



Tara Punzone's LA Guide: Where the Pura Vita Chef Eats, Shops, and Unwinds

By Courtney Davison
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In this installment of *Vegan Recs*, *Chef Tara Punzone*—founder of LA's vegan Italian hotspot **Pura Vita**—shares her local favorites for markets, dining, kitchen gear, and more across Los Angeles.

Vegan dining in Los Angeles wouldn't be what it is today without the influence of Brooklyn-born chef Tara Punzone. In 2018, Punzone made waves with the opening of Pura Vita in West Hollywood, the first all-vegan Italian restaurant in the country. It quickly earned a reputation not just as a standout vegan spot but as one of LA's great Italian restaurants, period.

Punzone credits her family with helping her keep the menu true to her Southern Italian roots. "I still have family who live in Italy, and they're always watching!" she says with a laugh. "They're always teaching me things, too. I like to stay true to the traditions."

That philosophy carries into her first cookbook, *Vegan Italiana: Traditional Italian the Plant-Based Way*, out next week. Co-authored with veteran plant-based writer Gene Stone (*Forks Over Knives: The Plant-Based Way to Health, How Not to Die*), the book features more than 100 recipes, including beloved Pura Vita dishes like Baked Ricotta and Cacio e Pepe. Although not oil-free, the book is whole-food-forward. "I don't ever use processed fake meats. My focus is on vegetables and nuts and legumes," Punzone says. "Making people feel good with food—that's what we try to do in the restaurant, and that's what I want to do through this book."

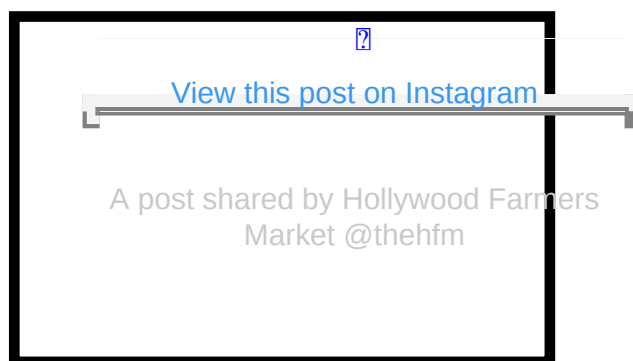
Punzone's love of community is just as central as her love of food. A West Hollywood resident of more than a decade, she lights up when talking about her neighborhood. "I love West Hollywood. Of all the vegan places in LA, so many are right here. But beyond that, it really feels like a community. People talk to each other; people know each other. Since I opened the restaurant, even non-vegans have been curious about the food that I make. The more questions they ask, the more inspired I get... because I'm somehow getting them to eat and think about vegan food, which is the main goal!"

In that spirit, we asked Punzone to share her favorite destinations in West Hollywood and around LA—for fresh produce, authentic Italian ingredients, and the occasional night off.

Hollywood Farmers' Market

Sundays, 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. | 1600 Ivar Ave, Los Angeles, California 90028

"Farmers market produce always just tastes better, and the Hollywood Farmers' Market on Sundays is incredible," says Punzone. "It's gigantic. It has everything you could possibly be looking for, plus a bunch of things that you never even heard of. You'll always bump into people there. It's a hangout. It's really fun." When shopping for something specific, Punzone often hits the smaller-but-closer [Melrose Place Farmers Market](#): "It's not as much for socializing, but I know that they're always going to have what I need."

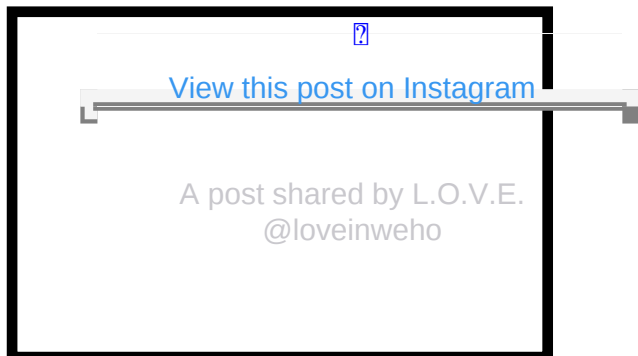


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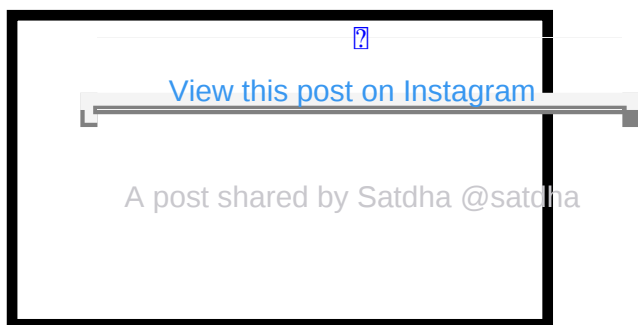
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8157 Santa Monica Blvd, West Hollywood, CA 90046
When Punzone wants a reliably delicious meal outside of her own restaurant, L.O.V.E. tops the list. "They're lovely. It's also female-owned and operated. I'm there every week on my night off. I can't get enough of them." The WeHo restaurant is also a favorite spot of celebrity trainer [Kollins Ezekh](#) and *Aladdin* star [Mena Massoud](#).



Satdha

2218 Lincoln Blvd, Santa Monica, CA 90405
"I love Thai food," Punzone says. "Satdha has really authentic Thai food. It's all plant-based, no fake meat, [and chef-owner Gunn Pankum] makes everything from scratch. Shoutout to Chef Gunn—she's killing it!" The Santa Monica spot celebrates its 12th anniversary in November.



Eataly

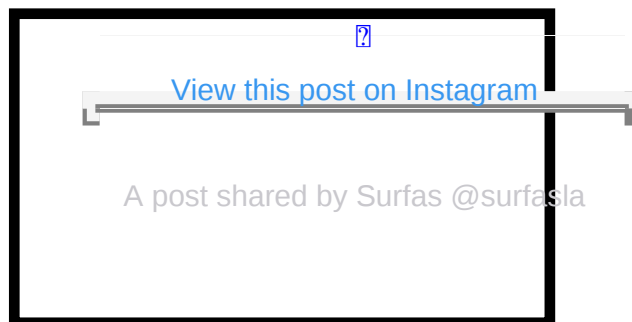
Westfield Century City 10250 Santa Monica Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90067
When she's in search of hard-to-find Italian ingredients, Punzone heads to Eataly: "Going to Eataly is an adventure. You have to go to the Century City Mall, but they have things there that I haven't seen anyplace else in California. They have real Italian ingredients. They're paying attention to the things that are coming from Italy, and they have things that you can't find in other places, so if you really need a specific Italian ingredient, that's a good place to go." She also likes [Sorrento Italian Market](#)

in Culver City and [Bay Cities](#) in Santa Monica. "Bay Cities has been there forever—you can't not mention Bay Cities!"



Surfas Culinary District

3225 W. Washington Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90018
Where does a pro chef get her gear? "I'm a Chefs' Toys and a Surfas girl," Punzone says with pride. "Chefs' Toys has a bunch of locations all over the city, and they're a go-to for equipment and bigger-ticket items. Surfas is more of a delicate, focused kitchenware store and market. They have beautiful things in there that you just won't find in a regular store. I can get lost in there. I'm like a little kid when I go to Surfas."



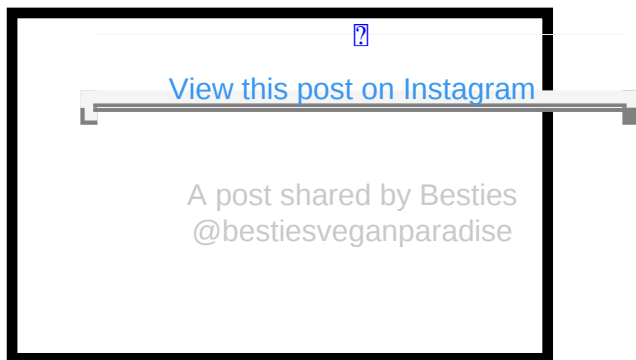
Besties Vegan Paradise

East Hollywood (4882 Fountain Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90029) and Fairfax (6333 W 3rd St #126, Los Angeles, CA 90036)
"Oh, Besties is the best!" Punzone says of the bodega-style vegan market. "They have one in East Hollywood and now they have a second location at the Grove, which is much easier, because there's parking. They have such great stuff there. It's all vegan. They don't sell anything from any brand that's not 100% vegan. I'm all for that place."

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Tara Punzone photo by Heidi Calvert