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# BEST NEW RESTAURANTS *2017*

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FOOD & DRINK

**HOW**  
**CORVINO**  
**PULLED**  
**OFF**  
**ITS**  
**PLAN**

# TO BE KANSAS CITY'S MOST AMBITIOUS RESTAURANT

By KHUSHBU SHAH    By KHUSHBU SHAH @khushandoj

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@khushandoj



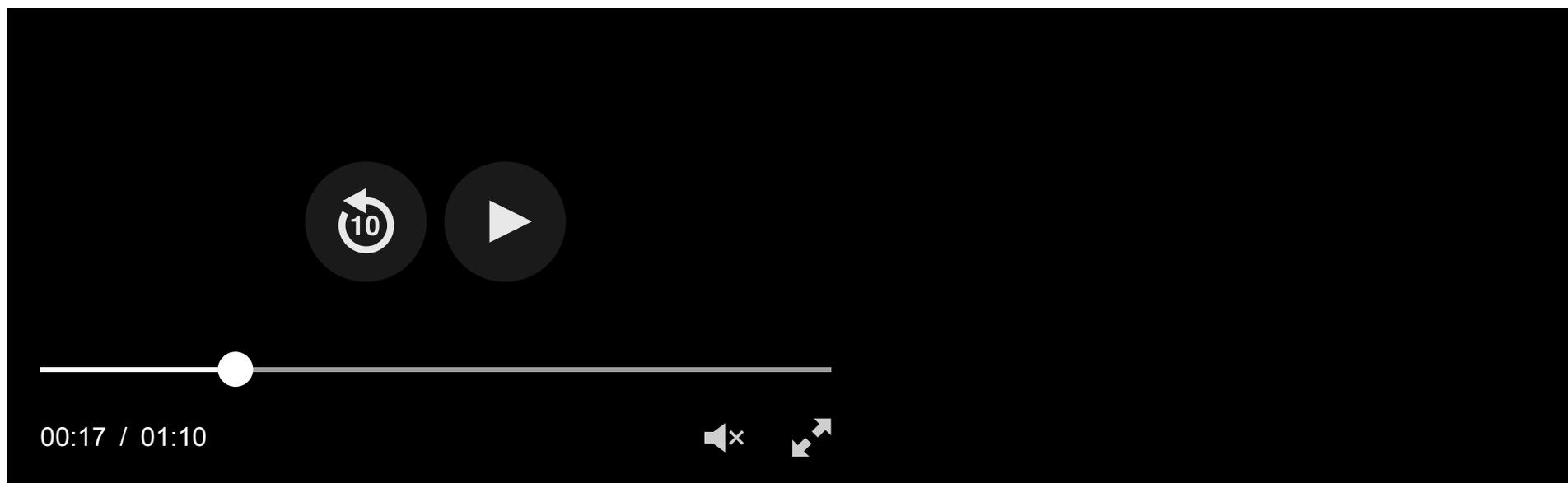
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Most people go to Kansas City for the barbecue. I go for the fried rice.

The kind I still dream about -- a far cry from the clumpy rice huddled with frozen vegetables that gets scooped into takeout cartons -- is a staple dish of chef Michael

Corvino's namesake restaurant, Corvino, on the Missouri side of downtown Kansas City. The fried rice, which changes seasonally, currently calls for pineapple, but when I visited the main dining room during a temperate June evening, perfectly fluffy grains of rice were cut with sweet and crunchy bits of Asian pear, subtly sweet hunks of crab, and a funky house-made XO sauce that managed to hit all of my taste buds in unison.

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The fried rice was just the start of the meal, which seamlessly blended ingredients from the Midwest, the South, and the Asian pantry into a menu of steady hits. Crispy pork ribs -- a nod to Kansas City's barbecue culture -- braised in fish sauce, fried, and topped with a fish sauce caramelized lime, and crushed peanuts that would be at home on any Vietnamese-inspired menu sit infallibly next to a house-made bread basket offering buttermilk biscuits that one might expect from their favorite Southern spot. The Korean-inspired fried chicken ssam, served with a pile of crisp lettuce leaves for wrapping, quick-pickled radishes for crunch, and a *gochujang*-like house-made hot sauce for a punch of umami, was an easy favorite.

Corvino may very well be the most ambitious restaurant to have ever opened in this Midwestern city. Not satisfied with only cooking for the Supper Club, the 72-seat dining room in a cavernous 6,000 square-foot space, Corvino also built an 18-seat tasting room cranking out multi-course tasting menus nightly. Front and center in the main dining room is a vaulted stage showcasing a steady stream of live music performances from Kansas City's vibrant local talent pool. The Supper Club also transitions to a full-blown late-night menu serving a whole new genus of food after 10pm. Did I mention this is Michael Corvino's first restaurant?



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For Corvino -- who ran the kitchen at the lauded Kansas City institution the American -- the decision to have both tasting and a la carte menus was a selfish one. "When you're sitting there doing a tasting menu all day, you taste a lot of the components [constantly]," he says. "But, it's not all necessarily really craveable food, right?" So he set out to also cook a menu of dishes he would want to eat every day. "It's dangerous," Corvino adds with a laugh.

For all of the entangled flavors Corvino manages to create, the restaurant's most talked-about item is found on the late-night menu, simply called "cheeseburger." Eschewing the display of burger one-upmanship restaurants have been competing in lately, Corvino keeps it simple. Smashed double chuck patties are thoroughly caramelized and overlaid with melted slices of Muenster, stacked under a few pickles and a bit of charred onion on a squishy, but toasted sesame seed bun that's been lightly lathered with creamy aioli. It's best consumed at one of Corvino's almost too-spacious tables, taking in the leviathan painted ravens that adorn the walls (Corvino

translates to "raven" in Italian), and listening to a local jazz artist croon on stage. There's a vegetarian version of the late-night burger that swaps the beef for an equally caramelized mushroom for less meat-inclined diners. We ordered the burgers — one beef, one mushroom — just 15 minutes after wrapping up a proper dinner when we heard that the couple at the table next to us visited the restaurant nearly every week, sometimes more, for the late-night menu.

*Corvino seamlessly blends ingredients from the Midwest, the South, and the Asian pantry into a menu of steady hits.*



While it has quickly become an integral part of the Kansas City restaurant scene in the eight months that Corvino has been open, the restaurant almost didn't open in Missouri. "My wife and I were really looking to open in Seattle," says Corvino. "We even took three trips to Seattle to look around neighborhoods and buildings. But then we looked at each other and were like, 'What are we doing? We can't do this here.'" The couple returned back home to Kansas City to double down on planning the restaurant even though they were unsure their shared plates concept would take off. "In this city people tend to get an appetizer, an entree, and a dessert," says Corvino. But as I watch the couple two tables down split every dish that lands in front of them amidst the dull roar of a packed house, it's clear Corvino will be just fine.

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[Khushbu Shah](#) is the Senior Food Features Editor at Thrillist. She highly recommends you get the fried rice and both late-night burgers at Corvino. Follow her travels to the best restaurants around the country

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