

Westword

BEST *of*
DENVER
2014

Best Chef's Counter **Rioja**

1431 Larimer St.

303-820-2282

riojadenver.com

Chef Jennifer Jasinski has had a stellar year, with a starring role on *Top Chef Masters* and winning a James Beard Award. But long before seats at the chef's counter of the now nearly ten-year-old Rioja became the most coveted spots in town, Jasinski and her staff were ready for prime time, showing their confidence and culinary mastery in front of inquisitive diners eager to witness flames shooting up from burners, steam rising from pasta pots, and the cook-speak banter that enlivens a kitchen. And while Jasinski doesn't spend as much time in her open galley as she used to, space at the counter is still booked days in advance by foodniks eager for an entertaining, and far more intimate, alternative to a traditional table — and a front-row seat at the best show in town.

Readers' choice: Euclid Hall