie mayo with a dash of mirin.

Ramen
BAR MUGA
126 W. Houston St., at Sullivan St.
929-389-5653

▶ New York’s ramen scene has diversified since the heady tonkotsu era, but there still aren’t a ton of vegetarian options. With few exceptions, meatless broths are afterthoughts. That isn’t the case at this downtown cocktail bar, where the sole bowl contains nary a drop of pork juice. The rich soup gets its snow-white color from soy milk, atop which floats a bramblebush of delicately fried vegetables. They resemble veggie chips, only they’re taster, crunchier, snappier, and cut into strands that run parallel to (and are a great companion for) the chewy noodles. Who needs pork fat?

Taco
ATLA
371 Lafayette St., at Great Jones St.
no phone

▶ Brussels sprouts, fish sauce, and peanut butter: These ingredients are not the contents of a Chopped mystery box but the makings of a fantastic new taco recently launched at Enrique Olvera’s Atla. Why took the Mexican super-chef so long to put a taco on one of his New York restaurant menus, we don’t know, but it was worth the wait. Cilantro leaves get pressed into the fresh tortilla, which makes an earthy, supple foundation for a double dose of sprouts (deep-fried and dressed in caramelized fish sauce; shaved raw and mingled with cilantro, avocado, and serrano chiles). There are pops of texture in the form of toasted sesame seeds and crushed peanuts. The clincher, though, is the swipe of Aleppo-pepper-peanut-butter salsa that, as it turns out, goes with fish-sauced Brussels sprouts the way that bacon goes with eggs.
The Lobster Club’s chicken wing, Vini o Pritii’s rib, Bar Matsu’s ramen, Loving Place’s pizza, and Café Altria Paradiso’s burger.