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DOWNTOWNER[®]

THE INSIDER GUIDE TO DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES

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THE INSIDER'S VIEW OF DOWNTOWN CULTURE, FOOD, DRINKS, FASHION & THE PEOPLE WHO SHAPE IT.

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BARTENDING IN THE TIME OF COVID

THE STRUGGLE TO KEEP THE INDUSTRY ALIVE

Written By Dakota Nate

Photographed By Robiee Ziegler and Dylan Jeni

With this "new normal" still feeling absolutely abnormal, the service industry, an industry that has not only kept DTLA's ruby red heart beating strong with fresh blood for decades is suffering more than anyone could have ever imagined. As many business owners have grappled with the effort to keep some sort of business afoot with takeout and delivery services steering the ship, there is simply no substitute for the full experience when it comes to a cocktail bar.

Eric Alperin

Eric Alperin, partner and co-founder of multiple concepts including The Varnish, the award-winning drinking hole situated within Cole's French Dip off of 6th and Main has felt the weight shift as closing, re-opening, and closing again has taken a toll that no one could have expected—all while releasing a book about his experience in the industry.

"For me as a business owner, creating a space where people feel comfortable and that welcomes all walks of life is really important to me as a tenant—so is creating a space that your staff, the people you work with are proud to call it their place of work." Says Eric "You know, if the business makes money, that's great too, but you need those first two tentpoles to have a complete experience. Caring for your staff, especially in this extraordinary time and situation is super important.

Business owners like Eric aren't just worried about monetary loss, they're worried about the well-being of their team and extremely fearful for the culture that is dissolving rapidly during the shutdown.

(Continued on Page 4)



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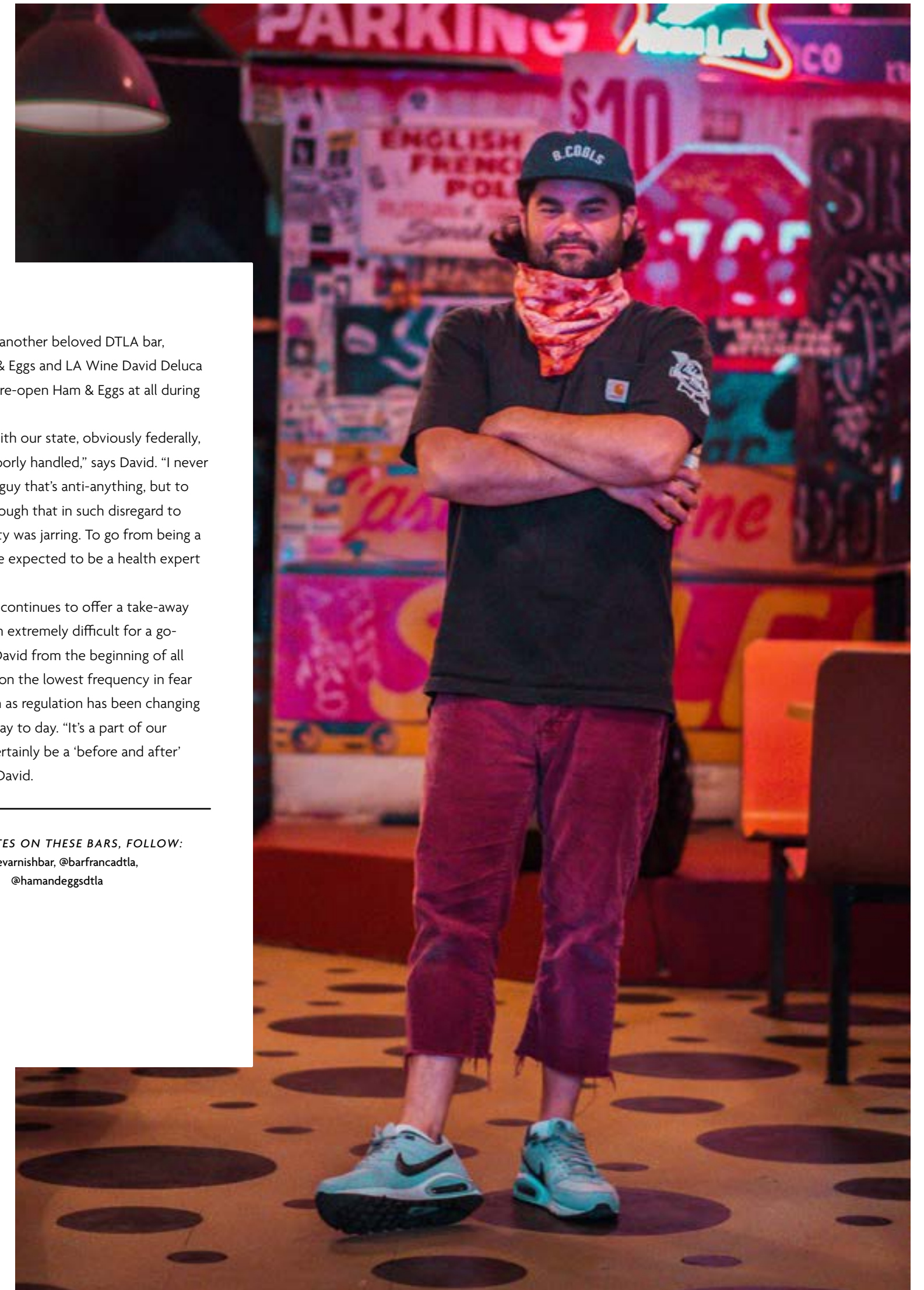
Diana "D" Danaila

Diana "D" Danaila, beverage director at Bar Franca shares the exact same fear. Diana chose not to go back to work once the bar reopened to give her co-workers who were having trouble receiving unemployment a chance to stay afloat.

"It made more sense for staff members who were in that position to go back before I did," she says. "I went and I visited, and even then the mood had changed so drastically. It was nice to see the familiar faces in our neighborhood momentarily and people were excited to come, but something had fundamentally changed."

Bar Franca had only been open just over a year when the pandemic reared its ugly head, and as a female-owned, queer-owned business, and also the only bar who hosts a lesbian night, D fears that without a place like Franca, there will be no more dedicated lesbian bars left in LA.

"The only worry we all have collectively, as bartenders or managers of places like these, is what will be left in downtown after we're gone, and how long will it take for us to rebuild?" She mentions, "The unique businesses that make our community diverse give our neighbors very specific catered places to go to. The downtown that we've all worked hard to cultivate into a community will only be left with these monoliths of corporations that can afford to take those types of losses."



David Delucca

The lead of another beloved DTLA bar, owner of Ham & Eggs and LA Wine David Delucca decided not to re-open Ham & Eggs at all during this time.

"I feel like with our state, obviously federally, it was just so poorly handled," says David. "I never want to be the guy that's anti-anything, but to drag people through that in such disregard to health and reality was jarring. To go from being a bar-owner to be expected to be a health expert is wild."

As LA Wine continues to offer a take-away service, it's been extremely difficult for a go-getter such as David from the beginning of all this to operate on the lowest frequency in fear of the unknown as regulation has been changing basically from day to day. "It's a part of our lives that will certainly be a 'before and after' moment," says David.

FOR UPDATES ON THESE BARS, FOLLOW:

@thevarnishbar, @barfrancadtla,
@hamandeggsdtla



BOHEMIAN HOUSE OF ESPRESSO + CHAI

SIXTH STREET REVOLUTION

Written By Daniel Nieblas
Photographed By GL Askew II

Between two dreary ionic towers on 6th & Spring, there's an escalated threshold underneath a dusty black shade that reads, "Bohemian House of Espresso & Chai." At first glance you'll probably assume it's a cut-rate shop some next-door neighbors drop by on occasion, but when you walk out, you'll have experienced what is arguably the most authentic coffee shop in Los Angeles.

You'll start out trying to take in a cacophony of artistic tastes. One wall has black & white photographs of 1960s cultural icons (MLK, Fidel Castro, Marilyn Monroe). Paintings of naked women and rock & roll artists sporadically catch your eye. There are Jetson-like television sets and a futuristic globe chair next to the espresso bar. The theme feels confusing, but irrefutably sixties. "There was a lot of change happening in those days...everyone is still trying to catch up."

Then there's the owner, or rather the barista, who calls himself Blackie; he makes all the coffee himself. He is also the author of a small book placed on every table, "Blackie Bohemian;" a minimalist-meets-beatnik manifesto on why he wants coffee to bring people together. Almost all the content is a series of moral choice questions like, what would you do if you had to assassinate the president to live?

You can certainly tell by the aroma of the man himself, Farah A. Hagar, that counter-culture is not only his aesthetic, but his objective. He wears a black beret (a must of any 1960s revolutionary), and talks with great confidence in



himself and the power of his coffee. He knows it's his blend of retro culture and built-from-scratch drinks that converts visitors against the bland mass consumption of stores like Starbucks (incidentally his next-door competitor). "No one is doing what I'm doing...I make everything from scratch."

This is literally true. You can pick a completely random item from his itinerary of specialties - The Camel Milk Cortado for example - and he will immediately get down to work; tearing up the various leaves and spices that go with it, and even crafting its own myth. "This came to me from an Amish farmer," he began one story, claiming he had been traveling and asking for what he hoped would be a soothing remedy for stress and anger.

Blackie hands a small cup of camel's milk to go with it. "He gave me this...believe me there is nothing like this in the world." Indeed, it is a wild yet minty and sweet blast of taste; it will make anyone a convert to the cause.

As ecstatic as his personality may be, he is also the kind of man that didn't like to talk too much about his past, even the struggles he had to face getting his business running as a Somalian immigrant. The only thing he wants to focus on are the people that come to his store. Once the city went into total lockdown from the COVID-19 pandemic, two of his revenue sources - tourists and office workers - completely vanished. Locals however, continue to pour in. He is grateful for the Downtown community, as it has remained the Bohemian House's life support during what Blackie said was "a really huge challenge...I can't fight this alone."

To put it mildly, The Bohemian House of Espresso & Chai is a rebel's cause. It is still open for take-out 8AM-4PM, and has no plans to close down.

FIND IT HERE:
548 S Spring St r110
bohemianchai.com





RISING UP

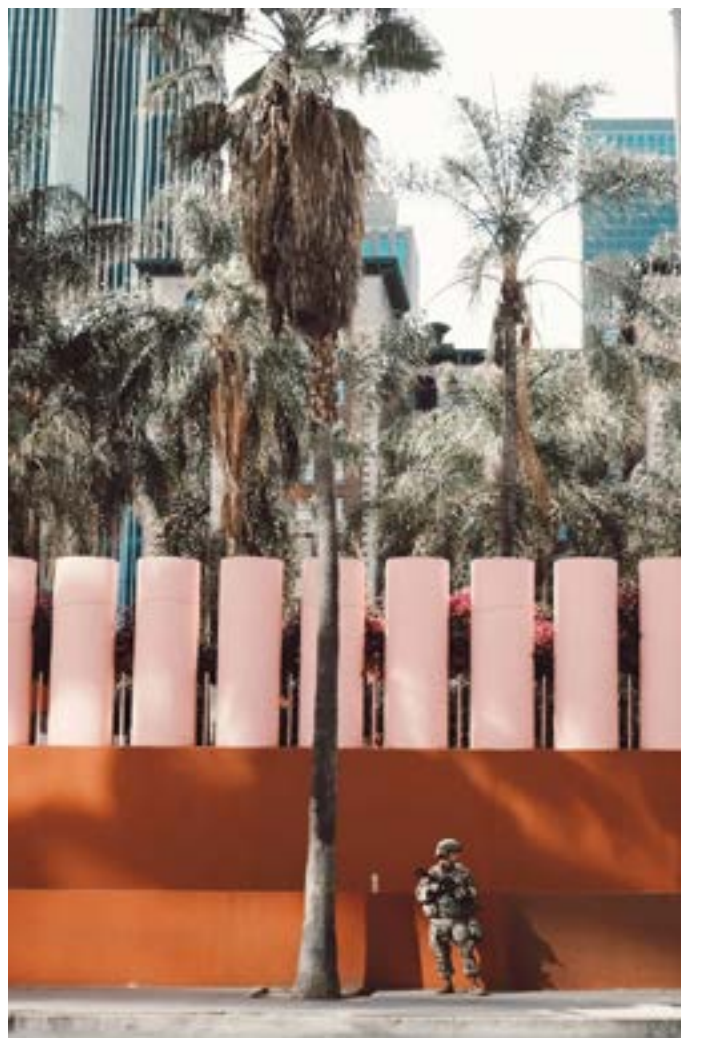
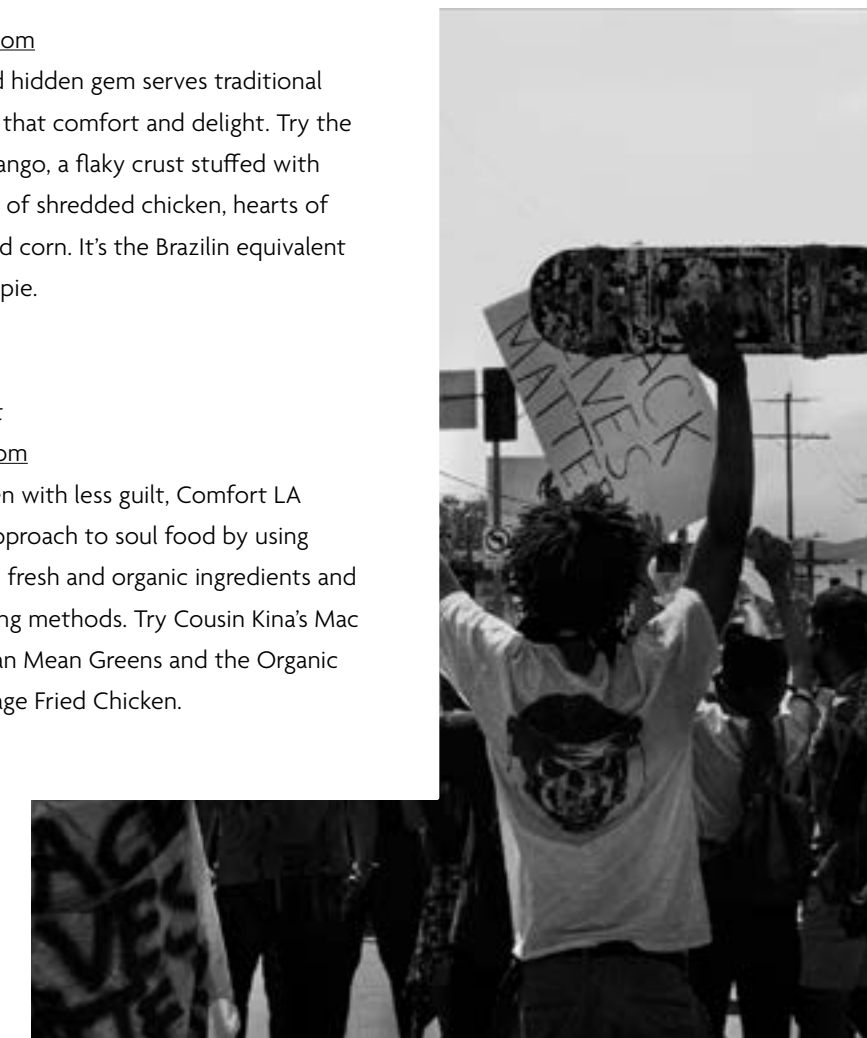
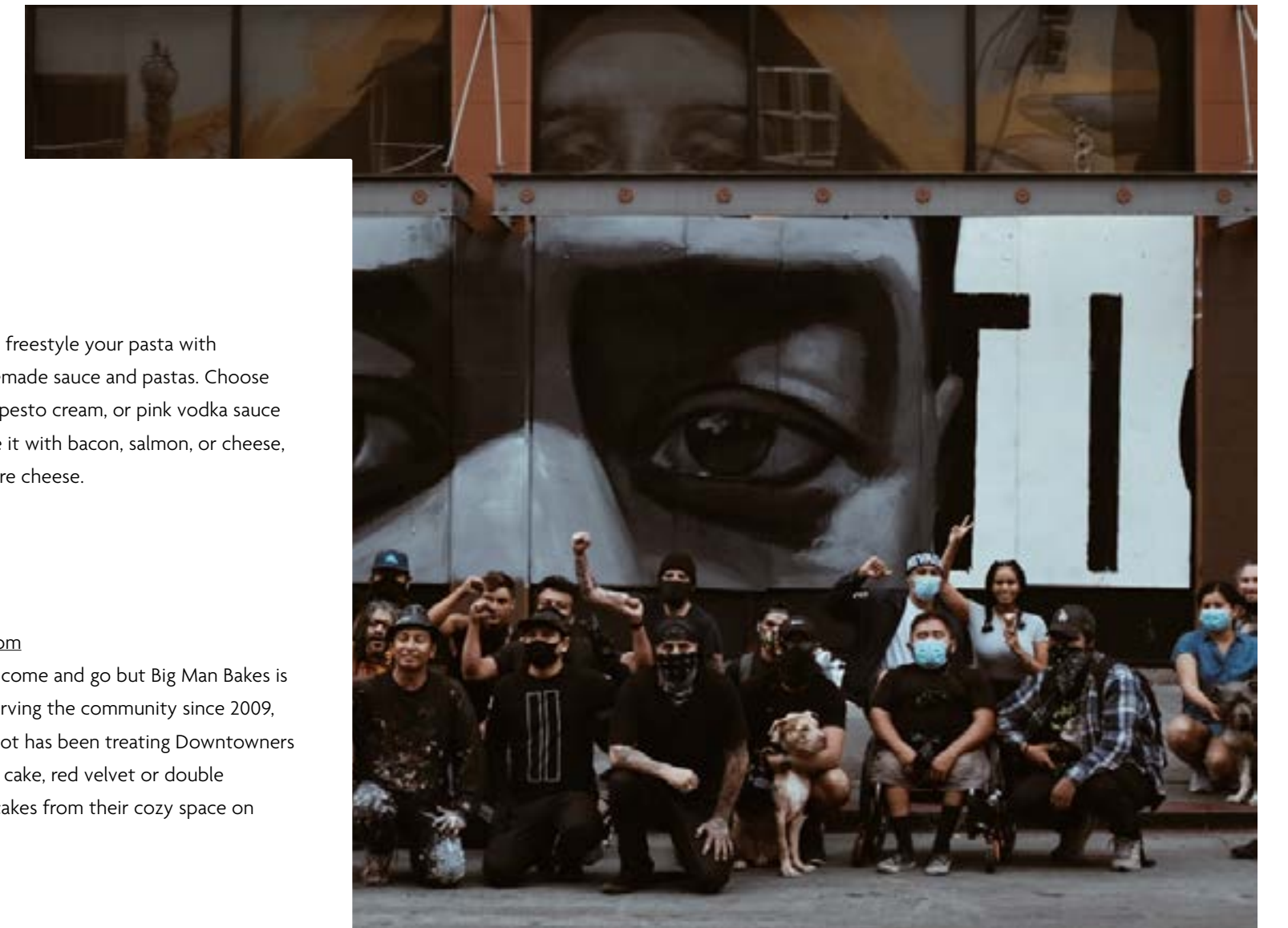
SUPPORT BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES

*List sourced by Kat Hong
Photographed By Andrew Castanon @andycasta_
Grace Liang @holograciegrace*

In the midst of a global pandemic and systemic racism, it's a crucial time to support local, black-owned businesses. Here are a few DTLA favorites to support now and forever.

A Beautiful Life
216 S Spring St
abeautifullifecafe.com
Sometimes an overwhelming amount of spice is what we need to wake our taste buds up. This Jamaican cafe features a menu jam-packed with mouthwatering jerk and curry flavors in the form of plates, bowls and sandwiches. Try the Jerk Mac N Cheese for Caribbean flair on an ordinary comfort dish.

Poppy & Rose
765 Wall St
poppyandrosela.com
Some people start their day with a cup of coffee, others start with a hearty serving of buttermilk fried chicken & waffles—these people come to Poppy & Rose in the Flower District. This casual eatery serves classic American comfort food for breakfast, brunch & lunch. Forget about dinner, you're guaranteed to stay full for hours.

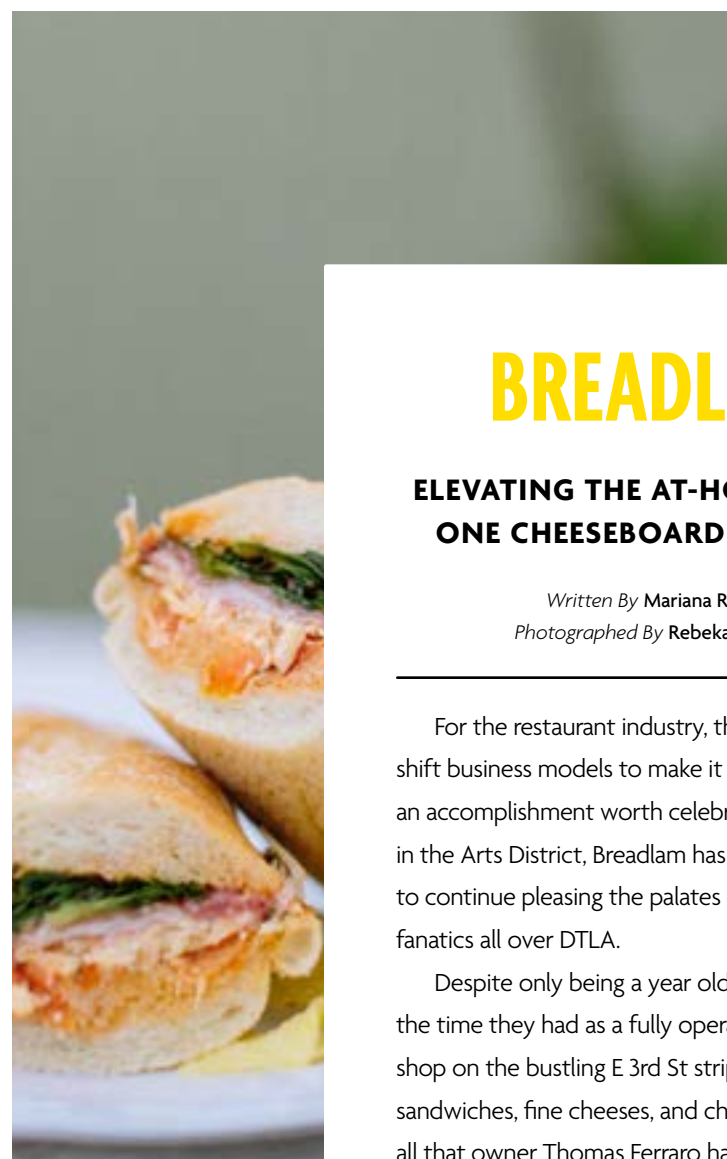


Funculo
724 S Spring St
[@funculodtla](https://www.instagram.com/funculodtla)
Mix, match and freestyle your pasta with Funculo's homemade sauce and pastas. Choose from marinara, pesto cream, or pink vodka sauce then customize it with bacon, salmon, or cheese, cheese and more cheese.

Big Man Bakes
413 S Main St
bigmanbakes.com
Sweet cravings come and go but Big Man Bakes is here to stay. Serving the community since 2009, this cupcake spot has been treating Downtowners to moist carrot cake, red velvet or double chocolate cupcakes from their cozy space on Main St.

Woodspoon
107 W 9th St
woodspoonla.com
This 14-year-old hidden gem serves traditional Brazilian dishes that comfort and delight. Try the Empadao de Frango, a flaky crust stuffed with a creamy blend of shredded chicken, hearts of palm, olives, and corn. It's the Brazilin equivalent to chicken pot pie.

Comfort LA
1110 E 7th Street
eatcomfortla.com
Eat fried chicken with less guilt, Comfort LA takes a clean approach to soul food by using locally sourced, fresh and organic ingredients and healthier cooking methods. Try Cousin Kina's Mac 'n' Cheese, Clean Mean Greens and the Organic Not Your Average Fried Chicken.



BREADLAM

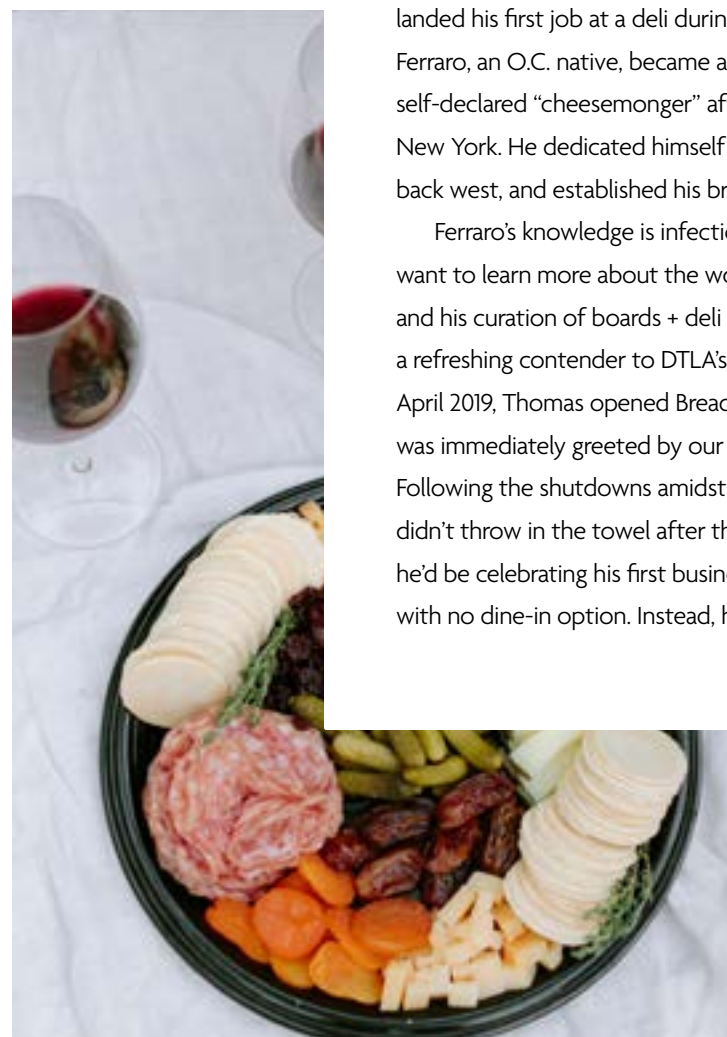
ELEVATING THE AT-HOME-PICNIC ONE CHEESEBOARD AT A TIME

Written By Mariana Ramos
Photographed By Rebekah Lemire

For the restaurant industry, the ability to shift business models to make it during COVID is an accomplishment worth celebrating. Nestled in the Arts District, Breadlam has accomplished to continue pleasing the palates of fine cheese fanatics all over DTLA.

Despite only being a year old Breadlam enjoyed the time they had as a fully operating sandwich shop on the bustling E 3rd St strip. Serving up sandwiches, fine cheeses, and charcuterie boards is all that owner Thomas Ferraro has known since he landed his first job at a deli during his college years. Ferraro, an O.C. native, became an expert and a self-declared "cheesemonger" after college in 2008 New York. He dedicated himself to the art, moved back west, and established his brick-and-mortar.

Ferraro's knowledge is infectious, it makes you want to learn more about the world of cheese, and his curation of boards + deli sandwiches are a refreshing contender to DTLA's food scene. In April 2019, Thomas opened Breadlam's doors and was immediately greeted by our eager community. Following the shutdowns amidst COVID, Thomas didn't throw in the towel after the realization that he'd be celebrating his first business anniversary with no dine-in option. Instead, he adjusted and



the quality of his product did not suffer, if anything he's got the perfect stuff for an at-home or virtual picnic.

The menu is divided into two categories, it's simple and not overwhelming, and the quality of Breadlam's ingredients shows. Their cheese platters come ready for whatever the occasion- Date Night, Impress Your Friends, or Rager. Each curated differently and accompanied by various other goodies like dried mandarins, dates, and crackers that don't dissolve like powder to the touch. The sandwiches, such as the 5th Ave, which has an incredible aged gouda cheese, and the Raymond, which has tomato mayo to die for but the true spin lies in the peppadew peppers. They're creative, not overly stuffed, and therefore very pleasant to eat.

The attention to quality and detail is reflected in Ferraro's favorite menu item- his cheese platters. However, if you're not a platter person, cheeses blocks that won't cost you an arm or a leg are available for purchase and constantly in rotation so there's something for everyone. Ferraro's current favorites include a Prima Donna Gouda and a Brie from France.

With delivery and pick-options available, Thomas has been happy to see some regular and locals continue to support Breadlam. Plus, given that socializing has become a virtual activity, a Breadlam indoor picnic (perhaps with a nice bottle of wine) might be the perfect idea for a Saturday afternoon in Downtown LA.

FIND IT HERE:
826 E. 3rd St.
breadlam.com



QUENTIN “SHPLINTON” ROBERTS

ULTRA VIOLET, CITY STREET

Written By Dakota Nate
Photographed By Robiee Ziegler

From Downtown Los Angeles to Santa Monica and just about any given block within any given neighborhood in between, you'll have no trouble in this city finding art out in the wild of the concrete jungle. Splashed against walls and windows from the hands of the talented artists that inhabit the city, there is one of these artists in particular that we've seen more and more of in the last few years, and his unmistakable style and artistic habit of taking subjects of everyday value and recognition and turning them into a technicolor extravaganza is bound to set both your soul and your mind on fire. Yes, like most artists, he wants you to make you feel something, but above all, he just wants you to feel happy.

Los Angeles-based artist Shplinton's larger than life murals speak for themselves: intense, yet harmonious color palettes, perfectly imperfect ultra-poised brushstrokes, and a vibe that does more than just speaking volumes, it shouts. And, even if upon first glance you don't know what exactly it's shouting, you will, and in the meantime—it sure feels good to gaze at. Shplinton specializes in abstract and expressionist art, as well as pointillism, and while the guy's no stranger to a good, ol' fashioned line drawing, most of his signature work is done with watercolor and acrylic paints.

Living in the heart of Downtown, Quentin

“Shplinton” Roberts found himself at the center of the recent civil rights protests. Since then, awareness of the issue has expanded tenfold, and with chaos unfolding all around him and a literal call for justice on the tongues of the many outraged protesters and activists on the ground below, he realized that now more than ever, how important it is to breed positivity without taking away or straying from the seriousness of the matter—in this case being the current challenges faced by people of color and the black community as a whole. It's hugely important to Shplinton to stay on narrative with his work while remaining ever-present in the mindset of happiness and hopefulness.

“We're talking about a lot of black issues and I want to bring black faces to it. Art has been a part of every movement,” he says, “and yes, there is a lot of art that will continue to be created, but I feel like for me, I want to do my best to create a place for people to feel joy and love even when they're thinking about serious issues.” By bringing the discussion to a place of levity, Shplinton hopes to promote a feeling of uplifting power to begin to overcome the recent tragedies and injustices faced. “I want to do strong, but joyful,” he says.

While he works partially in his home studio, much of Shplinton's work is splayed out on display right out in the open. His larger-scale work includes a portrait of James Baldwin as well as a quote of the famous black writer/activist himself, layered atop huge strokes of color residing at the Pershing Square Building. With a mural on Abbot Kinney in the works and his busy hands currently working away to promote the cause with several different foundations and campaigns at his side, keep an eye out open for more of his captivating work tucked within our beloved city's streets.

shplinton.com





HONEY DROP KITCHEN

HONEY'S KETTLE AT YOUR DOORSTEP

Written By Victoria Crowe
Photographed By Eric Cacioppo

While a lot can happen in twenty years, it seems even more can happen in a matter of months if the calendar reads 2020. For Vincent Williams and his family, there has been change the past twenty years, but two constants have always been devotion and tenacity that come with the name Honey's Kettle.

In 2000 Vincent and wife, Arlene, opened the original Honey's Kettle in Compton before opening their second location in Culver City in 2005. A few years later, a damaging fire occurred and then the 2008 recession hit. Yet through their dedication to service, the Williams family is not only celebrating their 20th anniversary as one of LA's fried chicken staples, but have even figured out a way to expand their business. When restaurants closed, delivery and curbside pick-up became the new normal. The Williams family launched Honey Drop Kitchen, a delivery-only location in DTLA, reaching even more Honey's Kettle-craving Angelenos. Vincent and his family saw the restaurant shutdown as an opportunity to accelerate on an idea already in the works. Honey Drop Kitchen adds an eat-at-home dimension with more reach while maintaining the values and practices they have always believed in for in-person dining. While Honey Drop Kitchen isn't a storefront operation, what has not changed is the love that is put into food whether it is a plate being put down in

front of you or a bag being handed off at your door. You can order through major delivery apps and get the same quality, same comfort with their food now on your dinner plates.

"What keeps us excited is that we are transitioning from the point of struggling and fighting at all costs, being unwavering and now getting the opportunity to share all these gifts and lessons we've learned along the way through our food and through a personal experience like delivering something for someone to eat," says Marques, Vincent's son.

Some classic items to look out for include the three- or four-piece meals which feature any combination of leg, breast or wing and include one of Honey's Kettles' delicious biscuits, fries and a pickle. Another option, the premium kettle chicken sandwich which features a butterflied chicken breast fillet with the same crispiness and crunch that customers love. "When all odds are against you, you double down on the product," says Marques. Doubling down means figuring out exactly when to lift chicken from the kettle, giving biscuits those minutes to breathe before they are in the oven, using highest grade ingredients and a wet batter giving the chicken that distinguishing crackle. Given the family's tenacity and ability to adapt, it's no surprise that Honey's Kettle has come out on top. "It has become our life's work as a family and we love it," Marques says. "It's really powerful to overcome the level of challenges that we've experienced. The fire, being a self-funded company. Up to now where we have lines around the corner and people are loving our food and swearing by our product."

FIND IT HERE:

Postmates, DoorDash, UberEats, ChowNow and Grubhub
honeyskettle.com



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