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## POD Network 1980 Conference Restaurant Guide

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POD Network 1980 Conference

Restaurant Guide

or

Steve's Prejudices and Sundry Hearsay  
Regarding Dining Out In That Gargantuan  
Garden of Gastronomic Gratifications,  
the San Francisco Bay Area....the Big G!



You are on your own for only one meal - Friday evening - while the conference is in session.

What follows is a personal directory to a few of the thousands of eaterys in this splendid region. Among the many reasons I moved to the Bay Area is the attraction of the marvelous cuisine. Now bear in mind - I've only been here for three and a half months, so this is not the big D: the definitive directory to divers delights. But I hope it will prevent you from squandering all of your food money (that is, when not attending an official conference function!?!).

Bon appetit!

Steve Scholl  
October 16, 1980

## SAN FRANCISCO

### Chinese

Of the hundreds of Chinese restaurants available in the Bay Area, I have chosen the following as a personal selection from among those located in the traditional "Chinatown" area, nearby Financial District and Fisherman's Wharf. If you are in the Clement Street region of San Francisco, there are another spate of excellent establishments. The following cover the major regional genres (with the exception of camp places, like Sam Wo's, where one can go to have noodles and be insulted by Edsel Ford Wong, the many Americanized mass-production tourist caterers and hole-in-the-wall strictly Chinese diners).

SUN HUNG HEUNG (744 Washington St. - 982-2319,  
11:30 a.m. - midnight)

This is my favorite all purpose, most regions place. Sun's is frequented by Chinese-Americans, San Francisco gourmands and tourists, and all receive similarly good though typically brusque Chinese service. Prices are moderate, bar service is slow and uninspiring. There is hardly a wine selection. Their Mongolian lamb is a good example of this standard Mandarin dish, and their Mongolian steak balls and beef (or other things) under "Snow" are somewhat unusual. Won ton soup here is a meal in itself. Few dishes are very spicy, but if you want a place where people with tastes ranging from Canton to Szechuan can get a wide selection at good prices, go to Sun's. If the wait is too long, the Nan Yuen next door is similar, though not as good, in my opinion.

EMPRESS OF CHINA (838 Grant Ave. - 434-1345. Open  
7 days. Men: Jackets Required)

I would almost eliminate the Empress because it is such a tourist attraction, but the panoramic view from the rear of the building is certainly worth rubbing elbows with someone from Iowa wearing an Hawaiian shirt. (A colleague of mine read this review and chided me: "I like the Empress - but I guess I am a bit of a colonialist.") Prices are a little high but the food is generally good and there is a reasonably wide selection. Good bar service here. Reservations are helpful if you want a good view.

KAN'S (708 Grant Ave. - 982-2388 - lunch 12-3 M-F;  
dinner until 10 Sun-Fri, until 11 on Sat.)

You dress up to go to Jimmy Kan's, and you feel good that you have done so. Levi's are sufficient for most of the Chinese restaurants, though polyester might be more suitable for the Empress of China and The Mandarin is a step up - perhaps Calvin's and a silk shirt.) Kan's food is excellent, and the prices are higher than ordinary in Chinatown - perhaps justifiably so. The service is more like that in a respectable French restaurant than in your typical Chinese establishment. The dishes here are more delicate and much more carefully presented than in a place such as Sun's, but are limited to Cantonese. Reservations on a Friday night are a must.

TUNG FONG, (808 Pacific Ave. - 362-7115 (9:00 am to  
3:00 pm only)

If you are in Chinatown during the day, one of the best bets is a dim sum lunch. It is inexpensive, very "in" and will give you an experience that is hard to replicate in most American cities. Dim sum is a kind of Chinese finger food, ranging from the proto-typical steamed buns filled with all sorts of delicacies to foil-wrapped savory chicken to a variety of things that resemble egg rolls, fried won tons or Mandarin "pot stickers" - a kind of won ton filled with ground pork, scallions, ginger and other spices, steamed first and then allowed to fry until the bottom is deep brown while the rest remains moist and soft. The key to success at Tung Fong is to insist on a table near the kitchen door. The method of ordering is to select items from trays brought around in no particular order by a small army of waitresses. They will gladly explain to you what each dish is, but they have a penchant for walking right past you to the nearest table of beckoning Chinatown locals, or running out of exactly what you wanted long before they get to your table. There's a certain sense of triumph in getting all of the things you wanted in a reasonable time without having thoroughly overdone it. Don't worry about the prices: your host or hostess will total up the cost by counting the dishes left on your table (how they know which ones are which I have never figured out), and you'll be surprised at how reasonable it is. Don't be intimidated by the size of some orders: you can always ask for half an order and they will split it on the spot.

HUNAN (924 Sansome St., 956-7727. 11:30 am to 9:30 pm  
Closed Sat and Sun)

A fellow named Henry Chung and his wife started a very tiny restaurant on the eastern edge of Chinatown years ago. Henry's wife did the cooking and it was very spicy Hunanese. The New York Times lists it as one of the best restaurants in the country - I have not made up my mind yet. But plenty of people think it is the place to go, and its new location in a former warehouse near the Embarcadero is always teeming. Get a reservation to assure a space. They close early so plan ahead. Don't expect things to come in any particular order or with any appropriate speed (you may wait awhile, and you may be rushed - they seem to have their own rhythm about things). Almost everything on the menu is spicy hot, and I strongly advise against requesting anything that is extra spicy unless you want a cathartic experience, a sauna from the inside out, or unless you have a throat and nose infection that requires cauterization. Unique onion cakes are an essential appetizer. The eggplant salad is spicy yet cool - a very interesting dish. You should try at least one of the smoked dishes (although I think the smoking is a little too heavy, undoubtedly the result of Henry's having his own smoking ovens on the premises). A pitcher of beer is an appropriate and essential accompaniment. Better ask for water on the side, too. Prices are reasonable.

THE MANDARIN (Ghirardelli Square, 673-8812. Open  
7 days a week)

Here's one at Fisherman's Wharf. A fancy place and the food is excellent. The restaurant has the reputation of having introduced Mandarin cooking for American tastes, and they can do elaborate banquets if you plan ahead. It is a little pricey, but I think you get what you pay for.

#### Haut Cuisine

There are so many first-class, expensive French restaurants in San Francisco that I hesitate to comment on them. But I don't hesitate very long. If you've never been to Ernie's, by all means go. It has a deservedly excellent reputation, and if you value ambience you'll get your money's worth in both food and surroundings. The flower arrangements are fantastic and the service is impeccable. They have all the classic French dishes and touches and a few specialties of their own. If you want

to spend even more money, at a place that I think is over-priced (though I do enjoy the food), go to La Bourqogne. Try to act like you have as much money as the other people who are sitting around you, and as you go out mutter something about having forgotten to have a valet park your "Silver Cloud". The same game, Italian-style, can be played at Orsi's.

If you enjoy a genteel piano bar, do your French dining at L'Etoile. Afterward, head for the Mark Hopkins Hotel just up the street and take in some after-dinner drinks and the view from the "Top of the Mark".

Unfortunately, I haven't received a subsidy from POD to do sampling in the preparation of this guide and I have not yet been able to get to Le Club. It has a reputation for being the best French restaurant in the City, perhaps because it is undiscovered by most tourists. Another with a very loyal following is Jack's, but I need two more weeks to work it into my sampling schedule. With all of the places above, it may not be possible to get decent reservations without at least a week's notice, though there is sometimes room open for very late in the evening. A place you are more likely to get into, and one that has very fine value for the high quality of its cuisine, is L'Escargot on Union Street. You may feel better dressed up, but it is not really necessary here and the setting seems just right for a kind of classy, country-style place. Their rabbit is excellent, if it is available. The wine list is pretty good and not overpriced. For dessert have the fresh fruit in saboyen sauce. Then stroll down Union Street where there is plenty of good window shopping and late-night bar action.

#### Fish, Vegetables, Cozy and Exotic

The serious fish places downtown are the famous Tadich Grill (240 California) and Sam's Grill (374 Bush). They are impossibly crowded at lunch time, close at 9:00 pm and 8:15 pm respectively, take no reservations and are not open on weekends. Prices are very reasonable. Try some sand dabs, rex or petrale sole, or some salmon or swordfish grilled. Everything is fresh, fresh.

At Fisherman's Wharf, my suggestions are Alioto's, A. Sabella's, and Scoma's. Prices are generally higher than at the downtown grills, but you get to look out windows and later you can browse the plastique in Ghirardelli Square, The Cannery or Pier 39.

Best vegetarian fare for gourmets is Green's at Fort Mason. Run by the Tassajara Zen community, it serves dinner only on weekends and usually requires at least one week's advance reservations. More accessible, somewhat antiseptic, but still very good is Dipti Nivas at 216 Church St. (They close at 10:00 pm)

For something stylishly cozy, try Vasilli's. It is in Compton Place, an alley between Grant and Stockton just off Union Square behind Gumps (the store for the best exotica of all sorts), has well-prepared cocktails, a dramatic iron-sculpture fire-breathing dragon outside over the door and intimate banquet tables in a warm brick and sculpture interior ambience, and an intelligently limited Greek/Continental menu.

Speaking of exotica, there is always the original Trader Vic's, also in a downtown alley near Union Square. It is too expensive, I think, but it is a classic of the now-familiar eclectic South Seas genre, featuring everything from those wild, rum-based and fruit drinks to American (including excellent seafood), Chinese, Polynesian and Indian cooking. For the more adventuresome, there is Moroccan fare at Agadir, Indonesian at Sari's, Vietnamese at the Saigon and Northern Indian at the Tandoori. I haven't tried Basque yet, but there are several such home-style places. And there are a large number of Russian cafes.

Neither have I made an attempt yet to sort out the best from the plethora of Italian, Japanese and Mexican places. I hear that Vanessi's, Sanppo and La Rondalla are good bets. But if you want a good sushi bar at 2:30 am, I can vouch for Kinokawa at Bush and Grant. There is even a "California Roll" for the squeamish who have not yet decided to explore the tender rewards of raw fish, or for those who, by 2:30 am, can't imagine eating anything raw.

#### BERKELEY / OAKLAND / KENSINGTON

Unfortunately there are few places within really convenient walking distance of the Claremont. If you are up for a hike, however, you really can walk to almost all of the following places that have a Berkeley address. You should at least stroll down to the first street below the tennis courts and get something from the Bread Garden on Domingo Avenue.

CHEZ PANISSE (1517 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley - 548-5525)

I just have to put this one first. Some would say this is the best French restaurant in all of California. It is certainly special. The food tends to be perhaps too delicate and mild at times, but everything can vary since the menu changes daily and I have never seen anything repeated. Dinner is prix fixe and probably unavailable - unless there are some cancellations, you need several days' notice for a Friday night reservation - and at this writing they are remodeling the downstairs main dining room. How-ever, the cafe upstairs has been recently expanded and is open from 11:30 am through the evening and available without reservations. There is a standard menu and two or three specials of the day, most like single-course meals costing only \$5 or \$6. They have a limited but well-chosen wine list. They bake their own bread and produce some of the best baguettes available anywhere. If there is a tart available for dinner, you'll find it one of the best you've ever eaten. Everything is done with style, including the famous Chez Panisse posters, designed and printed by David Lance Goines for more than a decade. Personally, I'd be ashamed to tell anyone that I'd been in Berkeley and hadn't had at least one meal at Chez Panisse.

NARSAI'S (385 Colusa Ave., Berkeley - 527-7900)

You'll need wheels to get to Narsai's and, again, you probably can't get a reservation unless you called ahead before you reached California. This expensive restaurant is probably the biggest deal in the East Bay, and I suspect it is worth the rather high prices (although some Berkeley populists refuse to go on the basis that nobody should charge over \$20 for a dinner, now matter how good it is). If I told you how long the wine list is, you probably wouldn't believe it. In addition to that, there is a second wine list that is available by request that is even longer, and the cellar has wines upon wines beyond that. Undoubtedly the most extensive in the region. What you really need to know is that if you want to go out and buy things to take back to your room (that does sound depressing) or, better, if you're going to be spending Sunday picnicking someplace idyllic such as Angel Island, Narsai's Market is open daily (until 7:00 Friday evening) and will drive you crazy with its cheeses, baguettes and croissants, delicatessen items, good wines and sublime desserts. Some people can never tear themselves away from the dessert display. The only thing that surpasses these delicacies are the chocolate concoctions available at Cocolat (but it closes an hour

earlier and you wouldn't dare miss a POD session to hustle on down just for a piece of the richest chocolate cake or truffle you've ever had, would you?).

YENCHING MANDARIN CHINESE RESTAURANT (2017 Shattuck Ave.  
848-2200)

There may be other good Chinese restaurants in Berkeley, but I can never resist going back to the Mandarin. This is, first, great northern Chinese food. The pot stickers are essential for appetizer, steaming rice soup is the appropriately scintillating second course, and you have a wide variety of entrees. Their Mongolian Lamb is particularly good and their whole fish is a house specialty about which you should inquire. Take the advice of the waiters - they know what they're doing. This is a good place if you've got a large party.

SIBONY (1700 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley - 843-2594  
Lunch and Dinner until 10:00 pm)

I suspect we will see a flood of Cuban restaurants outside of Florida in the years to come. If they are anything like Siboney, it is a welcome addition to our choices of cuisine. The bar at Siboney has some interesting specialty drinks (but you better ask what kind of glass they come it - some are sexist as are the "art" pieces hanging in the bar). You probably won't have time to order ahead for the roast suckling pig, but there are many other good choices. The diced pork is excellent, as are the beef and fish dishes. If you spot a particularly attractive, thin, long-haired waitress who looks like she might be a former graduate student in Spanish at Cal, be seated at one of her tables. She's been with the establishment since it opened and is an absolutely trustworthy guide to selecting from the menu. She'll even correct your pronunciation. (If you're still hot to trot after the POD dancing at the Claremont Thursday night, head down to Siboney where they are doing the salsa into the wee hours with an excellent band. However, there's a lot of skill out on the floor so you better be good, high or both if you don't want to feel like a klutz.)

YOSHI'S (Open 6 days a week, exc. Mon - 6030 Claremont Ave.  
652-9200)

On down Claremont Avenue into Oakland is a recently-expanded Japanese restaurant that has the full range of

specialties: a good sushi bar, delicate tempura and hearty sukiyaki. Make a reservation or you'll have to wait a long time in the uninspiring ambience of the new bar upstairs (inspiration waxes in the later evening when a jazz group appears).

#### SUNDAY BRUNCH

THE TRIDENT (565 Bridgeway, Sausalito, Marin County  
332-1334)

It may not be the best brunch in town, but it's one of the best views (across the Bay looking back at the City). Everything is bright and attractive - from the waiters and waitresses to the wooden fixtures and colorful awnings. You can eat outside if the weather is right and it is part of the "Marin experience". That is, you're in northern California, by the water, but there is something strangely southern California about the way the people are dressed and act. This could be Newport Beach if that wasn't the Transamerica Pyramid across the Bay.

Another choice in Sausalito is the Spinnaker, also on Bridgeway but closer to the ferry dock. A third is the Alta Mira Hotel up the hill. If you want to stay in the East Bay, try Mama's Royal Cafe (4012 Broadway, Oakland - 547-9561; opens at 8:00 am). And if you're heading for the wine country, try La Belle Helene in St. Helena or the Provencale at the Sonoma Mission Inn just north of Sonoma.

