

ARTS & BOOKS

SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 2009 • LATIMES.COM/CALENDAR

DAILY DISH

Proof that
L.A. is
what it eats

Every once in a while, a guidebook comes along that is so hyper-local it instantly claims a place in die-hard Angelenos' hearts. "L.A. Bizarro," the 1997 guidebook to all things obscure, absurd and perverse in L.A., is one such book, as is "Counter Intelligence," Jonathan Gold's indispensable guide to "Where to Eat in the Real Los Angeles." Now, a new book appears poised to grab the coveted local-love mantle: "Eat: Los Angeles."

What distinguishes it from a host of other L.A. restaurant guides, including Zagat and Gayot, is its emphasis on mom-and-pop restaurants, specialty stores, hole-in-the-wall coffee shops, caterers, street food and juice bars. There's also its wealth of write-ups on L.A.'s most ubiquitous dining option, the taco truck.



"It's a food book, not just a restaurant book," says editor Colleen Dunn Bates, whose Prospect Park Books published it. "What people really want to know about is not the chichi, hot new restaurant, but the bakery and cheese shop and taco truck. No one had really done that before."

Bates' instinct paid off. The book hit the shelves Dec. 1, and by the end of that month it was the No. 2 bestseller at Vroman's Bookstore in Pasadena. "We beat Barack Obama, so I was pretty happy about that," she says.

To put it together, Bates, a sixth-generation Angeleno, assembled six ace L.A. food writers: Jenn Garbee and Linda Burum (both regular contributors to The Times' Food section); Pat Saperstein of the Eating L.A. blog; Jean T. Barrett; Amelia Saltsman; and Andy "Bandini" O'Neill, whose "Great Taco Hunt" blog drew interest from all corners of the city and beyond.

On top of its listings, the book's local flavor is enhanced through 10 profiles of "Good Food Neighborhoods." The profiles act as mini-tours through areas possessing unique or remarkable scenes, including Silver Lake, Culver City, Boyle Heights and Artesia. There is also a feature that designates certain spots as "Essentially L.A.," meaning that a place represents Los Angeles boiled down to its essence. Think the Pacific Dining Car, Soot Bull Jeep, Providence and El Taurino.

The book — which costs \$19.95 and has an interactive companion website, eat-la.com — is divided into nine chapters, marked by easy-to-use recessed page tabs. The chapters are "Restaurants," "Breakfast + Lunch," "Coffee, Tea + Juices," "Food That's Fast," "Gourmet to Go," "Bakeries + Sweets," "Wine + Spirits," "Shops" and "Services + Events." You'll find an incredible variety in those pages, but you won't find any chains.

"That's been my complaint about Zagat in recent years," Bates says. "It's been full of Cheesecake Factories and Olive Gardens. Nobody needs to know about that; they already know about that."

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For the scoop on food in L.A., visit the Daily Dish blog.