



Bar Agricole

Smart cocktails in a stunning setting.

SOMA

A restaurant this beautiful could almost get by on looks alone. A Zen-like courtyard leads into a space of shapely wood banquettes and skylights framed by glass tubes that call to mind curtains shifting in the wind. Barmaster Thad Vogler works cocktail magic. His drinks are tinged with nostalgia (sours, Collinses, and other classics) but made with local spirits and artisanal syrups for a very contemporary San Francisco flavor. Chef Brandon Jew's menu aims for a restrained aesthetic: green beans with mustard-bathed potatoes, green salad with chive dressing (too lightly applied). High notes include spaghetti with duck ragù and chanterelles, and crisp-skinned quail with grilled scallions and creamed spinach. But often his medleys are off-key. An apple, burdock, and celeriac slaw cries out for acid. Prosciutto-wrapped rabbit is overcooked. But the desserts, like kabocha squash tart, are impeccable. Still, until the kitchen and the cooking acquire more seasoning, you're more likely to drain the last drop of your cocktail than to mop the last morsel from your plate. 355 11TH ST. (BET. HARRISON AND FOLSOM STS.), S.F., 415-355-9400 \$\$\$ DRW ★★½

BY JOSH SENS

PHOTOGRAPH BY LAURA FLIPPEN

Ragazza

A new pizza place joins the upper crust.

NOPA

So what if this town doesn't need another California-Neapolitan pizza place—we still want one. More than ever, it seems, judging from a recent hour-and-a-half wait for a table at one of the newest: Ragazza, which opened in September. Sharon Ardiana's NoPa offshoot of her long-loved Gialina, in Glen Park, is already wooing Little Star loyalists from up the street. Its sleek wood decor (mixed with the same old-time black-and-white family photos) is more hipster-chic than kiddie-centric. And that's reflected in the menu, which, although similar to Gialina's, is enhanced by just-like-in-Italy antipasti, such as house-stretched mozzarella with prosciutto di Parma, and a salumi plate assembled with local all-stars like Boccolone mortadella and Fra'Mani salume gentile. Things only get better with the addictive contorni (like the braised greens with bacon and goat cheese) and the brief list of pastas and roasts (try strozzapreti tossed with meaty short-rib ragù). But—seriously—save room for those ethereally thin pies: the Margherita; the Calabrian chili-spiked Moto; and the Potato, topped with bacon, gooey gorgonzola, and, may we suggest, Ardiana's signature centerpiece topping, the egg. 311 DIVISADERO ST. (BET. PAGE AND OAK STS.), S.F., 415-255-1133

\$\$\$ DW ★★½

BY RACHEL LEVIN

Spoonbar

Drinks trump dinner at this stylish wine-country spot.

HEALDSBURG

This bar and restaurant at the H2Hotel makes a winning first impression, its dining room dappled with apple-green bar stools and sea-blue chairs, its floor-to-ceiling windows pushed open to the sidewalk, spilling life into the stillness of what's become a twee wine-country town. Mixologist Scott Beattie builds on that upbeat spirit. His balanced cocktails are rendered with such confidence, he offers the drinks in pitchers, so you can refill your own Sazeracs and sours. The food is good for grazing: spicy lamb meatballs, warm flatbread with Moroccan eggplant spread, and flaky goat cheese-stuffed phyllo "cigars" all qualify as elevated bar snacks. But deeper trips into the menu yield diminishing returns. Grilled octopus, studded with olives and seasoned with the minty Italian herb nepitella, is forlorn and mushy. A beef and lamb burger is overwhelmed by cucumber chutney, yogurt, and tomato confit. Strawberry ricotta doughnuts revive your interest. Slightly. You walk in optimistic but leave a few drinks later with the sober outlook of a realist whose lofty expectations have settled back on earth.

219 HEALDSBURG AVE. (AT MATHESON ST.),

707-433-7222 \$\$ RW ★½

BY JOSH SENS

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, Jan Newberry, and Josh Sens.

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

Prices:

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

Symbols:

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

Ratings:

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

Updates

Ame

SOMA

Five years after this handsome restaurant opened in the St. Regis Hotel, a meal here is as smooth and uneventful as a ride in a Lexus set on cruise control. Lissa Doumani and Hiro Sone, who also still run Terra in St. Helena, have hardly tweaked the California-Asian menu, letting it coast on the momentum of its signature dishes, such as grilled whole lobster in yuzu brown butter, and sake-marinated cod, which sloughs off like a glacier into sweet shiso broth, with shrimp dumplings bobbing all around. Now and then, there are signs of inattention. The anchovies in a salad's bagna cauda-style vinaigrette are merely alleged; the evidence would not stand up in court. For every adventurous bite of uni (on bruschetta, with lardo) there are less risqué options, like tempura poke, as sure to please conservative tastes as easy-listening hits on the radio. "I assume you're staying with us?" a waiter says, as you nibble on a sugar-dusted apple beignet. It's not a bad assumption. Pretty much everyone appears to be. (J.S.) 689 MISSION ST. (AT 3RD ST.), 415-284-4040 \$\$\$ RWV ★★½

Anchor & Hope

SOMA

Frayed ship's ropes dangle from the rafters, and old life preservers and wooden oars hang on the walls, but even after two years, Anchor & Hope still manages to be cool, not kitschy. Tucked in a sleek, soaring space on Minna Street, the location is a bit inconvenient for anyone not rolling in after work for happy hour (\$1 oysters paired with beers from the bar's lengthy, globe-trotting list). Still, it's a lot closer than a flight to the East Coast for straight-from-Maine lobster, here stuffed into a lightly toasted brioche bun; creamy clam

chowder studded with hunks of smoked bacon; and plump, chilled shrimp with a spicy housemade cocktail sauce—far fresher than the wimpy, tasteless cocktail you remember from childhood. Just like Anchor & Hope itself: your favorite seafood shack, all grown up. (R.L.) 83 MINNA ST. (BET. 1ST AND 2ND STS.), 415-501-9100 \$\$\$ RW ★★

Cheap eats

Schweet Boks

OUTER SUNSET

🍷 Stoners, college students, and toddlers, listen up: Your dream has come true, thanks to fellow dreamer 24-year-old Dexter Cheng, who, after years of serious cereal-mixing experimentation, has finally opened this closet-size café deep in the Sunset. There are only four stools but unlimited combinations of cereal: Cocoa Puffs with Cookie Crisp and crushed Oreos; Kix, Trix, and Rice Krispies topped with coconut; Golden Grahams and Cap'n Crunch with chocolate chips. It's not all one big sugar rush: There's Kashi, of course, and Grape-Nuts is a surprisingly hot seller (Cheng prefers his with warm milk). You can get steel-cut oats topped with fresh banana syrup and agave nectar too. Yeah, spending \$3 for a bowl when you could buy a whole box for a buck or two more seems kind of silly, but, hey, cereal eaters like to go out for breakfast, too. Plus, here you can add mini marshmallows and chocolate syrup or order a hot cocoa made extra creamy with muddled banana. And best of all, for \$6.65 you can mix your own crazy concoction box to take home. (R.L.) 2142 IRVING ST. (AT 22ND ST.), 415-992-2119 \$ W ★½

San Francisco

Aziza

RICHMOND

After his triumph on *Iron Chef*, Mourad Lahlou returned to his Moorish-inspired Richmond district redoubt, throngs of culinary gawkers trailing in his wake. They're drawn to his cleverly exotic cooking, which takes Moroccan cuisine for a stylized spin. Fond of smoldering spice blends, like ras el hanout, which heats a molten caserole of lima beans and feta, Lahlou also finds great pleasure in artistic presentations and haute techniques. Miniature lamb meatballs lie crisscrossed intricately over jicama salad. A sous-vide Tibetan pear takes its tender place beside an artichoke heart. For \$68, the five-course tasting option showcases the basics: lentil soup, chicken pastilla, and succulent lamb shank with prunes. It's a safe bet but less exciting than an à la carte adventure, especially with one of the restaurant's highly alcoholic drinks. Though they're more bracing than balanced, the cocktails help you endure backlogs in the kitchen—the result of surging interest in Aziza, and seemingly the only downside of Lahlou's TV fame. (J.S.) 5800 GEARY BLVD. (AT 22ND AVE.), 415-752-2222 \$\$\$ DRWV ★★½ (6/09)

Baker & Banker

PACIFIC HEIGHTS

Lori Baker really is one, but Jeff Banker's surname is deceptive. He wears the toque at the couple's satisfying new restaurant, which occupies the building left behind by Quince. The menu isn't meant to startle, but it delivers small surprises. Creamy cauliflower soup with a scattering of almonds enjoys the gentle heat of Vadouvan curry, and calamari marinated in chimichurri lends fiery flavor to a bright salad of chicories, grapefruit, and hearts of palm, with a handful of fried chickpeas for crunch. The kitchen hits a great number of high notes, from sweetly balanced black cod braised in sake, mirin, soy,