

ELAINE'S GUIDE TO GOOD EATING IN THE BAY AREA

SPRING 2006

San Francisco	4
Wine Country	48
East Bay	50
Peninsula	58
Lists	62

Sample - Get your copy!
www.ElainesGuide.com

Elaine's Guide to Good Eating

Spring 2006

In my rush to board a flight to Boston last year, I forgot to bring any on-flight entertainment. So, I got to work on one of my favorite pursuits...food! I've wanted to compile something like this for my friends for a while.

What's Different: I have not encountered a single source that can answer all of my questions about restaurants. With this guide, I have tried to fill in the details I usually wonder about that aren't in the typical restaurant review. Will I be able to hear the people I'm with? What should I wear? And I had you singletons in mind when I wrote this...is this place appropriate for a date?

However, as with most things, a few caveats:

The "Best": I have not explored every place in the Bay Area, so I cannot claim that my favorites are the "best". The food scene changes so often that it's hard to keep up unless every meal is a meal dined out. However, these places have consistently delivered for me.

Cuisines: Because this is simply a list of my favorites, I may have excluded entire cuisines altogether. Also, I avoided including cuisines for which I don't have enough experience.

Alcohol: What's covered in this guide is FOOD. Many of you know that I don't drink, so I can't be much help when it comes to wine. Apologies for that deficiency.

A Few Invitations: If you don't see your favorite place here, it just might be that I have not been there. Please do share your own favorites with me. I'm also totally open to suggestions on how to make this guide more useful. If you had an experience counter to mine, I want to hear about it. Chefs and restaurant owners often change in a heartbeat, so I could use some more eyes and ears. That being said, we might just have different tastes!

Finally, if you really do find my ramblings at all helpful, feel free to thank me by buying me dinner!

In the meantime, have fun out there!

Elaine

elaine@elainessguide.com

Sample - Get your copy!
www.ElainesGuide.com

AMERICAN/CALIFORNIA CUISINE**2223 (Castro)**

I celebrated a birthday here and have loved it ever since. On certain nights, a prix fixe is available, with several choices for each course. They are good choices right off of the regular menu, which changes seasonally. If available, get the butternut squash soup and wild mushroom lasagna. But the mango sorbet with tapioca is the show stopper. Do not miss it if it's on the menu.

- Price:** The 3-course prix fixe is available Sunday through Thursday before 7PM for \$30. Otherwise, entrees are \$15-25.
- Dress:** Chic casual and up. Sevens and Diesels are OK, faded 501s and shorts aren't.
- Noise:** Not a big problem.
- Reservations:** Recommended.
- Payment:** Cash and credit cards.
- Parking:** Parking in the Castro is not great, but not as bad as in other neighborhoods. Cruise Market, as it has the highest turnover. Alternatively, it's only a five-minute walk from the most of the MUNI streetcar lines.
- Date Place?** Yes. Try to get a seat by the window to look out on Market.
- Contact:** 2223 Market Street (Noe & Sanchez), 415.431.0692

Boulevard (Embarcadero)

Boulevard was the first restaurant I ate at with an expense account. I was chicken about stretching the budget too much so I ordered chicken. I'm usually weary of ordering it because chefs often overcook. However, this chicken was tender and flavorful. I knew that this was a truly great place because it could make even chicken taste that good.

- Price:** Entrees are \$15-30.
- Dress:** Business casual and up. Don't wear jeans, even if they are of the \$150 variety.
- Noise:** Not a big problem unless you're seated close to the bar.
- Reservations:** Highly recommended, and book far in advance.
- Payment:** Cash and credit cards.
- Parking:** Parking in the evening is not bad, particularly if you park along the Embarcadero. During the day, either valet or park in a nearby paid lot. You can also try to find street parking along the Embarcadero but most of the meters are only for an hour.
- Date Place?** Definitely. Not only does it consistently rank at the top of the Zagat survey for popularity and food, but it also has great views of the Bay (it's right on the Embarcadero).
- Contact:** 1 Mission Street (Embarcadero & Steuart), 415.543.6084

EOS (Cole Valley)

EOS is owned by Arnold Wong, who also owns Bacar in SOMA. I usually hate Asian-fusion, but EOS does it well and the combinations are not out of control. My favorites are actually an appetizer and a dessert. I like the tuna tartare tower to start and the bananamisu to end. As the name implies, the bananamisu is like a tiramisu but has banana in it with a caramel sauce. I would go to EOS just to have this dessert.

- Price: Entrees are \$15-25.
Dress: Chic casual and up. Sevens and Diesels are OK, faded 501s and shorts aren't.
Noise: Not a huge problem.
Reservations: Recommended.
Payment: Cash and credit cards.
Parking: Parking in Cole Valley can be challenging but not impossible. Allow an extra 5-10 minutes to find parking. Otherwise, several of the MUNI streetcar lines stop nearby.
Date Place? Absolutely.
Contact: 901 Cole Street (Carl), 415.566.3063

Foreign Cinema (Mission)

This place first got noticed because it plays artsy movies on a wall in its outdoor courtyard. However, the food is also good, particularly the duck breast. The courtyard is also a good place for drinks. Others like the brunch, but I've never been so can't vouch for it.

- Price: Entrees are in the \$15-25 range.
Dress: Chic casual and up. Sevens and Diesels are OK, faded 501s and shorts aren't.
Noise: The indoor seating area can get loud, to the point where you might have to yell. But the outdoor seating area isn't too bad. You might not even have to raise your voice.
Reservations: Recommended.
Payment: Cash and credit cards.
Parking: Parking in the Mission is a nightmare at almost any time of the day. However, there are a few paid lots nearby. Alternatively, take BART or a Mission or Valencia bus.
Date Place? Yes, if you're looking for a hip, trendy type of environment.
Contact: 2534 Mission Street (21st and 22nd), 415.648.7600

French Laundry (Yountville)

This is thought by many to be the best restaurant in not only the Bay Area but the country. It's a special occasion place, but Thomas Keller's menu is not stuffy. He has dishes with fun names like Mac 'n Cheese (with truffle oil), Pearls and Oysters, and Coffee and Donuts. Obviously, these are creative and upscale concoctions and not your mass market renditions. The service is the best I've had anywhere. The servers are very knowledgeable and in fact, one time our waiter was a chef who owned a restaurant in France but came to the US to wait for Thomas Keller. That's how much he wanted to learn from the famous man.

Price: Nine and seven-course tasting menus are \$175 (the portions of the nine-course are smaller than those of the seven-course). Otherwise, entrees are \$25-45.

Dress: Jackets for men, business casual and up for women. Don't wear jeans, even if they are of the \$150 variety.

Noise: Not a problem at all.

Reservations: You need to plan far, far in advance to dine here. Getting reservations is nearly impossible. First, they are taken exactly two months from the date you want to dine. Second, when you call for reservations, the phone will be perpetually busy. Though they take reservations from 10AM to 5PM daily, chances are, when you finally get through, the whole date will be booked up. You will have to try all over again with another day. There are also a few tables available through OpenTable, but these are also hard to snag. Otherwise, stay at a nearby B&B or hotel where the concierge has connections and can book a table for you. This process also applies for groups of eight or more, but they get to book a whole year in advance.

Payment: Cash and credit cards.

Parking: Street parking is not a problem and there is a free lot across the street as well.

Date Place? Of course, if you can actually get in...

Contact: 6640 Washington Street (Creek), 707.944.2380

Café la Haye (Sonoma)

Though I recommend making reservations to ensure a meal here, the best seats in the house are at the bar, which is right in front of the open kitchen. Sit there and watch the staff prepare everything in a tiny space. The food is simple (e.g., roast chicken, steak, lamb shank, etc.), but very well-prepared. I highly recommend any of the pastas on the menu. The desserts are also simple (e.g., chocolate torte, rice pudding, creme brulee, etc.), but again, well-executed.

Price: Entrees are \$15-25.
Dress: Chic casual and up. Sevens and Diesels are OK, faded 501s and shorts aren't.
Noise: Not a problem at all.
Reservations: Highly recommended, and book far in advance.
Payment: Cash and credit cards.
Parking: Street parking is not a problem and there is a free lot across the street as well.
Date Place? Definitely.
Contact: 140 East Napa Street (1st & 2nd), 707.935.5995

The Girl & The Fig (Sonoma)

I oftentimes want to try new places before I go back to old ones, but this is one place I go back to over and over again without question. My favorite is the quiche and shoestring potatoes for brunch/lunch. They also offer a \$25 3-course prix fixe lunch. I love the funky yet plush indoor décor, but sitting in the garden is the best. I'm always many pounds heavier after I eat here.

Price: Entrees are \$10-20.
Dress: Chic casual and up. Sevens and Diesels are OK, faded 501s and shorts aren't.
Noise: Not a problem at all.
Reservations: Recommended.
Payment: Cash and credit cards.
Parking: Street parking is easy.
Date Place? Absolutely. The location right on Sonoma Square is a plus.
Contact: 110 West Spain Street (1st), 707.938.3634

Viansa (Sonoma)

I'm referring to the vineyard and not the restaurant. Spending a weekend in Wine Country can be expensive, so here's a tip to keep one meal cheap. In addition to the wine tasting setup, the Viansa shop is huge and has tons of olive oils, balsamic vinegars, and jams to be sampled for free. They put out a variety of breads and breadsticks, so you fill up pretty fast.

Contact: 25200 Arnold Drive (Highway 121), 1.800.995.4740

Spring 2006

A Cote (Rockridge)

This is my favorite restaurant in Rockridge. Though it's known to be a French small plates restaurant, the portions are generous. My favorites are the roasted quail, the mussels, and the profiteroles.

- Price: Small plates are \$8-15. Two per person should get you full.
Dress: Chic casual and up. Sevens and Diesels are OK, faded 501s and shorts aren't.
Noise: You'll have to raise your voice, as there are usually tons of waiting people that mingle at the bar to pass the time.
Reservations: Taken only for reservations up to 6:00PM. Otherwise, get there by 6:30PM or be prepared to wait at least half an hour.
Payment: Cash and credit cards.
Parking: Parking isn't too bad, as this place is a few blocks away from the BART station. However, you still might have to circle for 5 minutes. Alternatively, take BART to the Rockridge stop and walk for 5 minutes.
Date Place? Absolutely, but keep the potentially long wait time in mind.
Contact: 5478 College Avenue (Lawton & Taft), 510.655.6469

Bette's Oceanview Diner (Berkeley)

There is no ocean view, but Visa did film an ad here. That only added to the already long lines for weekend brunch. Everything is good, but I like the pancakes and waffles the best. Apparently, so does everyone else, as Bette's packages and sells these mixes in mainstream supermarkets.

- Price: Dishes are \$5-15.
Dress: Casual. The faded 501s and shorts are OK.
Noise: It's pretty noisy in here so you'll have to raise your voice.
Reservations: None taken. Go early or be prepared to wait at least 45 minutes on the weekend.
Payment: Cash and credit cards.
Parking: Parking on Fourth Street can be tough, so allow an extra 10-15 minutes.
Date Place? Sure, but keep the potentially long wait in mind. At least it's on Fourth Street, where the shops provide some distraction.
Contact: 1807A Fourth Street (Virginia & Hearst), 510.644.3230

Bittersweet – A Chocolate Café (Rockridge)

Although this café serves the standard coffee and tea, its main focus is hot chocolate. Yes, an entire café devoted to chocolate! Those who like dark chocolate should try The European (though I love dark chocolate and I found it overwhelming after a few sips). The American is probably going to be most people's favorite. It tastes like Swiss Miss but better. They also sell tons of bar and boxed chocolates for all occasions, as well as muffins and scones. If the chocolate pear ginger muffin is available that day, get it.

- Price: Drinks are \$2-4.
 Dress: Casual. The faded 501s and shorts are OK.
 Noise: Not a problem.
 Reservations: None taken and none needed. There are only a few tables, so you might have to share a communal table or be European and drink while standing.
 Payment: Cash and credit cards, even Amex and Discover!
 Parking: Parking isn't too bad, as this place is a few blocks away from the BART station. However, you still might have to circle for 5 minutes. Alternatively, take BART to the Rockridge stop.
 Date Place? Of course. The relative novelty of it will impress. However, it does close early—7PM on weekdays and Sundays and 9PM on Fridays and Saturdays.
 Contact: 5427 College Avenue (Kales & Hudson), 510.654.7159

Cactus Taqueria (Rockridge)

Though not at the level of the taquerias in the Mission, the food here is still good. However, my favorite is actually the tres leches cake. I don't know if it's authentic, but I crave it often. Also, they have a snack menu that includes empanadas and other smaller bites, as well as a full-size daily plate special.

- Price: Items are \$3-5 except plates, which are \$7-9.
 Dress: Casual. The faded 501s and shorts are OK.
 Noise: It's lively but you won't have to raise your voice.
 Reservations: None taken. You order at the counter and then find a table and wait for your food. During busy times, you might have to wait 5 minutes for a table.
 Payment: Cash and credit cards.
 Parking: Parking isn't too bad, but you might have to circle for 5 minutes. There is high turnover right on College Avenue for metered spots. Otherwise, parking is free on the side streets but a little harder to come by. Alternatively, take BART to the Rockridge stop and walk across the street to the door.
 Date Place? Not really. It's more of a quick bite on the way somewhere.
 Contact: 5642 College Avenue (Keith & Ocean View), 510.658.6180

Arcadia (San Jose)

This is the best lunch deal in the South Bay. Michael Mina of Aqua fame (and who now owns an eponymous restaurant in San Francisco) launched Arcadia in the downtown San Jose Marriott. Though he no longer cooks himself, the food is still great. Dinner is pricey, so go for the express lunch, which is only \$19. The lunch consists of a salad you create yourself (choose up to 10 ingredients from a list of around 30), two small cups of soup (e.g., corn chowder and tomato), and four small sandwiches (e.g., roast beef with foie gras, lobster salad, lox, BBQ chicken). Although everything in the lunch is referred to as "bites", there is plenty of food. You can also get a dessert sampler for an additional \$7, which might include s'mores, a mini-root beer float, cookies, and peaches with cream.

- Price: The express lunch is \$19. Otherwise, entrees are \$15-30.
Dress: Business casual and up. Don't wear jeans, even if they are of the \$150 variety.
Noise: Not a problem.
Reservations: Recommended.
Payment: Cash and credit cards.
Parking: Street parking during the day can be difficult and the time on the meters is limited anyway. There are paid lots nearby.
Date Place? Yes, if you don't dining in a hotel (though it is part of the new minimalist Marriott format).
Contact: 100 West San Carlos Street (Market), 408.278.4555

Evvia (Palo Alto)

There are only a few upscale Greek restaurants in the Bay Area and this is probably the best. I'm not a fan of lamb, but even I like their grilled lamb. Lamb lovers should get the lamb shank, which I've been told is very tender and tasty. I always get the moussaka, which comes baked in a round clay pot. Just like in Greece!

- Price: Entrees are \$15-25.
Dress: Chic casual and up. Sevens and Diesels are OK, faded 501s and shorts aren't.
Noise: It can get quite loud in here, so you'll definitely have to raise your voice.
Reservations: Highly recommended, and book far in advance.
Payment: Cash and credit cards.
Parking: There are many free lots nearby, but parking can still be difficult at times. Allow an extra 5 minutes to find it.
Date Place? Yes, but keep the noise level in mind.
Contact: 420 Emerson Street (Lytton & University), 650.326.0983

Fatima (Cupertino)

This place is one of only a handful in the Bay Area, or the States for that matter, that serves Muslim Chinese food. I took my college roommates here and every time they come back to the Bay Area, the first restaurant they ask for is Fatima. Fatima is known for its homemade noodles, which are hand-carved from a large ball of dough. As a result, every noodle has a different shape and all have a good al dente bite to them. My favorites are these noodles stir fried with very thin lamb slices (this is one of only three places where I will eat lamb), the thin onion and sesame bread, and the tea-smoked duck. The noodles also come in various soups, but you'll need at least 3-4 others to share the large portion with you. Get the equivalent of red bean pizza roll for dessert.

Price: Entrees are \$10-15.

Dress: Casual. The faded 501s and shorts are OK.

Noise: Not a problem.

Reservations: Recommended. On weekdays, you can just walk in.

Payment: Cash and credit cards.

Parking: There is a free lot right outside and street parking is easy...it's the 'burbs!

Date Place? Not really, but it wouldn't be the end of the world. This is more of a family or large group of friends place.

Contact: 1132 South De Anza (Rollingdell & Blue Hill), 408.257.3893

Fook Yuen (Millbrae)

OK, enough with the jokes about the name already. In Chinese, it actually means something like "lucky garden" or "garden filled with fortune." Like all dim sum houses in the Bay Area, waits of at least half an hour are the norm during the weekend unless you come early or late. The name scares off non-Chinese, so the clientele is mostly Chinese and the food is authentic.

Price: Dim sum is \$2-5. Dishes like chow mein are around \$10.

Dress: Casual. The faded 501s and shorts are OK.

Noise: All dim sum houses are loud and that's the way it should be.

Reservations: None taken, unless you know the staff or are in a large party.

Payment: Cash and credit cards.

Parking: There is a free lot connected to the restaurant and street parking isn't bad.

Date Place? No, given the potential for a very long wait. Plus, it's more fun to go in a large group.

Contact: 195 El Camino Real (Victoria & Chadbourne), 650.692.8600

- 2223** (Castro), 4
A Cote (Rockridge), 50
A16 (Marina), 27
Absinthe (Hayes Valley), 17
Antica Trattoria (Russian Hill), 28
Arcadia (San Jose), 58
Bay Bread Boulangerie (Pac Heights), 15
Berkeley Thai House (Berkeley), 55
Bette's Oceanview Diner (Berkeley), 50
Bistro Jeanty (Yountville), 47
Bittersweet – A Chocolate Café (Rockridge), 51
Blue Plate (Bernal Heights), 14
Bocadillos (North Beach), 41
Bouchon (Yountville), 47
Boulevard (Embarcadero), 4
Cactus Taqueria (Rockridge), 51
Café Intermezzo (Berkeley), 52
Café Jacqueline (North Beach), 18
Café la Haye (Sonoma), 49
Café Prague (North Beach), 10
Caffe Strada (Berkeley), 52
Charanga (Mission), 35
Chaya Brasserie (Embarcadero), 24
Chow and Park Chow (Castro and Sunset), 14
Citizen Cake (Hayes Valley), 16
Citron (Rockridge), 53
COCO500 (SOMA), 18
Colibri Mexican Bistro (Union Square), 35
Cordon Bleu (Nob Hill), 43
Cote Sud (Castro), 19
Dosa (Mission), 25
Dottie's True Blue Café (Tenderloin), 8
El Mansour (Richmond), 38
El Tonayense Taco Trucks (Mission), 36
Ella's (Presidio Heights), 9
EOS (Cole Valley), 5
Evvia (Palo Alto), 58
Farallon (Union Square), 39
Fatima (Cupertino), 59
Fina Estampa (Russian Hill), 41
Fleur de Lys (Union Square), 20
Fook Yuen (Millbrae), 59
Foreign Cinema (Mission), 5
French Laundry (Yountville), 48
Fresca (Pac Heights), 38
Gambardella's (Menlo Park), 60
Globe (Financial District), 34
Grand Café (Union Square), 20
Gregoire (Berkeley), 53
Hamano Sushi (Noe Valley), 33
Hawthorne Lane (SOMA), 6
Home (Castro), 15
Il Cantuccio (Mission), 28
Indian Oven (Lower Haight), 26
Isa (Marina), 21
Izzy's Steak and Chop House (Marina), 42
Jardiniere (Hayes Valley), 6
Jasmine Tea House (Mission), 11
Jeanty at Jack's (Financial District), 21
Joy Luck Place (Cupertino), 60
Kokkari (Embarcadero), 24
La Folie (Russian Hill), 22
La Note Restaurant Provencal (Berkeley), 54
La Provence (Mission), 22
La Taqueria (Mission), 36
Lupa (Noe Valley), 29
Mama's on Washington Square (North Beach), 9
New Sun Hong Kong (North Beach), 13
Osha Thai Noodle Café (Tenderloin), 43
Ozumo (Embarcadero), 25
Pakwan (Mission and Tenderloin), 26
Pancho Villa (Mission), 37

Pesce (Russian Hill), 29
Pizza Antica (San Jose), 61
Pomelo (Noe Valley), 7
PPQ (Richmond), 46
Quince (Pacific Heights), 30
R&G Lounge (Chinatown), 11
Rick & Ann's (Berkeley), 54
Rivoli (Berkeley), 55
Rose Pistola (North Beach), 30
Sam Wo (Chinatown), 12
Scala's Bistro (Union Square), 31
Shalimar (Tenderloin), 27
Slanted Door (Embarcadero), 44
So (Sunset), 12
Sociale (Presidio Heights), 31
South Park Café (SOMA), 23
Swan Oyster Depot (Russian Hill),
40
Takara (Japantown), 33
Tango Gelato (Pac Heights), 16

Tao Cafe (Mission), 45
Taqueria Cancun (multiple
locations), 37
Tartine (Mission), 10
Terrace at the Ritz-Carlton (Nob
Hill), 7
Thanh Long (Sunset), 46
The Girl & The Fig (Sonoma), 49
Thirsty Bear (SOMA), 42
Ti Couz (Mission), 23
Top Dog (Berkeley), 56
Town Hall (SOMA), 8
Trattoria Contadina (North Beach),
32
Truly Mediterranean (Mission), 34
Viansa (Sonoma), 49
Vik's Chaat Corner (Berkeley), 56
Yank Sing (Financial District), 13
Zachary's Pizza (Rockridge), 57
Zuppa (SOMA), 32