



Midnight Snack

When it comes to dining after dark, Austin foodies are tuned in.

By Jessica Dupuy

Photography by Frank Curry

Whether you're a longtime resident or fairly new to town, it's no secret that the Live Music Capital of the World supports a vibrant music, club, and performing arts scene. At the end of a long night on the town, it's not unusual to find yourself with that desperate craving for a midnight snack—or more. And sometimes hitting a fast-food drive-thru just won't do, especially if you want to continue an authentically Austin experience. Depending on whether you're on the crowded blocks along East Sixth Street or just stepping out of a wild show at Antone's or La Zona Rosa, finding the late-night dining spot to quell your hunger may seem challenging. We've assembled a guide to some of Austin's top late-night haunts that includes everything from fine-dining establishments and cozy all-night diners to some stripped-down, greasy holes-in-the-wall, all of which are distinctly Austin and sure to hit the spot.

Mulberry

Sun-Thu 5pm-1am, Fri-Sat 4pm-2am

360 Nueces, (512) 320 0297

The ever-growing 2nd Street District welcomed this sleek, intimate (as in small) wine bar in late 2008. The crowd is young and chic, the bar staff friendly and well versed in wine, and the food well executed and delicious. Chef Zack Northcutt, formerly of Cibo, has designed a new-American-style menu with everything from a classic cheese plate to a rich hamburger with

pancetta, Gruyere, and a fried egg. "We love to sit at the bar and try different food each time," says Kristin Thumlert of Rsd Advertising Design. The atmosphere makes this place. It's small, but they know how to make the space work."

With its proximity to the Austin Music Hall, La Zona Rosa, and the West Sixth Street corridor, it should be no surprise that this little hot spot draws quite a crowd after 10 pm, with the kitchen churning out plates until 2 am on weekends.

Parkside

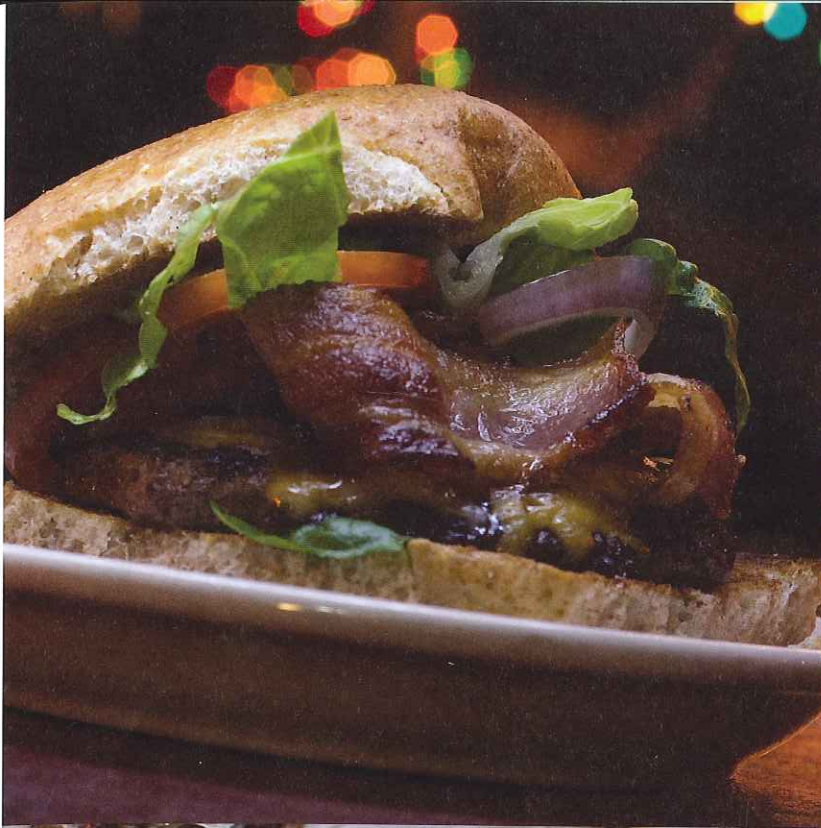
Daily 5pm-12:30am

301 E. Sixth, (512) 474 9898

Parkside is one of the most refreshing dining establishments to hit Sixth Street in years. Here, chef/owner Shawn Cirkiel excels at bringing a New York-style bistro to the raucous bar scene, giving Austin chefs a place to go after their own restaurants have closed for the night. "Parkside is great because it is really the only place serving decent food late. You can get dozens of top-notch oysters, marrow bones, or a burger with a fried egg on it," says Larry McGuire, chef/owner of Lambert's and La Condesa. "I love the large windows that allow you to look out on the mayhem that is dirty Sixth Street."

The minimalist, stripped-down decor provides a nice clean break from the clutter of Sixth Street bars, and

FACING PAGE PEI mussels steamed in a light white wine-butter sauce at The Belmont make for a light snack to tide you over for a late night.



steak *frites* (steak and French fries) followed by an order of piping-hot donut holes in a paper bag have never been so rewarding as after a night on the town.

The Belmont

**Mon-Wed 11:30am-12midnight, Thu-Fri 11:30am-2am,
Sat 5pm-2am, Sun 5pm-10pm
305 W. Sixth, (512) 457 0300**

Walking into this swanky, low-lit bar, you'd half expect to see Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and the rest of the Rat Pack settled into one of the oversized, nicely cushioned booths and sipping Manhattans. On the weekends, the Belmont serves a full menu of excellent appetizers and filling entrées until midnight and attracts a wide number of late-scene connoisseurs who like to end their evenings here, especially if there's a good DJ in town. "I love the old-school atmosphere and the feeling that you can pull up a seat at the bar and the bartender is happy to see you," says Nick Moulinet, a business development manager for Bury and Partners. Despite the Belmont's 1950s interior style, the terrace and courtyard radiate a decidedly California club appeal, with large palms and a chic, inviting patio design. Here you can savor a pressed Cuban sandwich and sip a classic cocktail while kicking back in style.

Spider House Cafe

**Daily 7am-2am
2908 Fruth, (512) 480 9562**

Though its proximity to the university lends itself to students looking to caffeinate for an all-nighter, Spider House is also a popular haunt for late-night diners wanting a hip place to relax, eat, and keep the party going. "Spider House is one of my faves because it's almost all vegetarian," says music photographer Brian Birzer. "The Frito pie burrito is the perfect snack when you've had a long night out." This popular place is easily spotted from its myriad strands of lights, and it boasts possibly the most eclectic collection of vintage and retro chairs, couches, and outdoor furniture in the city. You'll find most of the seats full late into the night as guests kick back with tasty black bean quesadillas, fresh hummus and pita chips, or simply a caffeine-loaded double latte.

FACING PAGE Clockwise from left: Sometimes a good old fashioned burger is all you need, so try the bacon-cheeseburger from the Spider House; The crunchy fish tacos from The Belmont are a flavorful, satisfying treat; The whopping mushroom and cheese burger from Casino El Camino is a local favorite; Parkside night owls love sampling from the raw bar with fresh oysters and raw sashimi style small plates such as snapper with chili oil and lime.

Magnolia Cafe

Daily 24 hours

**1920 S. Congress, (512) 445 0000
2304 Lake Austin Blvd., (512) 478 8645**

Ask anyone in Austin where to go for an authentic Austin late-night dining experience, and Magnolia Cafe is one of the two places that will be suggested (Kerbey Lane being the other). A longtime local darling, Magnolia has two locations, both close to downtown and each with a decidedly relaxed, hippie-esque atmosphere and a varied menu chock-full of particular favorites that appeal to each late-night regular. "I like that you can go in there anytime and get just about anything you're craving," says Susan Hewlitt, an Austin-based event planner. "I love the Mag Mud dip—this vegetarian queso with black beans and avocado. It's a rich and gooey delicious mess." Magnolia Cafe is what longtime Austinites identify as a little piece of home, a part of this town that was here long before the high-rise apartments and trendy 2nd Street-type districts arrived.

Thai Passion (Downtown)

**Mon-Fri 11am-3am
620 Congress Ave., (512) 472 1244**

For those who crave a more Asian spin on their midnight snack, Thai Passion and its Thai version of comfort food may be just the thing. Located at the epicenter of Austin's downtown action, the restaurant has a quiet, comfortable, low-lit ambience. "Thai Passion has the perfect environment for a two am nosh-fest," says Chantal Outon, an Austin-based freelance writer. "The pad thai is delicious, but I also really like the spicy duck curry and the *koong pla* (grilled shrimp with Thai pepper, lime, and lemongrass)."

The friendly, courteous staff add to the appeal to make this a great escape after an evening of blaring rock music or thumping club beats.

Kerbey Lane Cafe

**Daily 24 hours
3704 Kerbey Lane, (512) 451 1436; 2700 S. Lamar,
(512) 445 4451; 13435 Hwy. 183 N., Ste. 415, (512) 258 7757;
2606 Guadalupe, (512) 477 5717**

If you're one of the many who went to college in this town, it's likely that late-night study sessions at Kerbey Lane Cafe hold a special place in your heart. A longtime contender on the local scene, Kerbey Lane is a late-night refuge for local artists and business executives alike. "I come here all the time," says Luisa Mauro, of Marathon Real Estate. "I love the hummus. I love it so much I even eat the lettuce on the bottom." Indeed, Kerbey Lane is the ideal cozy spot for bottomless cups of coffee and the near-spiritual experience of savoring hot gingerbread pancakes drenched in butter and syrup.

Casino El Camino

Mon-Fri 4pm-2am, Sat-Sun noon-2am

517 E. Sixth, (512) 469 9330

Bands that play on or around Sixth Street love Casino El Camino for two reasons: its convenience to area clubs and its legendary burgers. After setting up the stage, most bands with later gigs like to linger in this dark and gothic bar to pass the time until they're due onstage. "I love hanging out here when I'm going to a show," says musician and recording producer Andy Sharp. "They have great burgers and they always play movies, so there is something to *do* before you head to a venue." This veritable hole-in-the-wall won't win points for a clean and crisp environment—after all, you do have to order your food at a counter stationed right next to the lavatories. But Casino El Camino scores big points on cheap eats with big flavor. The burgers are thick and juicy, and there are a number of versions to choose from, including the Pitts, with sautéed mushrooms, melted Provolone, caramelized onions, and zesty A-1 sauce. Top it off with a basket of Verde Chili Fries and a cold brew, and you're certain to catch a second wind.

The Best Wurst

Sixth Street Cart

2400 Wilson, (512) 912 9545

If you're strolling around Sixth Street and would prefer a quick bite rather than grabbing a seat at a late-night diner, the Best Wurst hot dog stand is what you're looking for. "The Best Wurst is killer," says

Austin musician Penny Jo Pullus. "I rarely go to Sixth Street anymore, but I will sometimes go out of my way after a show and double-park just so we can get a brat and some small potatoes." This bright little hot dog stand on Sixth delivers more than your average frank on a bun. Best Wurst serves up sizable all-beef sausages, bratwursts, and kielbasa-style wursts with everything from grilled onions and sauerkraut to spicy mustard and curry ketchup. You can usually find the best of Austin's wursts happily parked around Sixth and Brazos with a steady throng of patrons eagerly waiting in line.

Star Seeds Cafe

Daily 24 hours

3101 I-35 N., (512) 478 7107

Star Seeds Cafe has a personality all its own. With brightly colored walls painted with swirls in a galaxy-type theme and an open room with your typical booths and padded barstools, this 24-hour diner is where Austin Weird meets Alice's Diner. Among the many things to love about this place is the friendly staff, excellent music, easy parking, and seemingly endless list of menu items. "They have everything on their menu, so if your band can't agree on where to eat, this is where you want to end up," says Allison Scharf, lead singer for Austin band OHN. "I like going there after a show to unwind with a big veggie burger and fries." Located near campus on the east side of I-35, Star Seeds rates at the top of the list for its edgy and unique clientele and all-round excellent post-bar-hopping food, especially the large banana-filled pancakes, veggie tacos, and colossal breakfast tacos.

Though this is only a sampling of the many and varied places to satisfy your late-night cravings, a couple of others are also worthy of mention: the classic bars at the historic Driskill Hotel and the chic Four Seasons Hotel. Though both offer very different environments, they do serve a late bar menu and attract a certain elegant late-night crowd. But regardless of which locale tickles your fancy, what you'll discover is that there's something out there for the night owl in us all. ■