

RIOJA (last year 18)

As Denver's only James Beard Award-winning chef, great expectations follow Jennifer Jasinski, Rioja's executive chef and co-owner. The stakes are especially high in 2014, as Denver's dining scene continues to grow (40 restaurants opened in July alone) and Jasinski's time

is divided between Rioja, the newly opened Stoic & Genuine (18 on this list), Bistro Vendôme, and Euclid Hall. Updates to Rioja's dining room's decor and an on-point waitstaff buttress a menu that's the strongest it's been in years. Although some ingredients stray from the Mediterranean focus, we welcome the modern additions. Rioja is a Denver staple, and with its current direction, we imagine it'll stay that way for years to come. 1431 LARIMER ST., 303-820-2282, RIOJADENVER.COM



STOIC + GENUINE (new to the list)

If Stoic & Genuine had opened earlier than July 9 (and had a bit more time to work out understandable service snafus), it likely would have climbed higher on this list. The slender, maritime-themed space features dune fencing and antiqued mirrors, and the vibe inside the restaurant is nothing short of exhilarating. A portion of that energy comes from being part of the reimagined Union Station, but the rest comes squarely from the kitchen, where executive chef Jennifer Jasinski and chef de cuisine Jorel Pierce work their magic. Order the ever-changing crudos, like the scallop with peaches and basil consommé, the impeccable oysters, the fried clams, or the beet-cured salmon sandwich. Or order it all. Stoic & Genuine is the latest restaurant to prove to skeptics around the country that seafood in landlocked Denver can be—and is—both pristine and innovative. 1701 WYNKOOP ST., 303-640-3474, STOICANDGENUINE.COM

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