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Going to Austin

Until fairly recently, Austin's four food groups were basically chicken-fried steak, barbecued beef, pulled pork and breakfast tacos. Fine dining was limited to steakhouses and white-table restaurants with nosebleed prices. These days, however, the city's young chefs are devising menus that are at once more stylish, adventurous, global and populist.

The most exotic newcomer is Uchi (801 South Lamar Boulevard, 512-916-4808), a Japanese-influenced food laboratory overseen by Tyson Cole, who was named one of America's best new chefs last year by Food and Wine magazine.

Amid smooth wooden surfaces and playful chinoiserie wallpaper, Austinites dine on pumpkin tempura, uchiviche (striped bass and salmon soaked with tomato, garlic and Thai chilies) and hotate tiara (scallops with heirloom citrus fruit and lemon oil).

Imaginative desserts include black pepper sorbet and fresh strawberries. Dinner for two without wine comes to about \$80.