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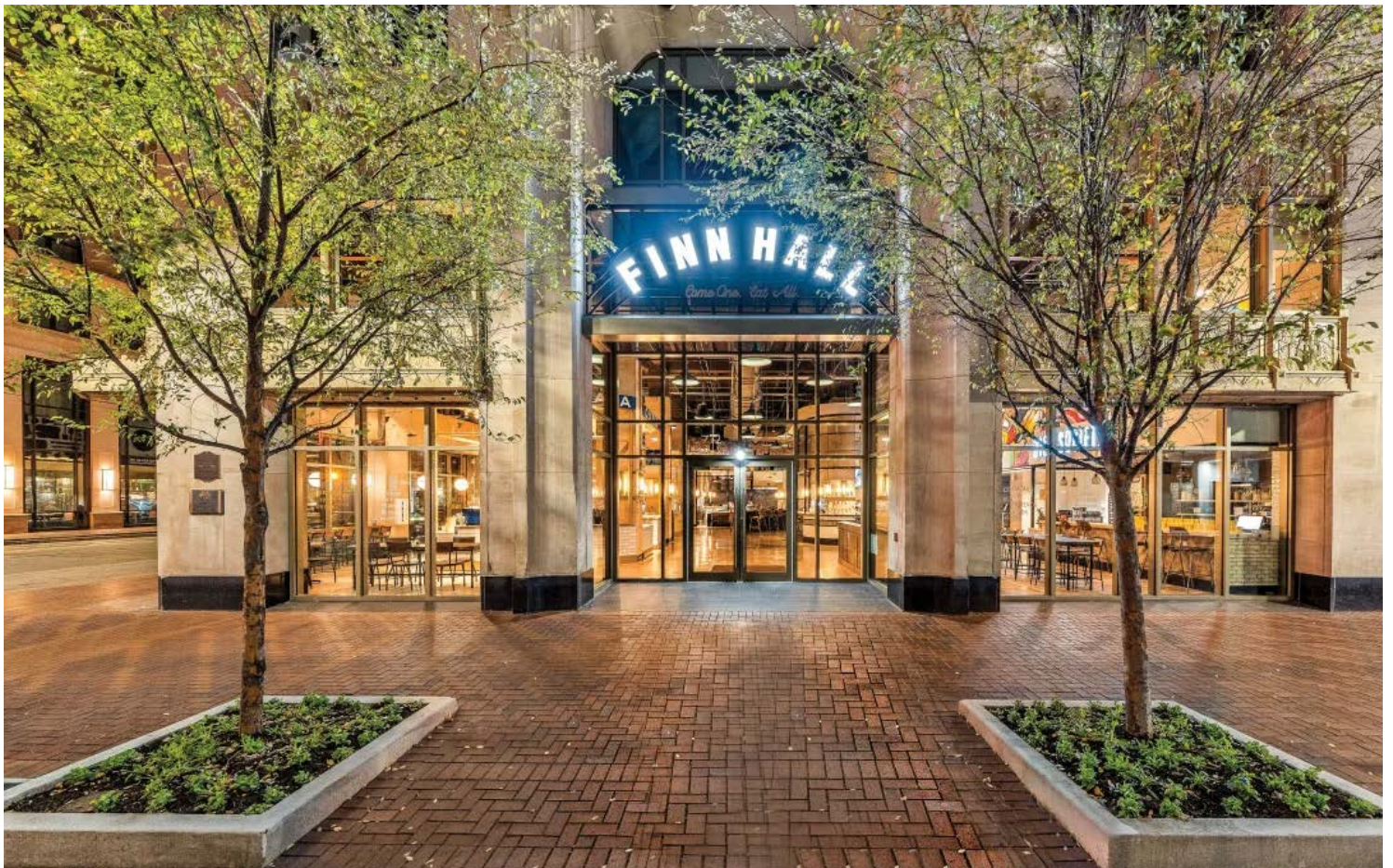
DESTINATION: DOWNTOWN

Where to Eat Downtown Right Now

Downtown is now a foodie paradise.

By [Timothy Malcolm](#) • 6/25/2019 at 12:00am • Published in the [July 2019](#) issue of *Houstonia*

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THE NEW FINN HALL, DOWNTOWN HOUSTON, MONDAY NIGHT. Sports fans are gathered at the bar to watch a game, co-workers grab dinner at a high-top, and solo diners finish projects over a quick dinner, whether from local favorite [Goode Company](#), [Taqueria](#), spicy Szechuan standout [Mala Sichuan](#), fresh-and-local concept [Dish Society](#), or popular food truck [Craft Burger](#). It's a busy place, and for downtown H-Town that's a little ... new.

For a long time the area was something of a no-man's land when it came to dining options. There have always been stalwarts, of course. The lunch crowd relies on the **Downtown Tunnels** and [Treebeards](#), which has been serving red beans and rice to workers for 40 years. "There was actually a building right next to our Market Square location that fell down right after I started," laughs Jolie Stinneford, president of the Treebeards restaurant group, chatting about the wasteland that long surrounded the place.

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The theater crowd has long depended on jovial Irish/Italian hybrid [Birraporetti's](#), which shares a building with the Alley, while a few of the other spots—among them Beard winner Robert del Grande's new-American fine-dining spot [The Grove](#) and Tilman Fertitta's [Vic & Anthony's Steakhouse](#)—have also managed to find a foothold over the past decade. But mostly the terrain has been inhospitable.

That is, until lately. Restaurateurs and—this is key—restaurant-goers have been positively descending on the area. "We think downtown has exploded," says David Goronkin, president of Oz Rey, which operates Finn Hall, pointing to the onslaught of new high-rise residential developments and the increase in tourism, both factors in the Austin-based company's decision to invest here. "There is an increased level of vibrancy, and there's a draw downtown that I don't think has been there for many years."



The new Dish Society at Finn Hall

IMAGE: [STRATA VISUALS](#)

The list of established Houston restaurateurs who long shied away from downtown proper, but have finally decided to venture in, isn't short. It includes not only Levi Goode of Goode Co. (the aforementioned Taqueria at Finn Hall) but also Jonathan Horowitz of Legacy Restaurants ([Ninfa's](#)), Marcus Davis of the Breakfast Klub (upscale soul-food restaurant [Kulture](#)), and Tracy Vaught and Hugo Ortega of H-Town Restaurant Group ([Xochi](#)).

"We weighed the move to downtown very carefully," says Vaught, whose group owns acclaimed restaurants including Hugo's and Backstreet Café in addition to Xochi inside the Marriott Marquis Houston, which was nominated for a James Beard Award for Best New Restaurant last year. "The location we ultimately chose was near the convention center, a number of hotels, Minute Maid Park, the Toyota Center, BBVA Compass Stadium, and Discovery Green. We are in a hotel with 1,000 rooms. All these things tipped the scales for us."

Finn Hall, by the way, is part of a veritable invasion of downtown food halls. Open since 2016, [Conservatory](#) is an underground lair boasting six popular food concepts, among them [The Pho Spot](#) and [Arte Pizzeria](#). [Soon-to-launch Understory](#) at Capitol Tower will feature an ultramodern design and tenants including [Ninfa's new Mama Ninfa's Tacos y Tortas concept](#), plus an outpost of [Mona Fresh Italian Food](#). And [Bravery Chef Hall](#), set to open in 2019 inside [luxury high-rise Aris Market Square](#), will include a wine bar, a molecular cocktail bar, and exciting eateries such as coastal Latin concept [Nuna](#) from David Guerrero of foodie favorite Andes Cafe.

And in what is, perhaps, the biggest indicator of a downtown dining renaissance, *Treebeards*—yes, *Treebeards*, long the near-exclusive domain of area office workers, open only for weekday lunch—is now open on Saturdays.

But because Stinneford has seen it all—downtown at its emptiest—she's proceeding with care. "There are a lot of things changing, and the city is trying," she says. "I'm cautiously optimistic. That's the catchphrase, right?"

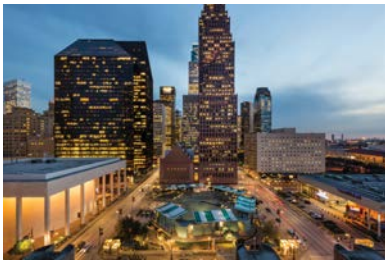
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447 Heights Boulevard, Houston, TX 77007

Phone: 713-862-4570 • Fax: 713-862-4606



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