



DINING

**Alfresco,
All the Time**

Eight restaurant patios worth waiting for.

BY TORI WOODS

Eating outside always beats dining indoors. But dining alfresco in Cleveland — where we get 17 minutes of decent weather a year — is an unparalleled delight. Mother Karma repays us for the soul-numbing crumminess of winter with exquisite (however brief) summers, and fortunately, many of the city's best restaurants have thoughtfully provided patios on which to sample their fare. So when the hostess asks, tell her you'll wait a little longer for that table in the sun. And remember your Coppertone.

LOPEZ SOUTHWESTERN FOOD CLUB
A spot where the food is spicy and the tequila flows like water (if water made you dance on bars), this popular Cleveland Heights eatery is the place to be in the warm months. Gorgeous mosaic-style patio tables abound in bright reds, blues, and yellows, and strands of lights crisscross

in squares overhead. The whole patio is surrounded by a tall iron fence, with trees and the occasional cactus completing the charming decor of this cozy enclave. Try to grab a spot early on Tuesday, when the margaritas are half off. And don't forget to eat: There are plenty of summery flavors to whet your appetite — from citrus to spice, on everything from seafood to pork to veggie options. Try the lobster enchiladas for \$18.50. 2196 Lee Road, Cleveland Heights, 216-932-9000, www.lopezonlee.com.

THE HARP

It's one of the places to be on St. Paddy's Day. But the beautiful patio at the Harp makes any summer evening just as fun. The spacious patio is situated on the north side of the restaurant, offering a panorama of Lake Erie and the downtown skyline just to the east. The solid beer selection — heavy on the imports, of course — is joined by a diverse menu of traditional Irish fare and eclectic American eats, like lobster pierogi (\$16.25) and BBQ meatloaf (\$11.99). But if you're feeling authentic, order one of the Harp's famous boxties (\$11.29 - \$13.99) and a black & tan, and take in one of the best views around. 4408 Detroit Avenue, 216-939-0200, www.the-harp.com.

SOUTH SIDE

South Side has one of the most happening — and huge — patios around. It's an indoor/outdoor combo, and at 1,000 square feet, there's room for everyone. By night, you'll find the hip set swilling brews, but at happy hour, lunch, and dinner, the patio belongs to those who hunger for reasonably priced, solid American fare. A wide-ranging menu of seafood, steaks, pastas, and more — including the legendary chicken and waffles (\$8.50) — is served up here. For the ultimate in luxury, the Kobe burger (\$10.50) is out of this world. 2207 W. 11th Street, 216-937-2288, www.southsidecleveland.com.

SAUCY BISTRO

This chic Westlake eatery is all warm tones and elegance inside. But step out onto the patio, and you'll have every bit as much fun eating as the chef clearly has serving up your dinner. An outdoor bar makes refills dangerously easy, and the place gets hopping, especially on weekend nights, as diners turn into lingering barflies, tennis bracelets a-sparklin'. But to prep for all that vino, try any of the always-fresh seafood offerings, especially the cornmeal-crusted tilapia, served with lobster risotto, green beans, and lemon-thyme beurre blanc (\$20). 24481 Detroit Road, Westlake, 440-835-3559, www.saucybistro.com.

MOMOCHO

The modern Mexican fare served up at this Ohio City spot is hot — so hot, in fact, that a bit of breeze seems like just the thing to cool you down. A nice Mexican cerveza goes a long way too, and fortunately Mo-

mocho offers both. Filled with wrought-iron tables and chairs, and surrounded by twinkle lights and pots of flowers, the patio here is an urban oasis — calm and tranquil, the perfect place to inhale the best guacamole we've found (particularly the blue-crab and goat-cheese options). For the ultimate summer pairing — seafood and citrus — consider the tuna taquitos, filled with seared tuna and blood-orange-jalapeño *mermelada*. Also check out the \$40 per person Tequila Dinners held on Wednesdays, and be sure you make a reservation. 1835 Fulton Road, 216-694-2122, www.momocho.com.

JOHN Q'S STEAKHOUSE

For almost 30 years, John Q's has been a cornerstone of the Cleveland dining scene. Legendary for big cuts of meat that are even bigger on flavor, it's fitting that they have a large patio. Seating up to 65 people, there's room to spare — and that's good news for everyone who enjoys alfresco dining with perfect views of Public Square. Dotted with flower boxes, this pretty patio is perfect for lunch or dinner for a special event, or maybe before a game (the classic Cleveland sports decor will help get you pre-pumped). Try the 12-ounce black-pepper strip steak (\$32.95) or, if you're Joe Thomas, the 24-ounce porterhouse for \$42.95. 55 Public Square, 216-861-0900, www.johnqssteakhouse.com.

FIRE

The lushly treed and eminently walkable Shaker Square is one of our favorite 'hoods. And Fire, one of our favorite restaurants in town, boasts an intimate, airy patio that seats 35 and plays host to a casual, diverse, unpretentious, but sophisticated crowd. The fresh air is the perfect complement to the fresh-from-the-farm food served at Fire, including the strawberry, cucumber, and goat-cheese salad in a minted lime vinaigrette (\$9), and tandoor-roasted meats and seafood. 13220 Shaker Square, 216-921-3473, www.firefoodanddrink.com.

THREE BIRDS

The patio at Three Birds is like a secret garden. Set back from the bustle of busy Detroit Avenue, the outdoor space is wrapped in luscious foliage, with twinkling fairy lights creating a romantic air. The brick-paved patio is the perfect place for dates or outings with friends to linger over a finely crafted dessert or an after-dinner cocktail or three. The seasonal menu is always changing, but should include surefire starters like the citrus crab cakes with taragon aioli, shaved fennel salad, and blood oranges (\$12). We always seem to have room for dessert — it's hard not to, when items like honey goat-cheese cheesecake with candied almonds, honey-poached pear, fig compote, and Ohio honey drizzle (\$7) are there for the devouring. 18515 Detroit Road, Lakewood, 216-221-3500, www.3birdsrestaurant.com.

Hit the Deck

Because drinking inside is so last month.

BY TORI WOODS

The only thing that makes Clevelanders happier than quaffing a cold one is imbibing with a theme. St. Paddy's Day? We drink ourselves green at the pub. Game day? We're drinking in eye black at the game. And when spring finally gives way to summer, we're throwing on shorts and skirts, proudly baring winter-withered legs, and drinking outdoors. But not all patios were created equal. Here are some of Cleveland's best:

FAIRMOUNT MARTINI & WINE BAR

In the heart of the Heights' bustling Cedar-Fairmount 'hood, a calm and tranquil patio awaits. It's a courtyard-style patio, hidden away from traffic and noise, and brimming with fetching tables and chairs with cutout fleur-de-lis patterns. Metal signs with booze brands adorn its walls, and it's surrounded by trees, with an outdoor stone-topped bar. Just in case you forget what you're really there for: knock-your-socks-off-strong and tasty martinis, or a couple of generous pours of vino. The crowd ranges from Coventry hipsters to soccer moms; both enjoy the more than 40 microbrews as well as the 30 wines by the glass and 200 by the bottle. And, of course, the inventive and extensive list of 'tinis, from the raspberry-lemon ice, with Finlandia Wild Berry, limoncello, cran-raspberry, Chambord, and lemon, to the white-chocolate martini, with Smirnoff Vanilla, Godiva White, and Frangelico, topped with a cinnamon blend. 2448 Fairmount Boulevard, Cleveland Heights, 216-229-9463, www.thefairmount.net.

ROCKY RIVER BREWING COMPANY

The multiple levels of this wooden bar and patio prove that the suburbs can be just as rockin' as the city. Chat with the friendly patrons and barkeeps — and vie for a spot on the Quote of the Day chalkboard — all the while enjoying delicious microbrews. Our pick, for seasonality and deliciousness, is the Summer Solstice Weiss Bier. There are specials every Tuesday through Sunday, including our fave, Thursday's Big Ass Beer Night, where 23-ounce beers are yours for the chuggin'. 21290 Center Ridge Road, Rocky River, 440-895-2739.

TREEHOUSE

Sure, the faux tree inside the bar is jaunty. But step outside into the fresh air — where there are real trees! — and enjoy the huge patio at this Tremont hot spot. Abundant, whimsically painted tables are enclosed by decorative metal gates. There's frequent live music — everything from local acts to Irish bands. The expensive-eyeglasses-wearing, fixed-gear-bike-riding local

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hipsters happily mingle with kids in frat shirts, who got their passport stamped to venture into Tremont for the night. The draft selection is straightforward and solid, but to really appreciate Treehouse, order up a perfectly poured pint of Guinness. 820 College Avenue, 216-696-2505.

GARAGE BAR

The bar where the after-work-and-still-in-chinos crowd happily mingles with bikers (and maybe bumps into a Burning River Roller Girl or two) also boasts a fine patio, sporting the same racing decor as inside. There are also a bar and food stand in the outside space of this Ohio City joint, with metal tables and chairs surrounding a fire pit for when the chill creeps in. Thursdays are grunge nights, so bust out the flannel, and Fridays are '80s night, so plug in the crimping iron. Plenty of live music, including Rockabilly, comes through Garage, so be sure to check the bar's website for upcoming events. 1859 West 25th Street, 216-696-7772, www.thegaragebar.net.

MAJOR HOOPLES RIVERBED CAFÉ

Going to Hoopples guarantees a good time, regardless of the weather — witness the indoor bowling game and the regular Thursday shows by blues-guitar-hero Glenn Schwartz — but during

the warm months, it's especially hard to beat. A large patio, fenced with wood and trimmed with shining rope lights, plays host to a variety of regional and touring musical acts. There's also the best view of downtown you can find. They'll even project the game onto the nearby overpass. 1930 Columbus Road, 216-575-0483, www.hoopples.com.

BUCKEYE BEER ENGINE

This relative newcomer to the Lakewood bar scene has already become a crowd fave, and the small but mighty patio is always packed. And with the huge variety of suds from which to choose, it can be doubly nice to sit under the stars while you thoroughly peruse your options. The selection of drafts changes seasonally, so now's the time to sample the Abita Purple Haze, Bell's Oberon, or the Franziskaner. Or go for one of two cask-conditioned ales, or any of the incalculable number of bottled beauties. It's all the fun of a Lakewood bar, with a marked reduction in crappy pickup lines. 15315 Madison Avenue, Lakewood, 216-226-BEER, www.buckeyebeerengine.com.

VELVET DOG

High above the weaving crowds of West Sixth revelers lies a rooftop patio with killer

views, an ample bar, and kickin' crowds. It's a place to see and be seen on Friday and Saturday nights, when the ample space plays host to bachelor and bachelorette parties, together with the singles who love to disrupt them while getting their groove on. The bar is handy and the views are unique: The city's buildings look surprisingly different from this angle, and West Sixth is even more fun when seen from a bird's-eye view. Thursdays are ladies' nights, Fridays have a happy hour with a Sushi Rock buffet, and on Saturdays, there's a dance party, with Top-40/house mash-ups. 1280 West Sixth Street, 216-664-1116, www.velvetdogcleveland.com.

SHOOTERS ON THE WATER

Nothing says Cleveland summer like a night at Shooters. The vast expanse of patio real estate and an even vaster panoramic view have been thrilling boaters and bachelorettes for more than 20 years in this legendary Flats locale. Light shows, music, and more booze than you can shake a yacht at make for a memorable night. The crowd includes actual, honest-to-blog boating enthusiasts, entertainingly hammered gaggles of gals, and equally entertainingly hammered gaggles of ladies remembering when they were gals. Try not to fall in. 1148 Main Avenue, 216-861-6900, www.shootersflats.com.