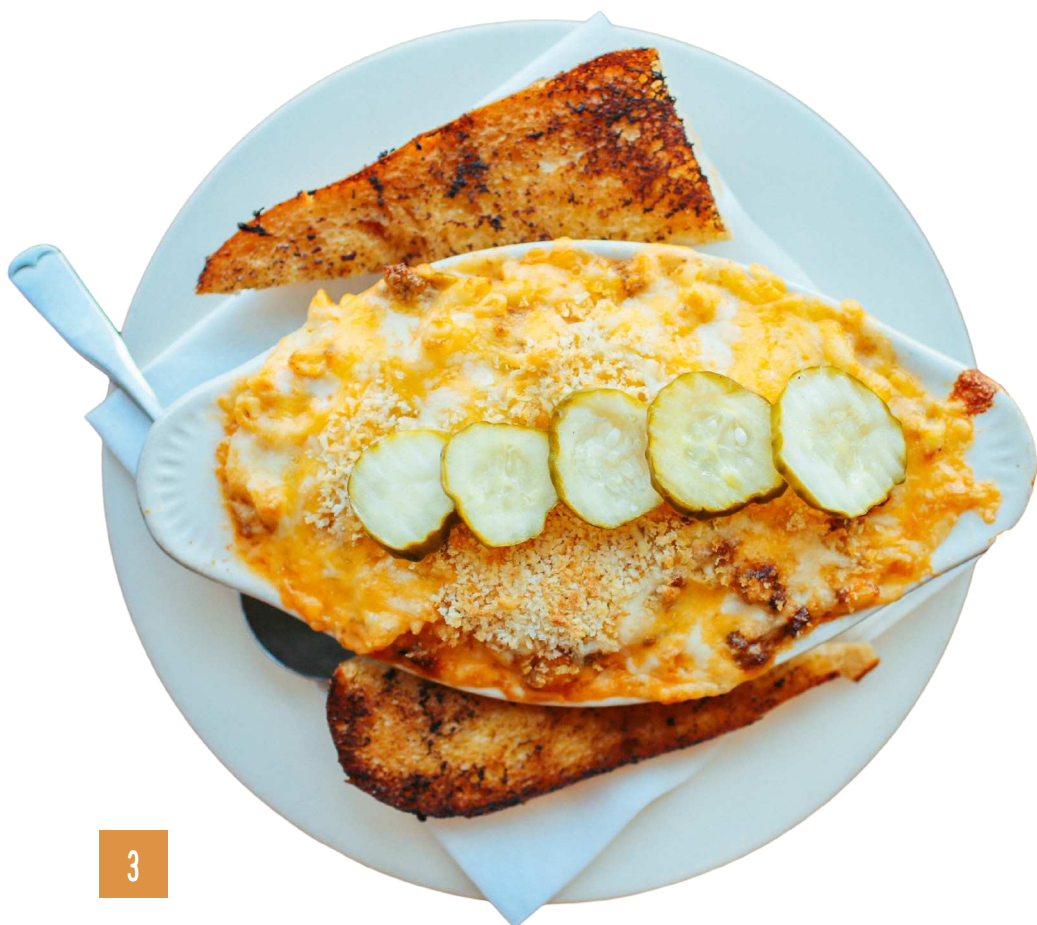




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mac

A ROUNDUP OF THE BEST MAC AND CHEESE ENTREES IN TOWN BY ALEX V. CIPOLLE

Settling in with a bowl of gooey macaroni and cheese is pretty much the culinary equivalent of a hug, and it's not just for kids: It's popping up on adult menus everywhere. The dish is simple, comforting, nostalgic and oh so American. And it's versatile — anything can be a topping!

In our highly scientific approach, we looked at noodle types (it's not always macaroni) and quality, cheese and cheese sauce, the presence of breadcrumbs and add-in options, presentation and, generally, if it made our bellies swoon.

Here are *EW's* top picks for the most mouthwatering, gut-bursting, under-\$20 mac-and-cheese entrees (side dishes didn't qualify) around town.

1. FIRST NATIONAL TAPHOUSE

51 W. Broadway

First National Taphouse is the best mac dinner on a budget. The "triple threat mac 'n' cheese" is \$9, but that goes down to \$7 during happy hour (3 to 6 pm, Monday through Saturday, and all day Sunday). Noodles are cavatappi, a ridged, corkscrew pasta, baked to a nice *al dente*. The cheese sauce is a deliciously deadly mix of cheddar, parmesan and Swiss — *EW's* only complaint is there's not enough, especially because its thick crust of toasted bread crumbs can put this mac on the drier, saltier side. A big perk: Take almost anything from the menu and stack it on your mac — buffalo chicken, pulled pork, caprese salad (add-ins are extra). *EW* chose one with bacon and one with seasonal veggies — carrots, peppers, parsnip, cauliflower and onions.

2. CAFÉ 440

440 Coburg Road

This was hands-down the creamiest of the macs tried and one of the larger portions. *EW* ordered both the "classic mac and cheese" (\$10) and the "bacon and bleu mac and cheese" (\$13), which are also made with cavatappi noodles, cooked on the softer side. The cheese sauce, which uses cheddar and parmesan, was the closest in taste to a béchamel, or white sauce, and it tastes like dairy heaven. The bacon bits were smaller, which mixed well into the sauce, and the bleu cheese crumbles were loaded (and we mean *loaded*) on top. Café 440 also offers a "BBQ pork mac and cheese" (\$14).

3. WILD DUCK CAFE

1419 Villard Street

If you're a fan of a more fast-food, classic American Velveeta shells-and-cheese kind of mac dish, Wild Duck is your place. We mean this in the best comfort-food kind of way. In our books, boxed mac and cheese is still the *crème de la crème*. *EW* ordered both the "plain macaroni and cheese" and "Chef Jen's macaroni and cheese," which changes weekly. That week, the Chef's choice happened to be cheeseburger mac and cheese — yes, you read that