

The 2024 James Beard America's Classics Winners Are Here

This year's honorees include a New York City institution, a decades-old meat and three, and the oldest Burmese restaurant in San Francisco

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Wade's Restaurant in Spartanburg, South Carolina is one of this year's winners. Wade's Restaurant/James Beard Foundation

James Beard Awards season is well underway. The list of semifinalists in the chef and restaurant category dropped late January, and today, the James Beard Foundation announced the recipients of its America's Classics Awards. To be among the six honorees in this category, a business must be a "locally and independently owned restaurant with timeless appeal, beloved in its region for food that reflects the character and cultural traditions of its community," according to the foundation's awards guidelines. These restaurants must also be at least 10 years old.

The category also strives to recognize restaurants located throughout the country. Per foundation policy, six of the 12 restaurant and chef awards category regions are included in each awards cycle, and then rotated next year, "so that each region is represented every other year." This year, the winners hail from California, the Mid-Atlantic, the Midwest, New York State, Southeast, and Southwest regions.

Finalists for the other chef and restaurant awards categories will be announced on April 3, and the winners gala will be held June 10 in Chicago. Here, the full list of America's Classics winners:

Mandalay, San Francisco: San Francisco's oldest Burmese restaurant is still family owned, currently by Kevin Chen. Since 1984, diners have visited the San Francisco essential for "the famous tea leaf salad, which leans more traditional than versions offered at other local Burmese spots," the foundation notes.

Vietnam Restaurant, Philadelphia: The Lai family's Vietnamese restaurant has "has remained a model of consistency for decades" in Philadelphia's Chinatown. Since opening Vietnam Restaurant in 1984, they've expanded the business to include a restaurant in West Philadelphia; the family also owns a market next to the West Philly location that's well regarded for its banh mi.

Pheasant Restaurant and Lounge, Brookings, South Dakota: Pheasant Restaurant and Lounge has the distinction of being the oldest full-service restaurant in Brookings, opened in 1949 as a gas station cafe. The menu still includes mid-century, Midwestern dishes, such as hot roast beef on white bread with mashed potatoes and gravy, but the foundation also acknowledges its current role in its community: "As it updates accessibility for patrons and staff with disabilities, supports local musicians, and serves \$9 'early bird' dinners, Pheasant Restaurant and Lounge embodies the good, simple food and hospitality of South Dakota."

Sylvia's Restaurant, New York: The Harlem institution, and essential New York City restaurant, was founded in 1962 by "queen of soul food" Sylvia Woods. Today, her son Kenneth Woods carries on her legacy with dishes like meatloaf and chicken waffles, as well as a line of food products, cookbooks, catering operation, a real estate holding company, and community service through scholarships and philanthropy. Per the foundation, "Sylvia's Restaurant is the embodiment of American entrepreneurial self-determination and will remain one of America's Classics for decades to come."

Wade's Restaurant, Spartanburg, South Carolina: This Southern meat and three does big numbers: "2,500 guests visit Wade's daily; 3,500 made-from-scratch yeast rolls are served; along with 750 turkey plates and more than 1,500 orders of mac and cheese." Its more than 130 employees are still led by the family, including the grandchildren of Wade and Betty Lindsey who founded the restaurant in 1947.

Peppermill Restaurant and Fireside Lounge, Las Vegas: In 1972, Nat Carasali and Bill Paganetti opened the iconic Vegas restaurant, known as a popular spot for mobsters and celebrities as well as "pit bosses, dancers, bartenders and other Vegas industry folk." Tourists, who may have spotted the restaurant in movies like Casino and Showgirls, also flock to sip mudslides among the neon lights. The Beard foundation appreciates that it's "a place where people want to work and want to stay."

Disclosure: Some Vox Media staff members are part of the voting body for the James Beard Foundation Awards.