

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
**DOUGLAS
MERRIAM**

BURGER KINGS

**HOW NEW MEXICO
BECAME THE UNDISPUTED
CHAMPION OF THE**

GREEN CHILE

CHEESEBURGER.

**PLUS TWENTY SPOTS YOU NEED
TO TRY RIGHT NOW!**

BY MOLLY BOYLE

ADDITIONAL STORIES BY DIANA ALBA SOULAR,
ASHLEY M. BIGGERS, LYNN CLINE, UNGELBAH DÁVILA-SHIVERS,
KAREN FISCHER, STEVE GLEYDURA, AND CHEF JOHNNY VEE



The green chile
cheeseburger from
Santa Fe's Bang Bite
food truck is an
absolute handful.



Blake's Lotaburger was the first restaurant chain to promote green chile on hamburgers, according to company president Brian Rule.

THE ORIGIN STORY

No one can say for certain who was the first to slap green chile and cheese on a hamburger. (We can say that this person was a genius.) Most experts agree that the Original Owl Bar & Café, in tiny San Antonio, New Mexico (pop. 11), has one of the most convincing arguments for being the first to sell them.

Janice Argabright
(third-generation Owl Bar owner-operator)

It used to be a mercantile store in the 1930s. My great-grandfather sold cold cuts and cheese. The atomic scientists at the Trinity Site would come in from the desert, and they would want hot food, beer, and whiskey. That's how we got started in 1945. My grandfather used to make the cheeseburgers with a side of picante sauce—red and green chile together. A lot of the farmers around here grew green chile, so he started using fresh green

chile. That was a big hit.

Rowena Baca
(second-generation Owl Bar owner-operator)
I was born in 1934 and went to school in San Antonio and then Socorro High School. Nobody knew what a green chile cheeseburger was when I was growing up.

ARGABRIGHT: One day my grandfather didn't have a dishwasher. He got upset, so he just threw the chile on the meat and cheese and

started doing it like that. So we think we invented the green chile cheeseburger.

BACA: The rivalry with the Buckhorn Tavern [kitty-corner from the Owl] started when they saw that my daddy was making a lot of money. They wanted in on the deal, so they started making chile burgers, too.

Paul Harden
(secretary, Socorro

County Historical Society)
Miguel Olguin's son, Manny, took over the Buckhorn Tavern in 1945. He quickly added a small restaurant to provide food to the Trinity Base travelers and the soldiers. It also seems this was triggered by seeing the Owl Bar being built across the street. Both restaurants served green chile hamburgers. I was never able to prove definitively which

opened first. It appears to have been within weeks of each other.

Cheryl Alters Jamison
(James Beard Award-winning cookbook author and creator of New Mexico's Green Chile Cheeseburger Trail)
It's a little bit like the breakfast burrito. Of course people had eaten tortillas wrapped around eggs and chile before. It's

Plan your trip along New Mexico's Green Chile Cheeseburger Trail at nmmag.us/burgertrail.

the same with a burger. Somebody was putting that together, but to actually make it a "green chile cheeseburger" and promote it that way, I wouldn't dispute the Owl's claim.

Fernando Olea

(chef-owner of Sazón and former chef-owner of Bert's Burger Bowl, 1991–2015, both in Santa Fe)
Everybody says they created it. We used to say we did at Bert's Burger Bowl. In Santa Fe, we were the creators of the chile cheeseburger.

Danise Coon

(senior research specialist, Chile Pepper Institute, Las Cruces)
I grew up on a farm in Española, and we always grew chile. Putting green chile on our burgers in the summertime was just a no-brainer. It's been a New Mexico thing for many, many years.

THE EVOLUTION

As more restaurants created their own versions, green chile cheeseburgers steadily won over

the hearts and stomachs of New Mexicans. By the early 2000s, out-of-staters were taking notice. The green chile cheeseburger was ready for its worldwide close-up.

Brian Rule

(president, Blake's Lotaburger)
The first Lotaburger opened on a warm July day in 1952. The original Lota Burgers did not come with green chile. A few years after, Blake Chanslor witnessed a customer putting green chile on a Lota Burger. Blake tried the condiment and loved the flavor combination.

OLEA: I ate my first green chile cheeseburgers at Blake's Lotaburger. I loved the double meat and double cheese. Coming from Mexico to Minneapolis and then Santa Fe, it was incredible to eat chile. It felt like home.

JAMISON: I moved to Santa Fe in 1980. People kept telling me I needed to try Bert's Burger Bowl. It was the green chile cheeseburger with barbecue sauce. It was a revelation.

Bonnie Eckre

(owner, Santa Fe Bite, and former owner, Bobcat Bite)
I joined Bobcat as a server in '89, and the green chile cheeseburger was the most popular menu item. When John [Eckre] and I took over Bobcat Bite in 2001, that's when I feel the green chile cheeseburger really took off. George Motz, out of New York, who wrote *Hamburger America*, put John and me on the map. We started getting phone calls from all over the nation.

Matt DiGregory

(owner, Range Café, Bernalillo, Albuquerque, and Los Lunas)
I remember when the McDonald's in Bernalillo opened in the early '90s. Locals would say, "You can't get green chile on your burger at McDonald's, how ridiculous is that?" But then even McDonald's got hip to it and offered green chile as a side. I think Blake's had something to do with it, as a New Mexico chain.

JAMISON: I was appointed by former governor Bill Richardson as

a culinary tourism consultant. I'd been bugging him about the fact that I didn't think New Mexico promoted its culinary resources adequately. When we came up with the idea for the Green Chile Cheeseburger Trail in 2008, it was really something for everybody. It's turned into one of the iconic tourism trails in the country.

THE HOLY TRINITY

Everyone has their own idea of what makes

a perfect green chile cheeseburger. But certain points cannot be disputed.

ARGABRIGHT: We get our chile from around the area and from Hatch. We buy it fresh and do our special little thing with it. It's a secret, how we cook it.

OLEA: We used Hatch chile, roasted and diced. We cooked it on the stove with onions, garlic, some oregano. No cumin. Cumin is in Texas cuisine, and they think that's

the only spice that exists.

COON: The Chile Pepper Institute released two varieties—one is NuMex Heritage Big Jim and the other is NuMex Heritage 6–4, both have five times more flavor compounds than their predecessors. People really love those. They're perfect for burgers.

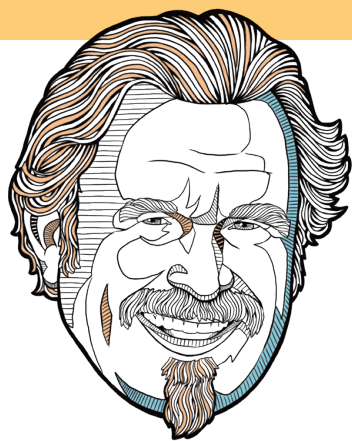
RULE: Blake's Lotaburger has our own proprietary cultivar of Hatch green chile, so it has the absolute best flavor.



"Everybody says they created it," says Chef Fernando Olea.



Sparky's Burgers, BBQ & Espresso flame-grills its hamburgers.



ARTISTIC TOUCH

For 30 years, painter and sculptor THOM "TEX" WHEELER has been meeting his friends at Ricky's Restaurant Comidas Nuevo Mexicanas, in Taos, for the signature Halo Burger (\$7.50). "It's big and meaty, like we like it," he says. "The juicy patty is bigger than the bun with plenty of green chiles. The fries are smothered in green chiles, too."—*Chef Johnny Vee*

JAMISON: The meatiness, the beefiness, getting a good, crisp sear on a burger and still having it juicy in its interior. The soft, melty cheese and its gooeyness; the sharpness and full flavor of the green chile on top of it. Those things need to be the predominant flavors.

OLEA: Eighty percent lean meat, 20 percent fat. The other thing that's very important is to do it on an open fire and a grill. That smoky, charred flavor, that's what makes a burger.

BONNIE ECKRE: We started grinding our own beef. It's from Western Way, out of Moriarty. It's the

traditional chuck shoulder and sirloin—85/15 is the fat content.

JOHN ECKRE: I built my own cast-iron grills. All our meat is cooked on cast iron.

ARGABRIGHT: We have a seasoned, aged grill.

BACA: The grill's about 75 years old, I guess. We've never changed it.

JAMISON: You can make a great burger on a griddle, but I favor a grill. If I want to pull out all the stops, I'll do it over a wood fire in my outdoor fireplace. That's the ultimate.

DIGREGORY: I'd always been kind

of a diehard "real cheese" person. But at places like Sparky's, in Hatch, they have American cheese on their burger. The best ones all have it.

JAMISON: People sometimes try to upgrade the cheese to something sharp, but that's not a cheese that melts well. A mild cheddar or Jack, I like. To my mind, one of the only decent uses for American cheese is on a burger.

OLEA: American cheese—classic American cheese. That's the way everybody loves it. Your yellow cheese with your nice meat, salt, and pepper, that's all you need.

BONNIE ECKRE: An American and white Swiss blend is our traditional cheese.

THE MAGIC

Green chile cheeseburgers transcend menus. Every place that serves them has its own extra-special element beyond the burgers.

BACA: You know how some customers come into the Owl? In an urn. They bring the whole family after the funeral of their grandpa or grandma. They put the urn on the table and say, "This was her favorite place." A lot of people have done that.

ARGABRIGHT:

Besides the cheeseburgers, the mahogany bar is our pride and joy. It was salvaged from the fire that destroyed Gus Hilton's saloon. The Hilton mercantile and saloon was about a quarter of a mile from where we are. It took a group of men two days to walk the bar down from the original place to our place. I think they stopped every little while for hamburgers and beer.

BACA: Can you imagine all the people who have sat

there? Movie stars, governors.

BONNIE ECKRE: Santa Fe Bite has come to be employee-owned. John and I felt like it was time for Angie Mason and Armando Rivas [manager and chef, respectively] to have the same opportunity that we did, to continue family traditions. That's what I feel in my heart that Bobcat Bite, and now Santa Fe Bite, has always stood for.

ARGABRIGHT: You've got to treat your employees like family—and cook with love.

SPARKY'S BURGERS, BBQ & ESPRESSO

With its jubilant jumble of kooky Americana—giant statues of Colonel Sanders, the A&W Burger Family, an alien robot—you can't miss Sparky's, in Hatch. Good thing, too. Burger buffs rank Sparky's World Famous (\$13) among the state's best. "It's a simple burger," says co-owner Teako Nunn, of the seven-ounce patty seasoned with a secret family recipe. "That's why it's so good." **Try this:** a side of pinto beans (\$2), soaked overnight, slow-cooked, then dressed with hot sauce and a house seasoning that includes chile and onions. "They're fabulous," Nunn says. *115 Franklin St., Hatch; 575-267-4222, sparkysburgers.com* ●●● —*Lynn Cline*



Pajarito Brewpub & Grill

When owner Patrick Mockler-Wood calls Pajarito Brewpub's Green Chile Pub Burger (\$19) a "smash burger," it's not what you think. This is not a crispy-thin patty. It's a behemoth. A half pound of beef from Moriarty's Haynes Cattle Company gets stuffed—yes, stuffed—with Tucumcari Mountain Cheese Factory's green chile cheddar, topped with Young Guns' Hatch chile, and placed on a bed of house-made pickles and a butter bun. "You have to smash everything down just to fit your mouth around a bite," says Mockler-Wood. While the



"This burger is meant to be enjoyed," says owner Patrick Mockler-Wood.

Los Alamos staple has had more than 20 versions since opening in November 2012, this green chile cheeseburger has become a top-selling fixture on a pub menu that includes smoked chicken wings, Chimayó red chile beef nachos, and a Sidewinder Reuben. "Even if you're full, you end up

finishing the whole thing," he says.

Try this: Upgrade to the truffle fries (\$5), hand-cut daily and tossed with Parmesan cheese, parsley, and truffle oil. "People gobble them up," he says. *614 Trinity Dr., Los Alamos; 505-662-8877, pajaritobrewpubandgrill.com* ●●●● —*Steve Gleydura*

KEY

COST

< \$10 ●
\$10–\$15 ●●
\$15+ ●●●

BURGER TYPE

ROADSIDE ●
CAFÉ/DINER ●●
BAR/GRILL ●●●
GOURMET ●●●●
FOOD TRUCK ●●●●●

EL PARASOL

It's the green chile cheeseburger (\$7.25) of Sunday afternoon picnic tables crammed with 10 of your nearest and dearest. It's the one that emerges hot from a bag at the drive-in movie or gets devoured at the kitchen table at the end of a long workweek. At El Parasol's six locations in northern New Mexico—including the original roadside stand on Santa Cruz Road in Española—a quick stop pays off in ½ pound of beefy, fiery, melty dividends. The Atencio family's commitment to classic norteño fare extends to its quintessential green chile cheeseburger, simply listed as "hamburger" on the menu. Unhook the wrapper from its toothpick and dive into a hand-formed, glitteringly juicy patty with the works: always piquant diced green chile (sometimes with exciting flashes of red), gooey American cheese, shredded lettuce, tomato, onion, pickles, and a swath of sharp yellow mustard. **Try this:** Adding red chile cheese fries with ground beef and beans (\$6.50) to your order makes it Christmas any time of year. *Various locations. elparasol.com* ●● —*Molly Boyle*

505 BURGERS & WINGS

In 2011, Morgan Newsom wanted to create a dining experience that was hard to find in Gallup: fresh takes on American and New Mexican roadside classics. Served on a sturdy pretzel bun, the half-pound burgers nod to cities across the state. While traditionalists can opt for the Hatch Burger, the Gallup Burger (\$11.75) remixes an old-school patty melt with green chile flair. “Patty melts were always delicious around Gallup,” Newsom says. But it’s the accompanying wet fries—hand-cut and topped with gravy—that make you feel small-town special. “It’s a Gallup thing,” he says. **Try this:** fresh-brewed iced tea (\$3). 1981 NM 602, Gallup; 505-722-9311, the505burgers.com ●●\$ —Karen Fischer



A whole chile graces Black Bird Saloon's El Chivato.

BLACK BIRD SALOON

When owners Patrick and Kelly Torres developed the Turquoise Trail outpost's El Chivato burger (\$10), they opted for a whole roasted Hatch green chile rather than diced. “We wanted it to look and feel a little different,” says Patrick. That’s the Black Bird’s ambience in a piñon shell. The circa-1880s former mercantile, complete with a standing bar and a potbelly stove, blasts customers back to Cerrillos’s boomtown heyday. But El Chivato is a thoroughly modern creation. “It’s our science,” says Torres. That means thick, grass-fed Angus beef, white American cheese, that entire chile, shredded lettuce, diced onions, and a proprietary mustard-and-mayo combo on a toasted bun from Albuquerque’s Fano Bread Company. The burger’s name comes from a nickname for Billy the Kid from the movie *Young Guns*, filmed in Cerrillos—not that you’ll need a reminder of the Wild West when you eat it. **Try this:** Crow’s Nest shoestring fries (\$3.50) are a melt-in-your-mouth accompaniment. 28 Main St., Cerrillos; 505-438-1821, blackbirdsaloon.com ●●\$ —MB



FAN FAVORITE

Las Cruces native and New Mexico United midfielder **JOSH SUGGS** scores one for the home team’s World Famous (\$13) at Sparky’s Burgers, BBQ & Espresso, in Hatch. “If you want a great green chile cheeseburger, you should go to the source,” he says. “Their cheeseburger is simple and is topped with green chile that is grown within a few miles of the restaurant.” —JV



LAGUNA BURGER

In 2006, a snack bar opened in a Laguna Pueblo grocery store. Using beef ground fresh in the meat department and handpicked chiles, the burgers gained favor with travelers near and far. “It became a destination,” says Ryan Westerman, area manager for Laguna Burger, which now includes stand-alone outposts in Laguna, Río Puerco, and Albuquerque. The namesake Laguna Burger (\$11) still gets its proprietary seasoning, special grind, and chopped red and green Hatch chile that results in deep earthiness and signature heat. “There’s still that care,” he says. **Try this:** the Duke (\$7.50), one of the Albuquerque location’s signature adult milkshakes. “It’s almost like a White Russian.” Various locations, thelagunaburger.com ●●\$ —KF



You might need a knife and fork for High Point Grill’s green chile cheeseburger.

High Point Grill

“If we had a state food, it would be the green chile cheeseburger,” says Mike White, owner, executive chef, and creator of the High Point

Grill’s 2019 State Fair runner-up burger. “The care we put into each layer and each ingredient puts ours right at the top in the state. It’s spicy, buttery, and smoky.” The Albuquerque eatery’s Southwest Burger (\$17) has been

a crowd-pleaser since the *Cheers*-like restaurant opened in 2015 with self-taught White at the helm. The burger begins with Akaushi beef, one of four Japanese breeds known as Wagyu. The thick-cut patty gets pressed

with Chimayó red chile powder for a charred, smoky flavor. It’s topped with extra-hot Hatch green chile, sharp cheddar cheese, and more Chimayó chile powder. When melted with the cheese, the chile looks like lava

running onto the toasted brioche bun. “I just get in the kitchen and start playing,” White says of his recipe. “I want to inspire others to play with food. It’s a creative outlet for me.” **Try this:** For its “mountain of fries,” High

Point Grill hand-cuts potatoes (\$5) every day and double-fries them to create a soft yet crunchy shoestring finish. 9780 Coors Blvd. NW, Ste. A, Albuquerque; 505-312-8519, highpointgrill.com ●●\$ —Ashley M. Biggers



PLAZA CAFÉ SOUTHSIDE

Tortillas rule the menu at Santa Fe's Plaza Café Southside, where family recipes have been passed down through generations. From breakfast burritos to enchiladas, this New Mexican staple is as versatile as our green chile. It makes perfect sense to combine the tortilla and green chile with a burger, in a delicious riff on a classic. "Everybody loves tortillas," says General Manager Belinda Marshall, whose family has long owned the Plaza Café and Plaza Café Southside. "We slap a hamburger patty in there, add cheese and chile, and it's a tortilla burger (\$16.50)." The patty, a proprietary blend of New Mexico grass-fed chuck and brisket, is folded into a tortilla and smothered with Hatch green chile. Diners say the combo is out of this world. "That's what I hear all the time," Marshall says. **Try this:** the Cool & Hot Margarita (\$12), made with house-infused jalapeño tequila and served over ice. "It is cool, until you drink it," Marshall says. 3466 Zafarano Dr., Santa Fe; 505-424-0755, plazacafesouth.com ●●● —LC

HI-D-HO DRIVE-IN

This vintage drive-in restaurant, known for its from-scratch creations, has been in owner Mika Myers's family since the 1970s. "It's like a mom-and-pop Sonic," Myers says of the Alamogordo joint, which opened in 1952. "We do everything

from cutting our tomatoes to making our own taco shells." Burger patties are pressed fresh and use a recipe created by Myers's grandmother, Patricia Dulany. Try the signature, double-patty Tiger Burger (\$12) with garlic-seasoned green chile. "It's big and mouthwatering,

like something you'd make on your grill," she says. **Try this:** a cherry limeade (large, \$2.34) with house-made simple syrup and fresh-squeezed lime juice. 414 S. White Sands Blvd., Alamogordo; 575-437-6400, nmmag.us /HiDHo ●● —AMB



TV WINNER

As host of KRQE's *New Mexico Living*, CHAD BRUMMETT has interviewed bushels of chefs and tried 40 acres' worth of green chile cheeseburgers. But if forced to pick, his favorite is a classic Laguna Burger (\$11). "I don't know what magic they work into their patty, but it has the best flavor," he says. "They're proof positive that you don't need to go over the top with gimmicks." —JV



Hi-D-Ho Drive-in's Tiger Burger is a double-fisted beauty.

SMOKING GRIDDLE

A culinary school grad with a degree in automotive technology, Sebastian Esquivel opened his Clovis food truck in September with West Texas-style barbecue, burgers, and hot dogs. "It's the literal meaning of grilling and chilling," he says. Case in point: His Green Chile Katso Burger (\$9)—a six-ounce smash-seared patty with pepper Jack, green chiles, and a smoked queso sauce. **Try this:** Smokehouse Fried Mac and Cheese (\$10), a blend of Gouda, pepper Jack, sharp cheddar, and green chiles that's smoked, breaded, and deep-fried. 2320 N. Main Street, Clovis; 575-404-9481, thesmokinggriddle.com ●● —SG

Jake's Café

It's almost required that an American diner have a cheeseburger. In Las Cruces, there's an extra stipulation: It must include Hatch green chile. Jacob Harkness is well aware of this unwritten rule. After launching Jake's in the village of Doña Ana 15

years ago, Harkness relocated to Las Cruces in 2017. The café sports a 1950s vibe, with images of Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley on the walls and stained-glass lampshades over the tables. In developing his classic smash burger (\$10.50), Harkness starts with diced Sandía chiles—hot, light on bitterness, and slightly sweet—from

Hatch's Young Guns. A quarter pound of locally raised ground beef gets flattened, seasoned, grilled, flipped, seasoned again, and grilled on the other side. Initially, though, he had trouble finding the right bun. "You could have a good burger, put it on a bad bun and it makes a bad burger," he says. The one crafted in-house falls

"between a brioche and a Hawaiian sweet roll." American cheese, lettuce, tomato, pickles, and diced onion tie it together. "I like to serve what I eat at home," he says. **Try this:** the off-menu tater tots (\$6.50) smothered in green chile and house-made cheese sauce. 1340 E. Lohman Ave., Las Cruces; 575-523-5770, jakeslc.com ●● —Diana Alba Soular



JOSEPH'S CULINARY PUB

Chef Joseph Wrede proves there's more to burgers than beef with his Santa Fe pub's extra-full-flavor NM Lamb Burger with Green Chile & Sheep Cheese (\$18). "We're in lamb country in New Mexico," says Wrede, who uses it throughout his menu. "Lamb has such a long history here, as does green chile—it's the perfect pairing." Plus, using the milder sheep's cheese allows the chile to really stand out, creating one baa-d burger. **Try this:** Add his duck fat potato chips to your order (\$3) and finish with the decadent Butterscotch Pudding with Caramel Sauce (\$10). 428 Agua Fria St., Santa Fe; 505-982-1272, josephsofsantafe.com ●●● —JV



A classic green chile cheeseburger completes the throwback vibes at Jake's Café.



A local elk burger meets Asian influences in De la Tierra's version.

De la Tierra Restaurant

Technically, the Elk Wagyu Burger (\$36) at De la

Tierra Restaurant, in Taos, is a green chile cheeseburger. But it's not like any New Mexico cheeseburger you've ever had before. Seared, then topped with miso-glazed

smoked pork belly and tempura Hatch chile, it is blanketed in an Irish white cheddar béchamel sauce and served on a brioche bun. "It's definitely more of a fork-and-knife burger," says

Executive Chef Cristina Martinez. It's also the kind of elevated dish you'd expect from the acclaimed restaurant of El Monte Sagrado resort and spa. "The burger has that regional

plus international influence, which I think people can identify with," she says. **Try this:** truffle Parmesan fries (included). "That's an extra little indulgence," Martinez says,

adding that a spicy prickly pear margarita (\$13) will enhance the experience. 317 Kit Carson Road, Taos; 575-758-3502, elmontesagrado.com ●●●● —LC

The Skillet

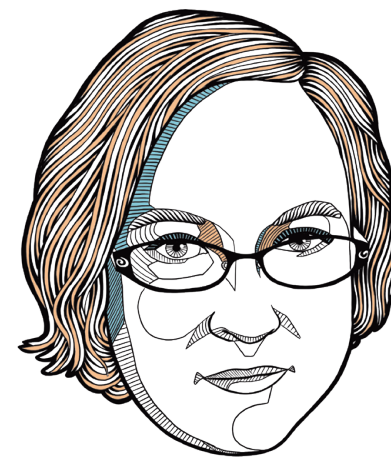
As soon as you step inside the Skillet, you know you're in for a wild ride. Housed in the historic Taichert Wool Warehouse, the fantastical Las Vegas, New Mexico, restaurant is the brick-and-mortar incarnation of Isaac and Shawna Sandoval's incredibly popular food truck. The crowds come for the couple's fun, colorful art that

animates the interior as much as for the Number Two Combo (\$12). "People tell us all the time that they'll travel here from all over the state because they've had our burger once and they can't stop thinking about it," says Shawna. The secret lies in the blend of old-fashioned ingredients. "We took inspiration from classic diner burgers, so we use thin beef patties and good old American cheese," she says.

"Simple is better." **Try this:** the Townie margarita (\$10), with a triple squeeze of citrus juices, plus agave nectar, mint, and silver tequila. "It's just the refreshing thing to help wash down a nice, greasy burger," Shawna says. 619 12th St., Las Vegas; 505-563-0477, giant-skillet.com ●●● —LC



The Skillet's fun decor amplifies the enjoyment of its diner-style burgers.



BRAND AMBASSADOR

After 13 years as the executive director of the Western Heritage Museum and Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame, in Hobbs, **ERIN ANDERSON** is still learning to love our state's favorite condiment. "I hate to admit that I haven't fully gotten into the spirit of the green chile yet," she says, deferring to museum curator Kim Claunch's favorite—a burger with green chile and jalapeño (\$6.29) at Kendall's Kountry Meat Market, in Hobbs. "Their burgers are juicy, and they are true masters with the use of green chile." —JV



BANG BITE FILLING STATION

If your idea of a perfect burger has the fillings falling out of the bun with each bite and a good amount of juice and fat running down your arm, make a mad dash to this food truck parked at Santa Fe Brewing Company's Brakeroom location. The basic Green Chile Burger (\$15) is stellar. But why stop there when you can add Amish blue cheese, chipotle aioli, roasted five-chile blend, fried egg, ham, bacon, pulled pork, maple-bacon jam, or green chile barbecue sauce? "We only ever cook them to order," says owner Enrique Guerrero, "just the way you like it." **Try this:** The Bang Fries (large, \$15) are swimming in "Trailer-Made" gooey cheese, bacon, and New Mexico green chile. 510 Galisteo St., Santa Fe; 505-469-2345, nmmag.us/bangbite ●●● —JV



Sugar Nymphs Bistro serves up a black bean burger with green chile benefits.

Sugar Nymphs Bistro

Tucked away in Peñasco, on the High Road to Taos, Sugar Nymphs is a rustic food-lover's retreat. Housed in a whimsical building painted with colorful murals, the cozy restaurant offers a fantastic green chile cheeseburger, but even

meat lovers rave about the Meatless Black Bean Burger (\$13), topped with caramelized red onion, Hatch green chile, Tillamook sharp cheddar, ripe tomato, and mayo. Yet there's a secret about owner and chef Ki Holste's veggie patty: Despite attempts to craft her own, she prefers Morning-Star Farms' chipotle black bean

burger. "I have people tell me every day that they buy the same product, and it doesn't taste like ours," she says. Holste's patty gets the star treatment, grilled on a small flattop that creates a super-crunchy crust, then served on house-made focaccia. "Even when it's not on the menu, in the evening and on Sundays, people

still order it," she says. **Try this:** the house-made gingerade (\$3.50), a restorative blend of ginger simple syrup, fresh lemon juice, and sparkling water. "But you don't want to walk out of the door without trying some carrot cake," she says. 15046 NM 75, Peñasco; 575-587-0311, sugarnymphs.com ●●● —LC

ANNEX BAR AND GRILL

Decked out in vintage bar signs, car and cowboy memorabilia, and a windsurfing board that hangs from the ceiling, this Logan convenience store/gas station is one of the last places to get your fill of New Mexican chile before sliding into Texas. The signature single (\$11) or double (\$15) Annex Slide comes open-faced and smothered with green, red, or Christmas. "You can't go wrong with a burger," says Manager Megan Vigil, "and New Mexico chile sauce gives it a spin." **Try this:** house-made fries smothered in Annex queso (\$9). 101 US 54, Logan; 575-487-4745, annexbarandgrill.com ●●● —AMB

COURTESY ANNEX BAR AND GRILL



Walk up to the window and order a Benny Burger.

BENNY'S MEXICAN KITCHEN

Since opening in 1972, Benny's New Mexican Kitchen has bought its New Mexico-raised beef from family-owned Nelson's Meats, in Albuquerque.

And the green chile? It's grown right down the road on farms in Socorro and Valencia counties. "It's the hottest chile that they have," says Benny Zamora Jr., who took over the Bosque

Farms spot, with its walk-up window, from his father in 1994. "It's not unbearably hot," he says. "It blends in nicely." Maybe that's why the signature double-meat Benny Burger

(\$8.50), with green chile, cheese, and guacamole, bursts with homegrown flavor. "I want people to be able to taste and feel it," he says. **Try this:** Even if you're not a vegetarian, the deep-fried bean burrito (\$2.60) will have you coming back for more. 1675 Bosque Farms Blvd., Bosque Farms; 505-869-2210, bennysmexicankitchen.food83.com ●● —Ungelbah Dávila-Shivers



RAIL BONDS

Host of the annual Fred Harvey Weekend in Santa Fe, author and Philadelphia resident **STEPHEN FRIED** began visiting San Antonio in the 1990s for the green chile cheeseburger (\$6.50) at the Owl Bar & Café, "just like the guys on the way to test the bomb," he says. "It was pretty great, but probably not the best thing to eat before the rest of our pilgrimage to Roswell." Now, he's a big fan of the Harvey Smashburger (\$10) at Bar Castañeda, in Las Vegas's onetime Fred Harvey hotel. —JV

ALMA STORE & GRILL

Sixty-six miles northwest of Silver City, the Alma Store & Grill rewards you for exploring the Gila National Forest—or being savvy enough to pull off US 180 for a pit stop. After buying the café and store with her husband, oldest son, and daughter-in-law in 2005, Lori Faust hit a homey and hearty sweet spot of New Mexican breakfast and lunch favorites, sandwiches, and the top-selling green chile cheeseburger (\$10.50). "I didn't want anything fancy like sticking cheese inside," she says. Instead, her hand-shaped five-ounce patties get grilled and then served on a toasted bun with American cheese and diced Hatch green chile. "It has that smoky, fresh, green taste." **Try this:** a Coke in the classic glass bottle. "We serve them ice-cold." 4592 US 180, Glenwood; 575-539-2640, facebook.com/AlmaGrillNM ●●● —DAS

THE EL ROI CAFE

The El Roi wants to Indigenize your green chile cheeseburger game. When owner Fabby Espitia-Archuleta opened the Albuquerque diner with her husband, Joshua Archuleta, in May 2021, they set out to help at-risk community members gain job skills. The result is a menu of traditional New Mexican and Native American comfort foods, including a frybread green chile cheeseburger (\$13). "The frybread gives it so much more flavor," says Fabby, who emphasizes that a sopaipilla and frybread are not the same. "We do a traditional frybread from scratch," using a recipe from Joshua's family in Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo. "There's not enough Native restaurants," she says. "So that's something we are trying to grow." **Try this:** Chef Joshua's Frybread (\$6), a mini frybread covered in powdered sugar and topped with chocolate syrup. 616 Lomas Blvd. NW, Ste. A, Albuquerque; 505-401-9313, nmmag.us/elroicafe ●●● —UDS