

# Eatery explosion: Valley sees surge in new restaurants

By Bethany  
Clough

- What is Campus Pointe?

This is a 45-acre development between the Save Mart Center and Highway 168. A partnership between Fresno State and Kashian Enterprises — headed by the same man who developed River Park — it already has apartments. More than a dozen restaurants and retailers will move into the buildings that are under construction now over the coming months. The 2,700-seat movie theater, Heritage Theatre, will open soon. Campus Pointe will eventually have senior housing, a hotel and possibly a grocery store.

## What is Park Crossing?

Formerly called the “Fresno 40,” work has just barely started on this future retail, restaurant, office and housing complex. It’s now an empty lot bordered by Friant Road, Audubon Drive, Cole Avenue and Fresno Street. It will have a Sportsman’s Warehouse and could have a high-end grocery store, clothing and shoe stores.

Sushi, fries smothered in jalapeño popper dip and brisket that’s smoked for 14 hours. The Valley is about to be awash with new restaurants offering these eats and more.

An increasing willingness to eat out, new shopping centers and the promise of a new year are inspiring a slew of new restaurants opening in and around Fresno.

Roman Cota, president of the Fresno chapter of the California Restaurant Association and managing partner at Wedgewood Wedding & Banquet Center, says things are looking up in the restaurant industry.

“The economy is coming back and it just feels good,” he says. “People are spending money and they’re going out to eat.”

At the same time, Fresno is mourning the closure of some longtime restaurants, which happens at the end of every year. The end of 2014 was the final chapter for PCH Subs, Samba Global Cuisine, Aria Persian Cuisine and most recently, the Silver Dollar Hofbrau.

But the list of closures is smaller than previous years and the list of newcomers is growing. And while restaurateurs are nervous about various issues — minimum wage will rise to \$10 next year and uncertainty still surrounds new health care laws — there is reason for optimism, Cota says.

“I think people aren’t so shellshocked and they want to spend a little bit,” he says.

Many of the restaurateurs opening new places have come of age in the post-recession economy, Cota notes. Pinching pennies is normal for the owners of [Mad Duck](#) and [Casa De Tamales](#), for example, both of which are planning additional locations.

The openings are helped along by two big new shopping centers that are under construction. Campus Pointe between Fresno State and Highway 168 and Park Crossing (formerly called Fresno 40) at Friant Road and Fresno Street are expected to open this year with many restaurants.

Plenty of restaurants are opening elsewhere, too. A handful of successful restaurateurs from the mountains have decided to give it a go on the Valley floor — among them Todd’s Bar-B-Q, which has moved from Oakhurst to Clovis.

Here's a closer look at restaurants opening soon.

**Todd's CookHouse Bar-B-Q**, 1414 Clovis Ave., Clovis. Status: Open.

Owner Todd Leaf was located in Oakhurst for 10 years, but pulling in so many diners from the Fresno-Clovis area that he decided to move his barbecue joint down the hill. (The Oakhurst spot is now [Alice's CookHouse & Barbecue](#).) Todd's has taken over the big quirky spot once occupied by QN4U on Clovis Avenue.

The Texas-style barbecue restaurant with a Cajun influence serves meats that are smoked on site for 14 to 17 hours each night. Southern fried catfish, hush puppies, Fresno State sausage and other goodies are on the menu, too.

The owner has spiced up the restaurant with folk art, hand-painted signs and lamps made from metal pails shot up with a .22.

### **Inside Todd's CookHouse Bar-B-Q**

Leaf says he has no doubts his restaurant will make it: "This is a beef town, particularly Clovis."

**Clovis Hofbrau**, 2674 Owens Mountain Parkway, near Highway 168 and Temperance Avenue in Clovis. Status: Opening early to mid February.

Fresno may have lost a beloved hofbrau, but Clovis is getting a new one. This newly constructed building will be home to an old-fashioned German hofbrau and bar with a bit of a Western feel. Workers will carve off slices from whole roasts and turkeys for customers.

The manager used to own [Wahtoke Grill & Bar](#) in Shaver and the hofbrau's anonymous owners are local ranchers. To honor that lifestyle, they invited ranchers from all over the Valley to burn their cattle brands into the sugar pine bar.

**Bulldog Burger Bistro**, 1782 E. Barstow Ave., Fresno. Status: Open.

This creative little burger joint opened late last year behind the Bulldog Shop. It serves burgers, salads, wraps and lots of fried stuff. Its signature dish is the Bulldog, a burger piled high with bacon, pastrami, cheddar and American cheese. French fries and other appetizers can come smothered in their jalapeno popper dip, which is getting a lot of attention from diners.

And of course, the decor is a Bulldog fan's dream.

**KuniSama Teppan and Sushi**, 6825 N. Willow Ave. Status: Open.

This is a teppenyaki and sushi restaurant with a bar that just opened for lunch and dinner. The owners hired some of the most flamboyant chefs they could find who cook the food at your table complete with flames and jokes.

### **Teppenyaki chefs in action at KuniSama**

If teppenyaki isn't your thing, you can eat at the sushi bar or a regular table. The menu includes everything from the teppan experience to salads, a New York steak and vegetarian meals. There's also lots of Japanese beer.

**Humphrey Station**, 23117 Tollhouse Road, Clovis. Status: Early February.

This historic stagecoach turned restaurant in rural Clovis shut down and went into foreclosure last year. But new owners and a new chef — Sean Dunn, formerly of [Peeve's Public House](#) — plan to reopen it for lunch and dinner. It will serve down-to-earth but good food that's "hyper local," from KMK Farms and others. Think biscuits and gravy with housemade biscuits from an 1880 recipe.

**Zen Wok**, 6731 N. Palm Ave., Fresno. Status: Open.

This is the big sister location of the original [Zen Wok Fusion](#) in the Tower District, which is still open. Zen Wok at Palm and Herndon avenues opened during the holiday rush. It features everything that's at the original location, plus lots more: more space, more style, two patios and more than 150 craft beers and 100 wines.

The restaurant still carries the Asian fusion food it's known for, including its honey walnut shrimp. But it has added more bar food, such as Sriracha wings and pepper beef sliders. Vegan and gluten-free items have been added to the menu, too.

**Mad Duck Craft Brewing Co.**, Campus Pointe. Status: Opening mid-March.

This brewpub is the realization of a dream for the people behind the existing Mad Duck at Willow and Herndon avenues in Clovis. Yes, that one will stay open.

The new location will be a brewery and a restaurant with beer brewed in giant tanks you can see from the dining room. Until now, Mad Duck has been renting space out of town to brew batches of its beer.

The menu will be bigger, too, with pub favorites such as beer-braised short ribs and beer-can chicken, in which a whole chicken is roasted atop an open can of beer, making it "incredibly moist," says owner Alex Costa. They'll also have "one handers," appetizers such as ahi wontons that can be eaten with one hand while sipping a beer in the other.

"We plan on pushing the envelope on the cool craft beer culture that's developing in Fresno," Costa says.

**1920 Tea Station**, 732 W. Bullard Ave. Status: Open.

This place is inspired by Chinese-influenced tea houses in Los Angeles. It serves all kinds of tea, coffee, milkshakes and smoothies and is open late. For food, there's all kinds of fried appetizers — popcorn chicken is the most popular. There's also toast as dessert: a thick chewy dessert bread smothered in toppings such as marshmallows, strawberries or peanut butter and eaten with a knife and fork.

It's open late with free Wi-Fi and heaters on the storefront patio.

**Casa de Tamales**, 938 Fulton Mall. Status: Opening in March.

Fresno-based Casa de Tamales, which many people know for its West Shaw Avenue location and selling at food truck nights, is opening a new location on Fulton Mall. This one will have the traditional and modern tamales Casa de Tamales is known for, ranging from shredded beef to vegan portobello and asparagus will also have their new line of tapas, including tortas, fish tacos, beer and artisan sangria.

The growing Casa de Tamales is also moving its production hub from West Shaw Avenue — the restaurant will remain open — to the former Organic Fresno restaurant spot (that restaurant closed last fall) on Parkway Drive near Roeding Park. That location won't be a sit-down restaurant, but events featuring food trucks and other food vendors are in the works.

**Farm Fresh Bowls**, Campus Pointe. Status: Opening tentatively May.

This little red drive-thru and walk-up window in Visalia has sold its food at the Old Town Clovis Friday night farmers market.

Everything here comes in a bowl. It's healthy breakfast and lunch food — no preservatives, no canned food — that's as local as possible and seasonal. There are egg scramble bowls, breakfast bowls with an acai berry puree topped with granola and fruit and a south of the border bowl with braised beef, black beans, sweet corn and salsa served over quinoa.

It's attracting everyone from cowboys on their way to work to health-conscious women wearing lululemon leggings and car pooling to get bowls.

**Brown Bear's Hot Dogs** , 3 locations. Status: Opening later this year.

Brown Bear's Hot Dogs is a drive-thru at Fresno Street and Herndon Avenue that will be opening several locations this year. Expect lots of whimsical bear decor — giant stuffed bears, murals of bears eating hot dogs, etc.

One location with indoor seating is under construction at Campus Pointe with a tentative late February opening date. Others are in the works for Park Crossing and the corner of First Street and Nees Avenue.

**Hino Oishi, Campus Pointe.** Status: Construction will start soon, projected opening in fall.

This is a 6,500-square-foot sushi and teppanyaki restaurant with a full bar with lots of saki. Manager Jason Lin says the teppanyaki chefs — these are the guys who prepare the meal in front of you with lots of flair and fire — will be a little bit more entertaining than Fresno is used to. Think chefs pitching pieces of scrambled egg into diners' mouths.

"Your mom said never play with your food, but with teppanyaki that's OK," Lin says.

**More Campus Pointe:** Other restaurants coming to Campus Pointe: [Tofa's Mediterranean Grill](#), Beach Hut Deli, Wok It Out, [Yogurtland](#), [Wahoo's Fish Taco](#), [Cold Stone Creamery](#), [Pieology Pizzeria](#), [Tapioca Express](#) and a coffee shop.

**Park Crossing:** Another development that has just started moving dirt but will have more businesses opening later this year is Park Crossing. Formerly called the "Fresno 40," it's on property bordered by Friant Road, Audubon Drive, Cole Avenue and Fresno Street in northeast Fresno.

Details are slim so far, but restaurants that have reported signing leases are: Kebab Time, [Figaro's Mexican Restaurant](#) and [Menchie's Frozen Yogurt](#).

Work will also start on Fresno's first [Corner Bakery Cafe](#) — Visalia just got one — in 2015, though the restaurant won't open until the following year. Two more Corner Bakery Cafes are headed for Fresno in yet-to-be announced locations too.

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