

2008 Top San Francisco Restaurants

Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
A16 2355 Chestnut St. San Francisco (415) 771-2216 www.a16sf.com	Italian Pizza	\$16-\$23

Although owners Nate Appleman and Shelley Lindgren have opened a second spot, SPQR, it hasn't been at the expense of the flagship. A16's Campania-inspired food is as good as ever (hope the whole piglet shoulder is on the specials menu). Meatball Mondays has also become a tradition - the chef features different variations each week, along with regular items including exceptional burrata and house-made charcuterie. The Italian wine list is superb and well priced. The long, narrow interior - with an always packed bar at the entrance - features an open kitchen and views of the wood-burning oven.

Acquerello 1722 Sacramento St. San Francisco (415) 567-5432 www.acquerello.com	Italian	\$60-\$82 (fixed price)
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For high-style Italian dining, no other restaurant compares to this 19-year veteran that recently introduced a tasting-menu format. Its white-tablecloth cuisine and presentations are served in hushed surroundings, with dozens of decanters that glisten under the soft lights. Giancarlo Paterlini, who has an encyclopedic knowledge of Italian wines, handles the front of the house with old-school aplomb. Chef Suzette Gresham gives all dishes an upscale turn, whether it's grilled lamb's tongue with salsa verde, cannellini beans and baby greens, or arctic char presented over an array of vegetables.

Ame 689 Mission St. San Francisco (415) 284-4040 www.amerestaurant.com	East-West Asian California	\$28-\$38
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Many popular restaurants use Asian ingredients, but if you're interested in the perfect fusion of East and West, look no farther than Ame in the St. Regis Hotel. Hiro Sone and Lissa Doumani, who also own Terra in St. Helena, have crafted a restaurant that seamlessly blends cultures in a serene atmosphere featuring a sashimi bar and open kitchen. At Ame, grilled confit of lamb's tongue with goat cheese fritters sits comfortably alongside chawan mushi, a silken Japanese custard. The menu, crafted by Greg Dunmore, starts with seven raw fish dishes from several cultures. The wine and sake selections enhance the eclectic offerings. The bar in the hotel lobby features a stylized fireplace and a well-executed appetizer menu.

Aqua 252 California St. San Francisco (415) 956-9662 www.aqua-sf.com	Seafood French	\$72-\$125 (fixed price)
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When this seafood restaurant opened 17 years ago it started a trend - serving intricately composed, top-flight food in a large, relaxed space. Aqua continues to set the bar for pricey, creative seafood. It remains one of the most visually exciting interiors with high ceilings, sexy lighting and oversize flower arrangements every where you look. The after-work bar scene also adds to the lively atmosphere, making this place very noisy at peak times. Under Laurent Manrique, the food has a heavy French accent. The three-course business lunch is a relative bargain for \$34.

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Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
Aziza 5800 Geary Blvd. San Francisco (415) 752-2222 www.aziza-sf.com	African Moroccan	\$18-\$26

Chef-owner Mourad Lahlou uses his homeland as a reference point at his Moroccan restaurant, lightened and freshened for California tastes. While there's an a la carte menu, most people opt for the five-course menu (\$49). His salad may be gypsy peppers with preserved lemon, roasted garlic, cilantro and capers; and his squid starter is given a twist with mint napa cabbage, chile, lime and marash pepper. Lahlou banishes the Moroccan cliches, including belly dancing, in favor of a warren of sophisticated dining rooms that feature both table and traditional floor seating. It's an exotic, romantic retreat, enhanced by the fabulous food.

Bar Bambino 2931 16th St. San Francisco (415) 701-8466 www.barbambino.com	Italian	\$12-\$28
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You've got to love a restaurant that offers an olive oil tasting on the menu and also makes space for a glassed-in charcuterie and cheese room. It's wedged into a narrow space between the bar and the back dining room, which has a chic urban look. Owner Christopher Losa has created one of the coolest Italian restaurants in one of the most unlikely (read dicey) areas of the Mission District. It feels like New York's East Village, but the nod to organic, sustainable and recycled products is very West Coast. Elizabeth Binder's simple menu is versatile, designed for a quick bite or a full meal to match the unusual wines.

Bar Crudo 603 Bush St. San Francisco (415) 956-0396 www.barcrudo.com	American Seafood	\$12-\$26
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A restaurant that specializes in only one thing is a rarity in the Bay Area, but Bar Crudo's raw-fish menu has made it a destination. Brothers Mike and Tim Selvera have turned a cramped space above the Stockton Tunnel into the city's best raw bar. The seafood is limited, but each dish is exquisite: pristine crudo, fresh oysters, a spectacular lobster salad. Two hot dishes, and sometimes a special, also appear on the menu: steamed mussels and clams with garlic, chile and smoked paprika broth and thick, rich chowder. Don't expect dessert beyond a cheese plate and truffles.

Betelnut 2030 Union St. San Francisco (415) 929-8855 www.betelnutrestaurant.com	Asian	\$16.25-\$20 \$15.50-\$19.95
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When it opened 14 years ago, this Pan-Asian restaurant was the first to offer dishes from China, Thailand, Malaysia, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore and India on the same menu. Now it seems just about every restaurant from coast to coast is mixing Asian cultures, but Alexander Ong has been able to maintain the integrity of each cuisine. The main challenge for diners is getting a table in this restaurant that evokes the sexy feel of a 1920s Shanghai speakeasy. The bar is exceedingly popular with the young Marina-Cow Hollow crowd, which is visible from the windows overlooking Union Street.

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Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
Bistro Aix 3340 Steiner St. San Francisco (415) 202-0100 www.bistroaix.com	French California	\$12-\$20

This is the type of restaurant we'd like to see in every neighborhood - a place that isn't fueled by hype, but by the consistent high-quality food and the reasonable prices. Chef-owner Jonathan Beard turns out comforting French classics in his utilitarian open kitchen, which along with the bar dominates the main dining room. Tables are wedged into the front window and along the wall leading to a large patio designed for year-round seating. It's the type of all-purpose restaurant where singles come in for a quick bite at the counter, and groups descend to mark special occasions.

Bix 56 Gold St. San Francisco (415) 433-6300 www.bixrestaurant.com	American California	\$19.75-\$39.50
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If you walk down the alley near the Transamerica Pyramid, trying to find Bix, you might feel like you're looking for a speakeasy. Inside, the space opens up like a butterfly in flight to reveal an impressive Deco-inspired interior, a lofty mezzanine supported by ornate columns. Bartenders are some of the best in the city, and so is the food crafted by Bruce Hill, who also heads up the kitchen at Picco in Larkspur. While this 20-year-old restaurant harks back to the past, both the food and the ambience seem very contemporary, and there's live jazz nightly.

Bocadillos 710 Montgomery St. San Francisco (415) 982-2622 www.bocasf.com	Small Plates Basque Spanish Bargain	\$6-\$15
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Gerald Hirigoyen, who also owns Piperade, keeps his focus narrow at his tapas-inspired Basque and Spanish restaurant. Flavors explode on the tongue with just about all of the 30 dishes, which are separated on the menu by preparation: a la plancha, marinated, roasted, fried and innards (such as braised tripe). The stylish interior features tangerine brick walls and candle-like lighting that gives everything a golden glow. A large communal table dominates the center of the long room, surrounded by bar tables and several dining counters.

Boulevard 1 Mission St. San Francisco (415) 543-6084 www.boulevardrestaurant.com	American California	\$29-\$45
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Nancy Oakes was a pioneer in producing contemporary American cuisine when she opened Boulevard 15 years ago. Her creations are complicated and extravagant: a tangle of house-made linguine with bacon, white truffles, Parmesan and a runny free-range egg on top; or squab with roasted mushrooms, two kinds of truffles and foie gras. Co-owner Pat Kuleto incorporates a complex mix of industrial and Belle Epoque details into the bustling restaurant with an open kitchen and a dining counter. Embraced by locals and tourists alike, it's one of the city's top destinations.

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Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
Cafe Majestic 1500 Sutter St. San Francisco (415) 441-1280 www.thehotelmajestic.com	California	\$17-\$29

Finally, a restaurant that offers a quiet reprieve from the cacophony of noise that seems to engulf every other place that opens. The plush booths and the warm butter-colored interior of this refurbished restaurant in the century-old Majestic Hotel in San Francisco is an appropriate setting for Ian Begg's creative food, which may include showstoppers like foie gras ice cream (try it, you might love it). At just 26, Begg is truly a rising star.

Canteen 817 Sutter St. San Francisco (415) 928-8870 www.sfcanteen.com	American California French	\$20-\$25
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In a cramped diner with only a counter and a single row of tables, uber chef Dennis Leary, who used to head the kitchen at Rubicon, turns out some of the most dynamic food in the city, practically single-handedly. The menu changes weekly and generally consists of four appetizers, four main courses and four desserts. The meal could begin with poached squid served with lentils and spicy aioli, followed by tuna with fennel, artichokes and black olives in a crab broth, or guinea hen roasted with red cabbage, apricots and cumin jus. Dessert might be lemon croquettes with hazelnut sauce.

Cav 1666 Market St. San Francisco (415) 437-1770 www.cavwinebar.com	Wine Bar California Mediterranean	\$17-\$25
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Wine bars that serve food are opening all over the Bay Area, but Cav, near Zuni Cafe on Market Street, is at the top of its genre. Owner Pamela Busch and chef Michael Lamina are perfect partners when it comes to matching his robust food with her often-unusual wine selections, which include 300 choices and several interesting flights. The modern interior is dressed up with a zinc-topped bar and whimsical artwork made of corks. It is a wine bar, but also a full-service restaurant in its own right.

Chow 215 Church St. San Francisco (415) 552-2469 http://www.yelp.com/biz/chow-san-francisco#hrid:rRMRZkF70QilhOVa6jiHtg/query:chow	American Italian Bargain	\$7.50-\$14.95
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A reader recently wrote for help finding an inexpensive place to satisfy grown-ups, please a picky eater and surprise a child with an adventuresome palate. One restaurant came to mind: Chow. Tony Gulisano's trio of restaurants serve high-quality products at astoundingly reasonable prices. A picky eater might go for the fried egg sandwich or pepperoni pizza; a more worldly diner can warm up to Thai-style noodles; and just about everyone will love pot-roasted beef short ribs. The interiors of each location have the same casual bar-and-grill sensibility. Tables are set with Hershey's Syrup cans holding flatware wrapped in brown paper napkins.

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Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
Coco500 500 Brannan St. San Francisco (415) 543-2222 www.coco500.com	Mediterranean Small Plates	\$10-\$26

Loretta Keller seamlessly bridges the divide between upscale lounge and sit-down dining with this redo of what used to be Bizou. Most of the offerings are small plates with bold flavors. They might include Tuscan kale and goat cheese ravioli, spaghetti with octopus bolognese or a pear pizza with Gorgonzola, and a few larger main courses thrown in for more traditional diners. The interior, with splashes of blue on the walls, tables of teak and floors of cork, nods to the 1950s. The signature cocktails, like the food, are fabulous.

Coi 373 Broadway San Francisco (415) 393-9000 www.coirestaurant.com	French California	\$115 (fixed price); \$11-\$19 in lounge
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Daniel Patterson operates two concepts out of one small restaurant: The lounge, which seats 20, has a straightforward menu that includes slow-cooked pork, udon noodles, a Gruyere cheese sandwich and a Little Gem salad; nothing is more than \$20. In the 29-seat dining room the chef pulls out the culinary stops with an 11-course menu. The restaurant, located on the garish Broadway strip, has a serene interior washed in browns and earth tones that give the space a sensual, Japanese air.

Delfina 3621 18th St. San Francisco (415) 552-4055 www.delfinasf.com	Italian	\$11-\$26
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It's been open a decade now, yet Delfina still sets standards for Italian food, whether in the full-service restaurant or next door at the pizzeria. Craig and Anne Stoll have created a modern Mission District restaurant that continues to garner loads of national press. Chef Craig Stoll has the rare ability to make straightforward, robust flavors resonate so even familiar dishes can surprise. The clean, industrial-looking interior incorporates hardwood floors, wooden benches and rows of sandblasted glass beaker lights suspended from the ceiling. The staff members are relaxed, but know what they're doing.

Dosa 995 Valencia St. San Francisco (415) 642-3672 www.dosaf.com	Indian/Pakistani	\$37 (fixed price); \$10-\$16
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A modern interior with tangerine walls and rows of pendant lights that have a midcentury feel belies the rustic Indian food at this popular Mission District spot. Chef Senthil Kumar, who grew up in Southern India, is a master at making dosa, thin crepes that hang over the edge of the plate and are stuffed with myriad fillings. He incorporates bold flavors and a fresh California sensibility into his cooking. Service is knowledgeable, and the innovative wine list is designed to go well with the food. Owners Emily and Anjan Mitra are opening a second location on Fillmore.

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Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
Ducca 50 Third St. San Francisco (415) 977-0271 www.duccasf.com	Italian	\$16-\$34

When some people find out this Venetian-inspired restaurant is in the Westin Hotel, they're skeptical; one taste of Richard Corbo's food, however, will convince them that he's doing some of the best Italian food in the Bay Area. One night he might serve a creative take on the cuisine with halibut cheeks with black polenta and a mint and jalapeno marinara; on another, it could be lamb with sweet pepper and bitter orange caponata. The interior, with rich wood and Venetian glass chandeliers, has an upscale feel, with large windows that overlook one of the best dining terraces in the city.

Firefly 4288 24th St. San Francisco (415) 821-7652 www.fireflyrestaurant.com	American	\$16.75-\$25
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San Francisco's reasonably priced neighborhood restaurants are good enough to be destinations in their own right. One of the best is Firefly, which draws vegetarians and carnivores. Chef-owner Brad Levy always offers at least two meatless main courses and an even larger selection of appetizers. The menu draws from many cultures with scallop and shrimp pot stickers, chile-braised pork osso buco, or a mushroom and Gruyere strudel. The two adjoining rooms, with a tiny open kitchen in one, have a homey, comfortable feel, and service is friendly and efficient.

Foreign Cinema 2534 Mission St. San Francisco (415) 648-7600 www.foreigncinema.com	French Mediterranean	\$16-\$27
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Few restaurants have the broad appeal of Foreign Cinema, and such straightforward, delicious food. Movies play on the covered patio, a fireplace in the loftlike bar adds warmth to cool nights, and Laszlo, an adjoining bar, is a perfect before- or after-dinner stop. There's even an art gallery that can be rented for private events. Gayle Pirie and John Clark construct the quintessential California restaurant with fresh ingredient-driven cooking. Weekend brunch is a winner; don't overlook the fruit "Pop-Tarts."

Gary Danko 800 North Point St. San Francisco (415) 749-2060 www.garydanko.com	California French	\$65-\$96 (fixed price)
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Getting a reservation at this popular restaurant can be a challenge, but obviously plenty of diners are persistent enough that it's continually rated by Zagat as the Bay Area's most popular restaurant. The three- to five-course fixed-price menu by chef-owner Gary Danko allows diners to mix and match dishes, so if you want all desserts, that would be fine with the kitchen. The two intimate dining rooms have an eclectic look with light wood trim, reflective black glass at the oversize windows, and impressive flower arrangements and artwork. The waiters provide some of the best service in the Bay Area.

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Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
Greens Building A, Fort Mason San Francisco (415) 771-6222 www.greensrestaurant.com	California Vegetarian	\$17.50-\$25; \$49 fixed-price menu on Saturday nights

Great food and spectacular water views give this vegetarian restaurant its competitive edge. No other vegetarian restaurant has had the impact of Greens, started by the San Francisco Zen Center in 1979. Annie Somerville's menu covers the globe: fresh spring rolls with mushrooms, noodles and tofu; mung dal fritters with mint-cilantro sauce; a tagine of vegetables; and a goat cheese onion tart. The wine list is impressive, and the warehouse-like interior offers panoramic views of the Golden Gate Bridge. The menu is a la carte for lunch and dinner, with a four-course fixed-price menu on Saturdays.

Hog Island Oyster Co. 1 Ferry Building, 11 A San Francisco (415) 391-7117 www.hogislandoysters.com	Seafood	\$15-17 for six oysters; \$27-\$30 for 12
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Perhaps the best place for oysters in the Bay Area is this casual restaurant/stand in the Ferry Building. Diners slurp their oysters surrounded by the bustle of farmers' market shoppers, or on nice days sit at tables outside overlooking the water. The expert shuckers mound trays with shaved ice and arrange the oysters around a ramekin of mignonette and wedges of lemons. Don't miss the oyster stew, a blend of cream and seafood with snips of chives and freshly ground pepper, or the baked oysters. There are also excellent salads and a well-chosen selection of wine and beer.

Incanto 1550 Church St. San Francisco (415) 641-4500 www.incanto.biz	Italian	\$15-\$24
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Few Italian restaurants have food as soul-satisfying and rustic as what Chris Cosentino produces. His menu reflects an artisan approach to seasonal cooking that includes house-made charcuterie and the creative use of offal such as beef heart tartare with horseradish, spaghettini with cured tuna heart, and pig's trotters with foie gras. The restaurant has its own filtration system, and diners have a choice of sparkling or still water at no charge. Owner Mark Pastore has created an exceptional Italian wine list, appropriate for the Tuscan-inspired setting.

Jai Yun 680 Clay San Francisco (415) 981-7438 http://www.yelp.com/biz/jai-yun-san-francisco-2	Chinese Asian	Multi-course banquets, \$45-\$100
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Chef Nei' Chia Ji, who developed a cult-like following at his hole-in-the-wall restaurant in Chinatown, has moved into larger digs that have nearly tripled the number of tables. Fortunately, his pristine take on Chinese food is as good as ever. That comes at a price, however. Menus start at \$45 for about 16 different dishes. You have to bring cash, and you might not know what you're eating until the food is on the table. There are no printed menus and service is spotty. All meals begin with a series of cold dishes. Very little English is spoken.

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Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
Jardiniere 300 Grove St. San Francisco (415) 861-5555 www.jardiniere.com	California French	\$25-\$40

A remodel to maximize the lounge area downstairs has breathed new life into this decade-old restaurant owned by Traci Des Jardins, who was awarded Best Chef-Pacific by the James Beard Foundation last year. The interior has the same celebratory feel as before, with an elliptical bar centered under a shimmering gold dome dotted with pinpoint lights that replicate Champagne bubbles. The ribbon-shaped metal railing encircling the mezzanine is punctuated with posts that hold wine buckets. Jardins has created a casual bar menu that makes the lounge a destination in its own right - not only for the great cocktails but also for bites like duck meatballs and fried olives.

Kokkari Estiatorio 200 Jackson St. San Francisco (415) 981-0983 www.kokkari.com	Greek Mediterranean	\$18.50-\$39
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It's both primal and satisfying to sit in the grand dining room at this Greek restaurant, basking in the glow of the goatskin-shaded floor lamps and the massive fireplace where haunches of pig turn a succulent bronze. A second dining room in the back feels like a taverna, complete with a communal table, open kitchen and a huge urn filled with hot sand used to make Greek coffee. Chef Erik Cosselmon offers some unusual combinations such as marinated lamb's tongue or goat stewed with tomatoes over orzo along with familiar standards such as avgolemono soup. Evvia, a sister restaurant in Palo Alto, offers a similar menu and an equally upscale look.

La Folie 2316 Polk St. San Francisco (415) 776-5577 www.lafolie.com	French	\$70-\$90 (fixed price)
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Those who decry the small portions at other four-star establishments should take note of Roland Passot's offerings. They're as intricately combined and composed as the others, but the servings would satisfy a trencherman. A huge slab of pig's feet, sweetbread and lobster terrine is enough for two, and it seems as if Passot uses a whole rabbit in his signature trio with baby vegetables and garlic. Passot's cooking remains fresh and vibrant, and the interior has evolved to reflect its four-star status, with soft fabrics, glossy wood and larger tables.

Laiola 2031 Chestnut St. San Francisco (415) 346-5641 www.laiola.com	California Spanish	\$19-\$23
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Spanish food in an airy California setting is a hallmark of this Marina restaurant, which features the dynamic food of Mark Denham. With a copper-topped bar and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking bustling Chestnut Street, the restaurant attracts young locals and an increasing number of people who come from all over the Bay Area for the all-Spanish wine list, the deftly prepared cocktails and a menu skewed to small plates, including items such as warm sardines on pickled vegetables or shrimp with fried Basque peppers.

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Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
Masa's 648 Bush St. San Francisco (415) 989-7154 http://www.masasrestaurant.com	French	\$100 for six-course menu (\$90 vegetable); \$150 for nine-course menu

This year Masa's will celebrate 25 years, and despite the still-unsolved murder of the original chef and many other changes in personnel and ownership, it remains one of the top white-tablecloth restaurants in the Bay Area. Thanks to the sleek Orlando Diaz-Azcuy design and the food crafted by Gregory Short, who spent seven years at the French Laundry, the place is in top form. Short creates a nightly degustation menu that might include crab salad with kanzuri aioli and tangerine gelee, or roasted lamb with chickpea cakes and lamb jus with rosemary. There's also an all-vegetable menu.

Michael Mina 335 Powell St. San Francisco (415) 397-9222 www.michaelmina.net	American California	\$98-\$135 (fixed price)
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This celebrity chef may have expanded his empire vastly over the last year, but his namesake restaurant hasn't suffered. When he's not jetting from one restaurant to another, Mina is behind the stove here, orchestrating a creative tasting menu where he takes a single ingredient and constructs three to six preparations on one plate. The wine list and the service are as well crafted as the food. Designer Barbara Barry envisioned the elegant interior awash in beige and celadon. The design is understated, but as the evening progresses her masterful touches unfold, much like Mina's food.

Nopa 560 Divisadero St. San Francisco (415) 864-8643 www.nopasf.com	Mediterranean California	\$12-\$23
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Although it's been open less than two years, Nopa, much like Zuni Cafe, has become a magnet for locals, and it almost single-handedly defined the neighborhood North of the Panhandle (thus NoPa). Because it stays open until 1 a.m., it also is a popular gathering place for chefs, who are drawn not only by the great bar scene but also by chef-owner Laurence Jossel's rustic, satisfying food from the wood oven and grill. The expansive dining room, a former bank, has a warm feel, with an open kitchen and a communal table.

O Izakaya 1625 Post St. San Francisco (415) 614-5431 www.jdvhotels.com/dining/sanfrancisco/oizakaya	Japanese	\$4-\$19
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This restaurant in the newly refurbished and renamed Kabuki Hotel in Japantown seeks to evoke the feel of an izakaya, or Japanese pub, with small plates, flat-screen television monitors tuned to sports, and walls that look like Japanese baseball cards. It helps that the food and drinks - wine, cocktails, sake and shochu - are so nicely done. Nick Balla has traveled in Japan and interprets the small-plates trend with braised pork belly on house-made kimchi; beautifully fried tempura mushrooms; seaweed salad; soba noodles; and sashimi. There's even a great hamburger for the Americans.

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Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
One Market 1 Market St. San Francisco (415) 777-5577 www.onemarket.com	American	\$18-\$32.50 (\$75 tasting menu also available)

In its 14-year history, this popular Embarcadero restaurant has had its ups and downs. Under Mark Dommen it's again flying high. Founding chef-partner Bradley Ogden has stepped back from hands-on duties, but his Caesar salad and butterscotch pudding remain. Dommen has taken the food in a more sophisticated direction, warming up what some consider an impersonal, corporate environment. Best deal: a three-course seasonal menu for \$45.

Park Chow 1240 Ninth Ave. San Francisco (415) 665-9912 http://www.yelp.com/biz/park-chow-san-francisco	Italian Bargain American	\$6-\$15
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A reader recently wrote for help finding an inexpensive place to satisfy grown-ups, please a picky eater and surprise a child with an adventuresome palate. One restaurant came to mind: Chow. Tony Gulisano's trio of restaurants serve high-quality products at astoundingly reasonable prices. A picky eater might go for the fried egg sandwich or pepperoni pizza; a more worldly diner can warm up to Thai-style noodles; and just about everyone will love pot-roasted beef short ribs. The interiors of each location have the same casual bar-and-grill sensibility. Tables are set with Hershey's Syrup cans holding flatware wrapped in brown paper napkins.

Perbacco 230 California St. San Francisco (415) 955-0663 www.perbaccosf.com	Italian	\$14-\$29
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Soon after guests are seated, the breadsticks arrive, the first signal that chef-owner Staffan Terje is taking diners on a memorable culinary tour of Piedmont and Liguria. He also makes exceptional house-cured meats, tender pastas and rustic long-braised dishes. The interior bridges the divide between old and new in two levels that incorporate a large open kitchen and various dining areas, some with dramatically high ceilings and others with a more intimate feel. Co-owner Umberto Gibin, who has worked at many of the city's best places, confidently orchestrates the front-of-the-house staff.

Pesce 2227 Polk St. San Francisco (415) 928-8025 http://www.yelp.com/biz/pesce-san-francisco	Seafood Italian	\$14-\$20
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Venetian-inspired seafood is the draw at Ruggero Gadaldi's intimate restaurant, opened in 2000. The menu leans heavily to cicchetti (small plates); many are memorable, including braised octopus salad with sliced potatoes, celery and lemon. Then there are items like spaghetti with tuna "bolognese," and an interpretation of cioppino, a seafood stew, with tomato and saffron. In addition, three or four larger plates are listed each day on the blackboard. The handsome interior features a 16-seat zinc bar, teak shelving, mahogany paneling and hexagonal floor tiles.

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Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
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Piperade 1015 Battery St. San Francisco (415) 391-2555 www.piperade.com	Basque California	\$17-\$29
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Gerald Hirigoyen, who also owns Bocadillos along with his wife, Cameron, celebrates his Basque origins. He was one of the first in the Bay Area to have a communal table, which seems fitting for the bold food he prepares. The modern ambience, with a handsome bar, gives nods to the culture with the bright woven runners on each white-clothed table. In addition to the regular menu, Hirigoyen creates Basque classics during the week: Monday is veal sweetbreads with Madeira; Tuesday is sauteed calamari in ink sauce, Wednesday is seafood and shellfish soup.

Poleng Lounge 1751 Fulton St. San Francisco (415) 441-1751 www.polenglounge.com	Pan-Asian	\$6-\$15
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One of the most popular trends of late is dishes from many Asian cultures on the same menu. What sets Poleng Lounge apart is the young chef-owner Tim Luym, a 2007 Chronicle Rising Star chef. His heritage is Chinese and Spanish, but he grew up in Manila. His varied background shows up on the menu: Filipino ceviche with butterfish; curried corn fritters; Madras samosas; and bok choy steamed with shiitake sauce. Tea, a specialty, is also included in many drinks and some dishes. The interior feels like a tropical oasis, with a dance club in back that's also used for private events.

Quince 1701 Octavia St. San Francisco (415) 775-8500 www.quincerestaurant.com	Italian	\$18-\$34
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Michael Tusk, a protege of Paul Bertolli of Oliveto and Alice Waters of Chez Panisse, has developed an almost cult-like following at this small, elegant restaurant that he owns with his wife, Lindsay Tusk. She handles the front of the house; he's a masterful cook, especially with pasta. The food is inspired by the seasons and the menu changes nightly; he also constructs a six-course tasting menu (\$105). The building started life as a 19th century apothecary, still visible in the painted drawers around the perimeter; it's been enhanced with dropped crown molding and four Murano glass chandeliers in the same creamy color as the walls.

Range 842 Valencia St. San Francisco (415) 282-8283 www.rangesf.com	California American	\$18-\$24
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Phil West proved himself to be a rising culinary star when he opened Range about three years ago. His concise, constantly changing menu is straightforward, but the execution makes diners take note. His roast chicken may be accompanied by a Brussels sprout and pancetta bread salad with sherry jus; the petrale sole by cabbage, mushrooms, capers and Meyer lemon butter sauce. Cocktails and desserts are also exceptional. Much of the interior design was done by West and his wife, Cameron, using elements found in nearby Mission District shops. Open-beamed ceilings and a glassed-in kitchen contribute to the comfortable feel.

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Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
Rubicon 558 Sacramento St. San Francisco (415) 434-4100 www.sfrubicon.com	California French	\$23-\$38

Stuart Brioza is one of the most inventive chefs in the Bay Area, producing striking and unusual food that pairs well with the impressive wine list at this Financial District restaurant. He poaches tai snapper in olive oil, crusts wild striped bass in nuts and seeds, and pairs pork tenderloin and belly with dates and chicory. The interior has a chic urban feel - brick walls and exposed metal earthquake beams play against refined wood booths and Dale Chihuly glass sculptures.

Shanghai 1930 133 Steuart St. San Francisco (415) 896-5600 http://www.yelp.com/biz/shanghai-1930-san-francisco	Chinese	\$15-\$36
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The international mix of diners, live jazz from the adjoining lounge that mingles with the sound of chopsticks hitting china, and the aroma of fresh seafood and steamed dumplings transport diners to China. George Chen has created a sexy, modern dining room that pays homage to the vibrant Deco period, in a decor that's several steps above its competition. It's a fitting showcase for chef Jason Xu's combinations, which blend flawless technique with modern interpretations of classics.

Silks 222 Sansome San Francisco (415) 986-2020 www.mandarinoriental.com/sanfrancisco/	Pan-Asian American California	\$34-\$47
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The Mandarin Oriental Hotel has been through so many chefs in the past 20 years that few locals think about it when a special occasion rolls around. However, Joel Huff is giving the place traction with his inventive menu that shows Asian flair in dishes such as black cod with Manila clams in miso soup, curried quail with quinoa and foie gras, and air-dried duck with bamboo rice azuki beans and saffron. The restaurant, located a flight above the lobby, is a great place for conversation with plush surroundings, secluded booths and tasteful Asian accents.

Slanted Door 1 Ferry Building, No. 3 San Francisco (415) 861-8032 www.slanteddoor.com	Small Plates Vietnamese	\$16-\$32.50
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Charles Phan and his family have moved their groundbreaking Vietnamese restaurant three times in past 10 years, and with each move, the interior has been upgraded. In the Ferry Building, the modern, expansive space is filled with hard surfaces - white marble floors, black honed-granite countertops, cypress tables, floor-to-ceiling windows - and grand views of the bay. Phan also has expanded his empire to a less expensive version, Out the Door, in the basement of San Francisco's Westfield Centre. There's also a new one coming this year to Pacific Heights.

2008 Top San Francisco Restaurants

Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
Slow Club 2501 Mariposa St. San Francisco (415) 241-9390 www.slowclub.com	California Mediterranean	\$11.50-\$22.50

Chef Chris Kronner, a 2007 Chronicle Rising Star, now splits time between here and Serpentine, but the food at the Slow Club is still excellent and well priced, as are the drinks. When it opened in 1991, the Slow Club's urban, hard-surfaced environment was novel and cutting edge, and it still appeals to a young, vibrant crowd. The friendly waiters set the pleasant, casual mood for the American menu that features salads, soups such as roasted butternut with apples, and main courses such as pan-seared petrale sole with roasted onions, broccoli romanesco and borage-caper brown butter.

SPQR 1911 Fillmore St. San Francisco (415) 771-7779 www.spqrsf.com	Italian	\$12-\$19
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With its soulful Roman-inspired food and its cozy, cramped interior this new osteria could easily be at home in Rome. The tables are so close together that it's almost impossible not to acknowledge your neighbors, and praising the handiwork of co-owner and chef Nate Appleman and chef Chris Behr is a natural icebreaker. Diners can order five small plates for the ridiculously reasonable price of \$28; everything is a winner. Service shines, as does the all-Italian wine list from co-owner Shelley Lindgren.

Spruce 3640 Sacramento St. San Francisco (415) 931-5100 www.sprucesf.com	American California	\$22-\$37
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Stephen Brady has designed a handsome restaurant that makes everyone sitting in the oversize faux-ostrich skin leather chairs or on the chocolate mohair banquettes feel well heeled and glamorous. Opened by the team from the Village Pub in Woodside, this restaurant has become the gathering spot for the Pacific Heights set. The food produced by Mark Sullivan is meant to cover every occasion, from a hamburger or charcuterie at the bar to a celebratory dinner in the dining room.

Swan Oyster Depot 1517 Polk St. San Francisco (415) 673-1101 http://www.yelp.com/biz/swan-oyster-depot-san-francisco#hrid:d3Zy2Zx0V8ATmv3HO99jlg/query:swan%20oyster	Seafood	\$7-\$35
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The culinary history of San Francisco dining is encapsulated in this tiny seafood diner and retail shop. People from all over the world make a pilgrimage here to sit at one of the 20 stools, picking at the fresh crab or warming themselves with a bowl of clam chowder. The restaurant's roots stretch back to 1912; it was purchased in 1946 by Sal Sancimino. It's now run by his sons (and grandsons), who are always behind the counter cracking sweet, succulent crab and keeping up a constant banter with diners, who are mostly regulars.

2008 Top San Francisco Restaurants

Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
Tartine 600 Guerrero St. San Francisco (415) 487-2600 www.tartinebakery.com	Bakery French	\$8.25-\$9.75

Without a doubt, Tartine is the best bakery-cafe in San Francisco. Even those who loathe lines don't seem to mind queuing up for a morning bun or bread pudding at breakfast. During the day, there are croque monsieur and hot-pressed sandwiches, and in the afternoon, coconut cream tart or passion-fruit Bavarian. Many people eat in, but on special holidays such as Thanksgiving, if you order a pie, you'll be given a time slot to pick it up. Husband-and-wife team Chad Robertson and Elisabeth Prueitt also own a full-service restaurant, Bar Tartine, a few blocks away.

Terzo 3011 Steiner St. San Francisco (415) 441-3200 www.terzosf.com	Spanish California Mediterranean	\$16-\$28
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While Terzo was one of the best small-plate practitioners in the Bay Area, late last year chef Mark Gordon switched to a menu that includes larger portions. Rest assured the food is still as good, and it's served in an upscale dining room that caters to the moneyed Cow Hollow/Marina set. Generally there are five larger plates such as slow-cooked pork with spaetzle or skirt steak with braised greens and a dozen smaller plates including mussels steamed with sherry, roasted winter vegetables or grilled artichokes with piquillo peppers.

The Matterhorn Swiss Restaurant 2323 Van Ness Ave. San Francisco (415) 885-6116 www.matterhorn.citysearch.com	German	\$15.50-\$24.50 (fondue \$18-\$23 a person)
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Matterhorn, which feels like an Alpine chalet, is one of the few places to specialize in fondue. It's the perfect antidote for a harried lifestyle, because diners must slow down to eat. Matterhorn offers several variations of cheese fondue, and three versions with meat. Chef Andrew Thorpe also prepares traditional main courses and offers hard-to-find Swiss wines. Brigitte Thorpe aptly handles the dining room.

Ton Kiang 5821 Geary Blvd. San Francisco (415) 386-8530 www.tonkiang.net	Chinese	\$10-\$26
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Even after 31 years, Chin Wong's dim sum restaurant sets the standards. On weekends, diners stand in line to get one of the coveted 235 seats. The carts continually pass by the crowded tables carrying some of the best bites in the city: crisp-skinned duck, shrimp balls that look like little porcupines, custard "pancakes" thick with vanilla filling, crescent-shaped dumplings filled with shrimp and pea tips, airy steamed pork buns, leaf-wrapped sticky rice stuffed with meat and mounds of garlic-laced pea shoots. At night the restaurant serves Hakka-inspired specialties and dim sum.

2008 Top San Francisco Restaurants

Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
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Town Hall 342 Howard St. San Francisco (415) 908-3900 www.townhallsf.com	American	\$19-\$31
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Town Hall is San Francisco's gathering place for an eclectic group of movers and shakers. They come to dine at the bar, meet at the communal table or have dinner in the dining room of century-old building with brick walls and large windows overlooking its South of Market neighborhood. The host is Doug Washington, one of the city's great front-of-the-house guys. Chefs Mitchell and Steven Rosenthal, formerly of Postrio, hold up their end, producing American food with Southern roots.

Yank Sing 101 Spear St. San Francisco (415) 957-9300 www.yanksing.com	Chinese	\$4-\$15.50
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The roots go back to 1958, but Yank Sing's dim sum has taken on a contemporary aura with the third generation of the Chan family now in place. On any given day the carts will be filled with 80 items, including the "creative collection" of unusual dim sum. During the week, the food is served in the pleasantly appointed dining room, but on weekends the tables spill out into the lobby of Rincon Center, creating enough space for 500. There's also a small, more casual location on Stevenson Street, where the food is equally fresh and inviting.

Yoshi's San Francisco 1330 Fillmore St. San Francisco (415) 655-5600 http://sf.yoshis.com/sf/jazzclub	Japanese	\$14-\$48
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Shotaro Kamio creates some of the best, most innovative Japanese food in the Bay Area, cooking with a three-S philosophy: season, simple, surprise. That means creative sushi rolls, pristine sashimi and beautifully prepared dishes from the robata grill and wood-burning oven. He roasts vegetables in cedar and uses uni to flavor his risotto along with vanilla-infused cauliflower. Kamio orchestrates the meals in front of a 3,500-square-foot kitchen that complements the loft-like dining room. Yoshi's masterfully blends fine dining, artistic preparations and live music in the club next door.

Zarzuela 2000 Hyde St. San Francisco (415) 346-0800 http://www.yelp.com/biz/zarzuela-san-francisco	Spanish Tapas	\$14.95-\$19.95 (small plates \$3.25-\$10.95)
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Long before small plates swept the country, Lucas Gasco was turning out delicious tapas at this Spanish-inspired restaurant on Hyde Street, right on the cable car line. For 14 years, he's produced the famed tortilla espanola; ham and cheese croquettes; roast duck leg in prune sauce; and grilled oysters in romesco sauce. The restaurant also features larger plates including paella, an incredible oxtail stew, and pork medallions with piquillo peppers, but many are also offered in half portions. Beamed ceilings, stucco walls, tile floor and windows overlooking the tree-lined street lend a Spanish ambience.

2008 Top San Francisco Restaurants

Restaurant	Cuisines	Price Range
Zuni Café 1658 Market St. San Francisco (415) 552-2522 www.zunicafe.com	Mediterranean	\$14-\$27.50

Few restaurants are as beloved - or consistent - as Zuni Cafe, which is like San Francisco's dining room, attracting a wide range of diners. Politicians, celebrities, artists, executives and just plain folks find common ground here. No wonder the 29-year-old restaurant, and chef-owner Judy Rodgers, have been honored by the James Beard Foundation with Outstanding Chef and Outstanding Restaurant awards. The roast chicken, hamburger and Caesar salad are legendary, and so is the rustic urban interior that overlooks Market Street.