



Brix

A new chef amid splendid wine-country surroundings.

YOUNTVILLE

One way to refresh a wine-country restaurant with old rootstocks is to graft a new head chef onto it. At Brix, they've gone with a strain of Gingrass—as in Anne Gingrass-Paik, now planted in a kitchen where her ex-husband, David Gingrass, used to work. Gingrass-Paik, a Postrio veteran, has pruned back an overgrown menu in order to shed light on the seasons. The result is unpretentious, if fairly plain-Jane, cooking. While grilled swordfish with artichokes speaks simply and clearly, asparagus soup studied with green garlic is so subdued that it leaves you with only two choices: enliven it with salt or administer last rites. Along the way, sparsely topped flatbreads make an appearance (a search party is required to confirm the alleged presence of smoked salmon and leeks), along with rustic roasts and sweet desserts, like a rhubarb sundae with anise ice cream. But nothing on the plate competes with the setting: The refurbished dining room, awash in golds and rich reds that straddle the line between bold and gaudy, overlooks a patio, the restaurant's vast, green gardens, and a sea of vineyards. It's an arresting vista, and you suspect it will always be Brix's main attraction, no matter who's in charge. 7377 ST. HELENA HWY. (BET. YOUNT MILL RD. AND WASHINGTON ST.), 707-944-2749 \$\$\$ RW ★★

BY JOSH SENS

Midi

There's nothing middle-of-the-road about this new downtown restaurant.

FINANCIAL DISTRICT

Located in the geographic purgatory between Union Square and the financial district, Midi balances a sophisticated bar and lounge on its ground floor with an upstairs aerie with right angle after right angle of welcoming banquettes. Chef Michelle Mah, formerly of downtown's Ponzu, has abandoned that restaurant's pan-Asian small plates for a familiar Bay Area trope: light, seasonal French-influenced cuisine. But Mah's food is far from common, and, like Midi itself, also straddles a halfway point—in this instance, between husky and delicate. Her fried sweetbreads, tossed with cubes of pancetta, tread lightly, thanks to a refreshing salad of celery leaves and fennel. In a bistro classic, brown butter blankets skate wing, but briny capers level the richness; hearty braised lamb shoulder bellows “winter,” but its circle of basil oil and its gently cooked mix of eggplants, summer squash, and tomato murmur “high summer.” Mah manages an impossible tightrope walk: She gives diners precisely what they crave while outwitting their expectations. 185 SUTTER ST. (AT KEARNY ST.), S.F., 415-835-6400 \$\$\$ RW ★★★

BY SCOTT HOCKER

OUR REVIEW POLICY:

To ensure that we get a typical consumer's experience in a restaurant, our writers dine anonymously; all expenses are paid by the magazine. Reviews are pulled from our listings two years after the review date or any time personnel changes at a restaurant render a review invalid. Our admittedly imperfect star ratings are based on food quality, variety, service, ambiance, and value.

Staff reviewers and contributors to our restaurant guide include John Birdsall, Susan Bryan, Scott Hocker, Rachel Levin, Peggy Nauts, Jan Newberry, Josh Sens, Lisa Trottier, and Nan Wiener.

CHECK BACK EACH MONTH for a new selection of reviews. You can search our entire database of reviews at sanfransmag.com.

Prices:

Average price of an entrée:
\$ = \$10 or less
\$\$ = \$11-17
\$\$\$ = \$18-24
\$\$\$\$ = \$25 or more

Symbols:

D = Dinner only
R = Reservation required/recommended
C = Cash only
V = Valet parking
W = Wheelchair accessible
☉ = Staff favorite
☺ = Cheap eats

Ratings:

★★★★ = superlative
★★★ = excellent
★★ = very good
★ = good
☆ = below average

eria lina

cal Italian food
es in West Marin.

ES STATION

Caiazzo calls his cook-Reyes Italian, another thing he has concocted enu peppered with mes. From Star Route ts in a salad of baby and ricotta salata to Marin Sun Farms beef, nder in a stew and r polenta, Caiazzo he bounty of a region an Eden for conscien-s. While the chef ie purity of his prod-ss a starter of braised nary, and cannellini 's not afraid to press unfamiliar roles—st-chicken salad chock rries, and blistered, a adorned with lemon sters, and cream.

y Laura Matis match aesthetic (her coffee- pot de crème is effort- t), and the setting suits ance. Though the ser-ve a gruff, coastal waitstaff treat you well ven if, unlike the produce, you come g way away. 11285 HWY. 1 5-663-9988 \$\$ RW ★★★½

ENS

PH BY LAURA FLIPPEN