

# Forbes



**Hunter Atkins**  
Contributor

*Offerings for the wannabe athlete, chef and entrepreneur inside US.*

[full bio](#) —

Opinions expressed by Forbes Contributors are their own.

FOLLOW



LIFESTYLE | 10/09/2014 @ 10:30AM | 192 views

## 10 Most Creative Jeans-Appropriate Restaurants in Boston (Part I)

[+ Comment Now](#) [+ Follow Comments](#)

Boston is revered for its colonial history, but a creative food scene has emerged in recent years. These restaurants are not slinging bowls of “chowdah,” but are relying on local purveyors to drum up devout followers for global cuisine, elevated comfort food and sumptuous cocktails that rival the fare served in any other American city.

The best part: you don’t have to gussy it up or spend a lot to enjoy these places. Throw on a pair of jeans, grab a friend and get ready to pig out.

Here are five of the 10 most creative jeans-appropriate spots in Boston (check out the other five in Part II at the same time tomorrow). This post includes a recipe for the best dish tasted on my trip, the Lamb Meatballs at Tavern Road.

**The Breakfast Club** (270 Western Ave., Allston)



*Pumpkin Pancakes at The Breakfast Club*

**Ideal Meal:** Harvest Hash with poached eggs; Pumpkin Pecan Pancakes; Pumpkin Milkshake.

Entering the Breakfast Club in the Allston neighborhood is like walking back in time. Well, it's like walking back into two times, actually. With its classic diner look—chrome trimmings, leather booths, countertop service across from the griddle—the place seems plucked out of the 1950s. But listen to [Bon Jovi](#) playing from the speakers, look around at the framed soundtracks (with the original disks still inside the vinyl folders) to *Rocky*, *Rain Main* and *The Karate Kid*, take some advice from a photograph of Alf, read through menu items titled “The Janitor,” “The Detention” and “The Dean’s Office,” and you understand why owner George Athanasopolus named his restaurant The Breakfast Club.

A child of the 1980s growing up in Watertown, Athanasopolus became a disk jockey and, in turn, became obsessed with the decade’s pop culture. He got the idea for the name after hearing “Don’t You” by Simple Minds on the radio, the iconic song that plays at the end of *The Breakfast Club*. Athanasopolus could not have known then how apt the name would become. The restaurant has a dedicated following for its perfectly executed breakfast and brunch staples.

Few dishes exceed \$10—a good deal considering the massive portion sizes—but in the case of the seasonal menu, an extra dollar or two gets you the most creative dishes. In the spring, Athanasopolus relies on garden vegetables like kale and zucchini and offers Piña Colada French toast, made with coconut cream. In the winter, he makes fresh eggnog and offers a gingerbread waffle. “We’re trying to do stuff nobody else is doing,” he says. You won’t find those white square packets of jam—The Breakfast Clubs makes its own spreads from scratch. For autumn, try the pumpkin pancakes, a satisfyingly dense stack made with pumpkin puree, spiced with cinnamon, filled with pecans, drizzled with caramel and topped with crushed amaretti cookies. The cookies are the kicker, a crunchy burst of sugar that contrasts through the soft mound. The Harvest Hash mixes in apples, figs, maple sausage, butternut squash and caramelized onions and is topped with eggs from organic cage-free chickens (my tip: a splash of vinegary hot sauce cuts through the sweetness). Send the whole mess overboard with a pumpkin spiced milkshake.

The Breakfast Club is a bit out of the way, but the food and environment are worth the trip. Sitting at the counter, you can strike up a conversation with Athanasopolus and watch him call out orders. Ask him to put on your favorite 80s song. Listen to his plans for opening up 90s- and 70s-themed restaurants (“Everyone will wear rollerblades and a big wig.”) He is the type of jovial, benevolent, dream-big character who could easily have been in of those John Hughes classics.

**Anna’s Taqueria** (446 Harvard Street, Brookline)



*Crispy quesadillas and all the freshly-made fillings at Anna’s Taqueria*

**Ideal Meal:** Veggie quesadilla with fresh-squeezed lemonade. Anna’s is a Boston staple, going in 20 years, lauded for its stuffed burritos. It elevates the now ubiquitous point-and-order burrito station by relying on fresh vegetables, authentic drinks made in-house and meat dishes rarely found at fast food restaurants.



Peering through the sneeze guard of a burrito station can be a disappointing sight: chicken bits drying out; mysterious beef parts floating in murky liquid; onions and peppers greying by the hour. But the tray of vegetables used for Anna's' veggie quesadilla is a bounty of bright and fresh seasonal ingredients: green peppers, yellow peppers, red peppers, squash, corn, eggplant, Brussels sprouts, green beans carrots, zucchini, onions, cauliflower, sweet potato and broccoli. Veggies are blanched and grilled to enhance their flavors. The tortilla is greased with a touch of oil and griddled to form a golden crust on the outside.

If you must satisfy your carnivorous craving, Anna's braises its shredded carnitas (pork) in rendered pork fat, dresses steak in a delicious guajillo chili sauce, boils its tender chicken in a garlicky stock and slow-cooks beef tongue. That's right, beef tongue. No fast food place offers beef tongue! Cap off the authenticity with Horchata, fresh-squeezed lemonade or Jamaica juice (boiled down hibiscus flowers).

**Eastern Standard** (528 Commonwealth Ave., Boston)



**Ideal Meal:** Dartmouth Highball; Bone Marrow “Luge”; Steak tartare; Hake with green beans in a coriander sauce.

High ceilings, white tablecloths, steak knives, a glowing marble bar, big band music softly playing over the din, skilled bartenders dressed in black vests, a raw bar, a rare beer selection and a revolving door of cocktail specials—you get the picture.

Eastern Standard is a comfortable brasserie-inspired hang out. It’s classy without being stuffy, elegant but still accessible. [Lists](#) of simple food and drink offerings deliver complexity and surprise touches. Like a brioche roll (baked that morning) topped with sea salt and paired with whipped butter arrives for free. Or the best seller: the steak tartar, finely minced with a slight trace of egg and tiny nuggets of crunchy cornichons, accompanied by a red pepper aioli.



*Steak Tartare at Eastern Standard*

The bar shows off the Eastern Standard’s showboating side. A “Huge Beers” selection, which ranges from 1.5 to 6 liters, included a \$675 St. Feuillen Belgian Tripel (8.5%). If that is too rich for your blood, friendly and flashy bartenders make the imbibing experience fun and approachable. Bartender Felicia Grossi slaps mint across her wrist to “wake it up” and garnishes the Dartmouth Highball, a twist on a Pimm’s Cup that is done with ginger beer. After her recent trip to Mexico, bar manager Naomi Levy came up with the Poor Little Rich Man, her take on a traditional Latin American cocktail called a Kalimotxo, which she refines with house-made red wine-cola bitters.





*The Dartmouth Highball at Eastern Standard*

Although boasting a massive porterhouse steak, the restaurant also offers excellent fish dishes. Try the bluefish pate with pickled shallots, a lip-smacking dip that is not too fishy and addictively salty. The seared flaky hake rests atop springy green wax beans and buttery chanterelles and is dressed in a North African-inspired coriander sauce.

“Did someone say marrow luge?” a manager may call out. Yes, you heard that right. Although it is not always on the menu, diners can ask for the marrow luge, a shamelessly indulgent opportunity to play with your food: after scrapping out the unctuous bone marrow, tilt the bone up to your lips and pour from the other side a small shot of sherry. Even a classy joint like the Eastern Standard knows there are times to take off the white gloves and get sloppy.

**Belly Wine Bar** (1 Kendall Square B4201, Cambridge)



*Belly Wine Bar*

**Ideal Meal:** Red Wine from Matthew Rorick; Lamb Mortadella; Cured Duck Breast with Aged Balsamic Vinegar; Earthy Prescott

The mark of a great wine bar is not merely an apparent devotion to interesting wines but also to the world of meat, cheese and snacks that pair well with them. Belly Wine Bar is particular and informative with its offerings, to a degree that is almost obsessive. They boast between 15 and 20 amaros at a given time. You will be told where every product is sourced from and even the name of the person who sourced it. Be prepared to nerd out.

White and red wines are listed beneath the names of their winemakers, who have been personally vetted by Belly's owner and wine director, Liz Vilardi. The vineyards are mostly very small operations that practice organic and biodynamic winemaking. You will taste the fruity and dill notes of a red wine and have a greater appreciation for its maker, Matthew Rorick in Sierra Foothills, Calif.

A glance around the room, which looks like the inside of a wine barrel, will show chalk descriptions of the cheese categories: Fresh, Butter, Earth, Salt, Funk, Homegrown and Blue. The staff will guide you and drop some education. Try one of each, like a blue cheese and a chèvre from Vermont, a manchego from Spain, a funky oma also from Vermont, an earthy Prescott from the Robinson family farm in Massachusetts, all paired with crisps and a red plum spread.





*Belly Wine Bar cheese and charcuterie selection.*

Menus with “charcuterie” typically include cured meats. But at Belly, extensive lists distinguish charcuterie (terrines, galantines, pâtés, and confit) from salumi (salted cold cuts). Iberian ham, arguably the best cured ham in the world, is available, but the bar sells its own delicious, creative meats made or cured in house that are hard to come by: duck en crouete, pork and fennel terrine, lamb mortadella, chicken liver mouse and cured duck breast with aged balsamic vinegar.

Belly is an ideal spot for a late night jaunt or a first date—or perhaps a second date after you have already visited on your own and can show off some of your charcuterie and cheese knowledge. For ravenous groups, call ahead two days for the “arm + a leg” dinner, four courses of lamb for \$62 per person, which caps off with a wood-smoked leg.



## **Tavern Road** (343 Congress Street, Boston)



*The dining room at Tavern Road*

**Ideal Meal:** Lamb Meatballs; Cavatelli Carbonara with Small Batch Bacon; Mexican Chocolate Ice Cream with Smoked Caramel Sauce

Let's cut right to it: Tavern Road is offering one of the best dishes in all of Boston (and the best bite of anything I tried on my recent visit): the Lamb Meatballs. When brothers Louis (chef) and Michael (general manager) DiBiccari opened the restaurant in February 2013, the meatballs were the first dish placed on the menu. They were beloved. Too beloved.

Louis took them off the menu "because I had to make it all the time. Nothing could compete with it. I wanted people to order something else." Taking cues from idols like chefs April Bloomfield and Andrew Carmellini, Louis wants to offer creative and approachable dishes but also have the trust of his customers to change the menu items whenever he feels like it. "They should be arguing over which stood out best," Louis says. "If everyone goes to order one thing, then you're not a good restaurant."



*Fried Pig, Duck and Lamb Bacon at Tavern Road*

The dining public overwhelmed him. They demanded the meatballs come back.

It is understandable. Even amidst a menu of dishes that customers are unlikely to find anywhere else—like the Saffron Risotto with Maine lobster and uni butter (decadent comfort food) or the orange-honey-glazed bacon trio of pig, duck and lamb (smoky, sweet greasy goodness)—the meatballs are unique. Ground lamb meat and fatty pork are deep fried, nestled into a swirl of thick honey-laced yogurt and topped with a crunchy flavorful garnish of cocoa nibs, almonds and fried faro. The balance of flavors (the gamey lamb paired with the espresso-like nibs) and contrast of textures (the fried crust, the luscious yogurt, the unexpected crunch of the farro) is masterful.

The dish epitomizes Louis' global influences and vision to cook without restraints. It is an approach he learned from his uncle, a sculptor from Naples who encouraged his apprentices to find their own style. Cast over the fun and chatty dining room and flanked by the bar and the open kitchen, a mural of Louis' uncle spans an entire wall. It honors the restaurant's muse. "That's why we change the menu everyday," Louis says.



Even the bartenders enjoy a playful sense of autonomy. The drink menu includes “Cocktails from Friends,” a section of drinks dedicated to bartenders’ favorite customers or fellow drink-makers around the city. The “Blade of Destiny,” for instance, is finished with a “double high five!!!”

The lamb stands out, but Tavern Road offers many delectable dishes worth returning multiple times in order to try them all: the meal starts with warm focaccia bread covered in melted Parmesan; the Chickpea Bites are deep-fried spongy, salty, cheesy cubes; the pasta is handmade, like the ultra indulgent cavatelli carbonara with small batch bacon, a duck egg and ricotta; the succotash is fresh with sweet corn and heirloom tomatoes purchased daily; and the Mexican chocolate ice cream delivers cayenne pepper heat, a smoked caramel sauce and a delicate cocoa nib florentine.

Oh, yeah, there’s also that smell in the air. Louis can explain that: “This place is swimming in bacon.”

Chef Louis provided Forbes with the recipe for his sensational lamb meatballs (yields about 25 meatballs):



*The Lamb Meatballs at Tavern Road*

### Chicken Wing Dredge

1/4 cup all purpose flour

1/4 cup corn starch

1 heaping teaspoon baking powder

### Lamb Meatball

1 1/4 lbs ground lamb

1 1/4 lbs ground pork

1 cup breadcrumbs

1 cup shredded parmesan

1/2 lbs marscarpone cheese

1 oz kosher salt

1/2 tablespoons za'atar

5 egg yolks

lemon juice

*In a large mixing bowl, combine lamb, pork, breadcrumbs, parmesan cheese, marscarpone cheese, salt, za'atar, egg yolks and lemon juice. Mix all ingredients with your hands, until well-incorporated. Using a spoon separate mixture into golf ball sized pieces. Then with your hands, shape into rounds. Heat a skillet over medium-high heat and coat with olive oil. Add enough meatballs to fill pan with one layer. Brown meatballs on two sides and then transfer to a roasting pan. Repeat with remaining meatballs and then place roasting pan in a preheated 350 degree oven. Roast meatballs for 4-5 minutes, or until cooked through.*