

IN SEASON

# Falling for Max's Wine Dive

An autumn dining experience—minus the cool temperatures

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A few days now into November, we are all taking in the beauty that is autumn: the light jackets and tall boots we don while walking in cooler temperatures with a backdrop of orange leaves falling and then littering our driveways—a scene we, as Houstonians, have only seen on a screen depicting places with a more reliable seasonal structure. But even if we don't have a traditional fall experience, we can at least eat like we do.

Enter **Max's Wine Dive** and its “gourmet comfort food”—the restaurant's trademark cuisine since opening in 2006. The restaurant, which has now expanded into eight additional locations as far away as Atlanta and Denver, rolled out a few new fall menu items this week.

While the original location on Washington Ave. tempted me with its own custom fall menu, I elected to try executive chef Michael Pellegrino's inaugural fall menu at the newer Montrose location on Fairview St. that

## Max's Wine Dive

214 Fairview St., No. 2

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[maxswinedive.com](http://maxswinedive.com)

opened this past January. The addendum to the regular dinner menu—which still lists the fried chicken Max's first became famous for—is filled with heavy vegetables and succulent meats for the cold (well, cooler) days ahead. Pellegrino, who hopped over to the Fairview location from the Washington one, dares patrons to order off the fall menu—as tempting as the fried chicken and Max 'n Cheese may be. The eccentric dishes, especially when paired with the right vino, will have you ready for winter hibernation.

With the Rolling Stones's encouragement—a [limited edition painting](#) hangs notably near the back of the restaurant—my friend and I bypassed the Before Dinner category, with brunch classic *foie gras* French toast and tempting duck confit fried rice. We elected instead to split two of the entrées, starting with the spanakopita calzone.



The fall menu's spanakopita calzone with tzatziki sauce.

The spinach and feta pastry, a Greek snack food that's typically flaky and greasy, was prepared Italian-style in a crispy crust with tzatziki sauce on the side. In keeping with the casual-meets-fine-dining theme of Max's, we were encouraged to pair the finger-friendly food with Moet & Chandon Imperial champagne. Reminiscent of food truck cuisine, the calzone was easy to share though it does present a bit of a slicing challenge, but I promise you'll fight over the final morsels of the \$19 dish. If you're not a tzatziki fan—I'm told these people do exist—the entrée doesn't even need it to be enjoyed.

Deciding on a second final entrée was a difficult task. I leaned at first toward the barbecue chicken, but was warned it was super smoky—a dish a true Texan would enjoy, which I am—yet I'm not sure I'm up for the challenge—overly smoky meats are not my favorite. My eyes wandered toward the massive wild boar burrito, mainly out of curiosity, since eight ounces of boar in a burrito sounded just crazy enough to work.

In the end, I settled on a comfort food classic: meatloaf with a kick—curry.



Those aren't sardines in the goat cheese mashed potatoes, I promise. They are juicy rainbow carrots best dipped in the fried egg yolk on this curry braised meatloaf.

I tried really hard to contain my excitement for the goat cheese mashed potatoes and roasted rainbow carrots that came on the side. I was told they were delicious when dipped in the fried egg yolk that also lined the plate, but it was the juicy curry meatloaf that stole the show. It wasn't too spicy, but definitely did not pair well with the recommended flavorful Sangiovese wine I was sipping.

While I didn't get a chance to try the bone marrow and pistachio bacon brittle—something that sounds just crazy enough to work—or the ooey, gooey broccoli casserole, the fall menu seems to be an overall success, as does the rest of the restaurant. Max's has a familiar, friendly feel encouraged by a jukebox and cozy booth seating that still seems like fine dining, especially when you consider the valet-only parking situation and the precise plating and presentation of each dish. It's just alluring enough to make me venture back before the fall menu transitions to winter.

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