



A Serious Passion For Food

“Part of the secret of success in life is to eat what you like and let the food fight it out inside.” I don’t know if Mark Twain was in San Francisco when he said this, but the sentiment certainly suits the overabundance of excellent eateries that take food very seriously here in the city by the bay. As hosts to so many foodie-minded travelers we are constantly asked, “What is the restaurant we should try to experience San Francisco’s best?” The restaurant scene in San Francisco is fiercely competitive and ever changing, but in this guide we’ll attempt to highlight some of the ‘serious’ dining options worth your time. Keep in mind that most of these restaurants are very popular and may be difficult to get into on short notice, though many hold tables for walk-in guests or can accommodate diners in their bar areas. Listings are divided into the following categories: “New-ish Hot Spots”, focuses on mostly new restaurants that seem to be creating the ‘buzz’; “Hot Spots and Must Visit Gems”, is devoted to an eclectic mix of trend-setters along with great ‘neighborhood’ spots; and “Tried and True”, which covers those well established long-open spots, still drawing raves.

New-ish Hot Spots

HIME

A gem in the Marina, also being touted as one of the best Japanese restaurants to open in San Francisco in years. Enjoy an array of Japanese-style small plates crafted by the under 30 Chef Kunihiro Kinda. What a presentation of some of the dishes including an ice-filled bowl topped with sashimi and bluefin tuna belly. • 2353 Lombard Street, 931-7900 • himerestaurant.com

LARK CREEK STEAK

Shop your day away at the new Westfield SF Centre and finish on the fourth floor at this warm restaurant adorned with a cathedral-style ceiling and open kitchen. Chef Jeremy Bearman is as delicate with the cooking of the beef as he is with the vegetables in his seasonally-driven menu. • 845 Market Street, 593-4100 • larkcreeksteak.com

NOPA

Originally built as a bank and later converted to a laundromat, you wouldn’t know it today when you walk into this sceney spot that attracts all types of San Franciscans to enjoy the homey favorites such as huge burgers and flatbreads topped with California seasonal ingredients. This is a popular spot in an up-and-coming neighborhood just a short walk from Alamo Square. • 560 Divisadero Street, 864-8643 • nopasf.com

POLENG LOUNGE

This Pan-Asian restaurant offers a small plates menu with each item taking a little different spin on the usual Thai, Vietnamese, Malaysian and Chinese. Enjoy whole sugarcane skewered shrimp on a green papaya, mango and Thai basil salad. The space is open and has a unique bar menu to accompany the unique cuisine in this newly named San Francisco neighborhood – Nopa (North of Panhandle). 1751 Fulton Street, 441-1710 • polenglounge.com

THE FRONT PORCH

Former Vice President and Filmmaker Al Gore dropped in here when this spot opened in 2006 to enjoy some of Executive chef Sarah Kirnon’s specialties. Gore may have indulged on her famous fried chicken or perhaps other items inspired by her grandmother’s Caribbean recipes. The décor is homey with rocking chairs and jugs of wine to share, set uniquely under a few typical San Francisco flats in the Mission near Bernal Heights. • 65A 29th Street, 695-7800 • thefrontporchsf.com

Hot Spots & Must Visit Gems

BACAR

Known as much for its fabulous wine list, as its modern American cuisine, Bacar is another draw to the SOMA South Beach area. This is a large restaurant with a wine bar downstairs and a giant wine menu to match, and the noise level can be deafening. • 448 Brannan St., 904-4100 • bacarsf.com

CORTEZ

Another of Pascal Rigo's hip eateries. Executive Chefs Seth Bowden and Louis Maldonado prepare inspired modern Mediterranean-inspired cuisine which is both creative and approachable.. The restaurant is a warm and vibrant setting in the Hotel Adagio. • 550 Geary, 292-6360 • cortezrestaurant.com

DOSA

Recognized as San Francisco's best Indian restaurant in many circles with its South Indian fare. The yummy 'dosas' (crepe-like rice-and-lentil pancakes) come in many different regional varieties and go well with a great wine list. This place gets packed -- best to arrive just before opening and grab a spot in the line of anxious diners. • 995 Valencia Street, 642-3672 • dosasf.com

FOREIGN CINEMA

Dinner theatre may not be as popular as it once was, but thanks for Foreign Cinema, you can still enjoy classic movies projected on a large outdoor stone wall while enjoying daily changing food menu from the husband-and-wife team of Gayle Pirie and Jon Clark. The scene is for the city's coolios and the food for all foodies at this inner Mission hot spot. Make a reservation or patiently wait in the chic adjoining Bar Laszlo. 2534 Mission Street, 648-7600 • foreigncinema.com

GARY DANKO

Chef Danko and partner Nick Peyton offer outstanding French dishes like glazed oysters with leeks and salsify, served in an elegant space by a well-trained and smooth wait staff. This is the place to go when everything has to be perfect. Voted best restaurant in San Francisco for 2007 by *7x7 Magazine*. Very expensive, but worth it. Valet parking. • 800 North Point St., 749-2060 • garydanko.com

SUSHI GROOVE SOUTH

Often noted as the most inventive and best sushi spot in the city, Sushi Groove is set within the club district of SOMA. You might miss the undercover entrance as you walk by, but don't because there aren't many other options to choose from in the neighborhood. One step inside and the scene is alive and well with a DJ spinning ambient beats as backdrop to the freshest fish used in the most divine sushi creations in the city. The service is a bit edgy but perfectly harmless. • 1516 Folsom Street, 503-1950

Tried and True - Evening Dining

ACQUERELLO

Michelin starred, Acquerello offers modern Italian cuisine in an upscale, refined setting. Service is flawless. Great for a special intimate dinner, or special occasion. Entrées are around \$33. • 1722 Sacramento St., 567-5432 • acquerello.com

BIX

This is a beautiful jazz supper club with the feel of a chic ocean liner. The Art Deco design is well matched by chef Bruce Hill's upscale American cuisine. The menu is built around all kinds of San Francisco favorites. • 56 Gold St., 433-6300 • bixrestaurant.com

BOULEVARD

Boulevard, consistently voted the most popular by residents, serves French-influenced American regional food created by Executive Chef Nancy Oakes, San Francisco's 'most beloved' chef. The belle époque design is unique and beautiful with a bustling bistro environment, and some tables have lovely Bay views. Entrées are \$28-\$40 • 1 Mission St., 543-6084 • boulevardrestaurant.com

CHEZ PANISSE

Alice Waters started the whole California cuisine phenomena here in the 1970's and it is still well worth a trip across the bay to the now 'gourmet ghetto' of Berkeley. Organic ingredients and the freshest produce are used in both the downstairs restaurant and the upstairs café. 1517 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley, 510-548-5525 • chezpanisse.com

DELFINA RESTAURANT

California inspired Italian food balances the industrial design of the room with great service from a typical Missionite staff. Moderate prices and many housemade specialties have helped to quickly spread the word about this 'neighborhood' joint. Plan well in-advance as reservations are hard to get! Expect to pay \$18-22 for most entrees, and leave the car behind because there's no valet parking. • 3621 18th St., 552-4055 • delfinasf.com

FARALLON

Opened in 1997 by Chef Mark Frank and Restaurateur/Designer Pat Kuleto, this unique, underwater-themed setting in Union Square makes great host to deliciously rich seafood dishes in a 'coastal cuisine' menu. You can expect entrées to run \$34-39 each. • 450 Post St., 956-6969 • farallonrestaurant.com

FIFTH FLOOR

Award-winning since its 1999 opening, this restaurant on the fifth floor of the Hotel Palomar, serves top-notch California/French cuisine in one of the most impressive rooms in the city. At once elegant, and relaxing this place is attracting the well-heeled. Seasonally changing entrées like milk fed poularde range from \$42-\$48, so be prepared to pay handsomely for this deluxe experience. Valet parking. 12 Fourth St., 348-1555 • fifthfloorrestaurant.com

FLEUR DE LYS

Fleur de Lys, a stalwart to the city of San Francisco for over 45 years is currently lead by world-renowned Chef Hubert Keller. The interior tops the list of most romantic, and the finest French food is as fabulous as ever under the helm of Chef Keller with such classics done to perfection as Filet Mignon topped with sautéed Foie Gras. Prices are steep, your stomach and heart will thank you for the investment. 777 Sutter St., 673-7779 • fleurdeyssf.com

JARDINIÈRE

Nationally acclaimed Chef Traci des Jardins creates fine French cuisine in a glamorous setting in the Civic Center area, just near to Hayes Valley. Her commitment to social responsibility is remarkable in her choice of local, sustainable ingredients for the chef's six course tasting menu for \$99 including changing menu items such as Pan Roasted Quail and Seared Foie Gras with Quinoa, Endive and Candied Citrus and Maine Diver Scallops with Roasted Beet and Avocado Salad, Meyer Lemon and Tsar Nicoulai Caviar. • 300 Grove Street, 861-5555 • jardiniere.com

MASA'S

Set on Nob Hill, this four-star, haute French cuisine is a sure thing. Chef Gregory Short celebrates French technique with all the wonderful bounty of California. It is a bit spendy but many say it is worth it, choosing between a three course tasting menus priced at \$79, \$90 for the six course vegetarian menu or Chef's tasting menu, and \$120 for nine courses • 648 Bush St., 989-7154 • masasrestaurant.com

MILLENNIUM

Who thinks of 'vegetarian' and 'fine dining' in the same sentence? With it's move to a larger space in Union Square, Chef Eric Tucker's flavorful dishes are now matched by sophisticated surroundings. The dessert bar is the perfect after theater stop. Entrées are \$20-22; valet parking is available. • 580 Geary, 487-9800 • millenniumrestaurant.com

SLANTED DOOR

Check out expansive Bay Views at its newish hip location in the Ferry Building. This great, former Mission neighborhood spot, gives diners an inventive modern Vietnamese restaurant experience as Chef Phan uses organic ingredients and locally sourced meats for his updated menu of 'street food', dishes rarely seen outside of Vietnam such as 'brick oven roasted whole fish with spicy ginger fish sauce'. For a less expensive option, try *Out the Door* • 1 Ferry Building, #3., 861-8032 • slanteddoor.com

TADICH GRILL

Over 150 years old, San Francisco's oldest restaurant welcomes dinners in traditional fashion into its Gold Rush era dining room. Wooden paneling and private booths with doorbells (!) create a warm, rich heritage of bygone San Francisco and a place to hideaway from the financial district buzz just outside the doors. If you feel like dining on the solo, this place plays host to many lined along bar stools enjoying a warm bowl of a classically prepared clam chowder and as you would expect, fresh sourdough bread. • 240 California Street (between Battery and Front) 391-1849

ZUNI CAFE

If what is going on around you is as important as what you're eating than this might be your spot. Great people watching combines with deliciously simple rustic California cuisine by famed Chef Judy Rodgers. On a sunny day the outside tables along Market street are the best. No website for this local spot – you'll need to go to experience for yourself or pick-up a copy of Chef Rodgers cookbook, "The Zuni Cafe Cookbook" for a peek inside. • 1658 Market St., 552-2522

