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my table

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OUR LONE STAR FOOD QUIZ

plus, Texas Food Firsts

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PIMIENTO CHEESE TASTE-OFF • THE COCKTAIL HOUR



**IN
THE
BAG**

What We Bought: Organic Coffee

By Robin Barr Sussman

The perfect cup o' Joe goes way beyond locating a coffeeshop that starts with the letter "S." Discriminating coffee lovers want not only fresh and carefully-roasted beans full of intense flavor, but coffee beans that are also environmentally friendly and fairly

traded. Stop searching and head to the bulk bins at Central Market for the new organic coffees. Choose from exotic Sumatra Mandheling or Panama Finca Santa Barbara, to the more everyday Breakfast Blend, Nicaragua or French Roast. Grind. Brew. Wake up!

\$9.99 to \$10.99/pound

Central Market
3815 Westheimer
713-386-1700



THE HALF FULL'S

I always love it when places try to be hip and trendy. **The Flat** (1701 Commonwealth, 713-521-FLAT) is the place to go if you want to feel cool and listen to some beats. However, don't go looking for anything trendy on the cocktail list unless you want a frozen mojito, which is their signature drink. It is tasty, but really just a mojito from a slushee machine. The cocktail list consisted of one martini and something else that blew my mind — "The All American Cocktail," Jack and Coke. Now, I realize I was in Texas, but please, people, Jack and Coke does not belong on a cocktail list. The Flat is funky and very fun late night, but they could do with a groovier beverage list.

Soon it was time to go home. As my plane took off, I closed my eyes, leaned my head back and realized that in three days I had tasted some fabulous martinis and learned some amazing life lessons. A tear slipped down my face as I sighed. Not only would I need a new liver when I got home, but a new heart as well. For, I had left my heart in Houston.

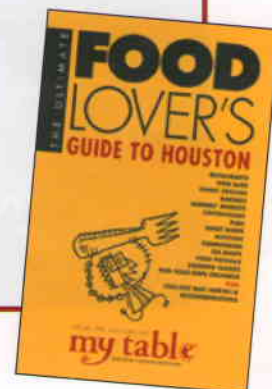
Marjie Martini writes about martinis and modern male-female relationships on her website, martinisatmidnight.com.

AS MY MAMA USED TO SAY...
YOU CAN PUT YOUR
BOOTS IN THE OVEN,
BUT THAT
DON'T MAKE THEM
BISCUITS



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TASTING THE TOWN BY ROBIN BARR SUSSMAN

GRILLED CHEESE, PLEASE

THE HUMBLE GRILLED CHEESE SANDWICH, A CHILDHOOD FAVORITE, HAS BEEN ELEVATED TO GOURMET STATURE AND VALUE. THERE'S EVEN A \$50 NUMBER WITH TRUFFLE SHAVINGS IN A NEW YORK RESTAURANT. HERE ARE A FEW IN HOUSTON YOU'LL HAVE A HARD TIME PUTTING DOWN.

BLACK WALNUT CAFE, 5510 Morningside, and other locations, 713-526-5551
Triple decker. "Rustic Grilled Cheese" with cheddar and mozzarella is prepared on three slices of pesto-flavored la-chac-la bread (flat bread) layered with sliced tomatoes. In spite of the tasty bread, the plastic-textured cheese is flavorless and the bread is soaked in oil.

PRICE: \$7/incl. fries

SCORE: 6

GRAVITAS, 807 Taft, 713-522-0995

Earth moving. Pungent gruyère cheese oozing from perfectly buttered and crunchy, thick grilled sourdough bread makes this an addictive indulgence for the grilled-cheese purist. Served with a lovely side of fresh tossed salad greens.

PRICE: \$7

SCORE: 10

MAX'S WINE DIVE, 4720 Washington Ave., 713-880-8737

Local boy. Everything's big at Max's, and this grilled cheese is constructed on artisanal organic Texas toast with local Veldhuizen Farms gruyère and provolone, and then dusted with piquillo peppers. Decadent with a tangy pimiento cheese effect.

PRICE: \$14/incl. tomato soup & pickle salad **SCORE: 9.5**

OUISIE'S TABLE, 3939 San Felipe, 713-528-2264

Mama mia! "The Best Ever Grilled Mozzarella Cheese Sandwich" comes on sourdough with Paula's snowy white mozzarella, sliced tomatoes, fresh basil leaves and anchovy butter brushed on the bread. Olives come on the side. Super fresh and original.

PRICE: \$10

SCORE: 9

TINY BOXWOOD'S, 3614 W. Alabama, 713-622-4224

Chichi. Pity, ladies who lunch probably avoid this caloric yet delish crispy gouda grilled cheese on white pagnotta bread with basil-garlic pesto. The precious price tag includes the huge sandwich and side salad. Split it with a garden-gabbing friend and enjoy the view.

PRICE: \$11/incl. side salad

SCORE: 8

59 DINER, 10407 Katy Fwy., 713-984-2500, and other locations

Texas pride. The "Texas Grilled Cheese" sandwich sports both baby Swiss and cheddar cheese, plus sliced tomatoes on grilled jalapeño cheese bread. Love the reasonable price and the undeniable layers of zesty flavor.

PRICE: \$4.70

SCORE: 7.5

Robin Barr Sussman is a freelance food writer with a culinary mission: great taste.