

# EATS

San Francisco

News, reviews,  
cheap eats,  
and updates

EDITED BY  
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At Palo Alto's  
Oaxacan Kitchen,  
frothy hot chocolate  
redolent with almonds  
makes a warming  
after-dinner drink.

PHOTOGRAPH BY  
JENNIFER MARTINE



## The Oaxacan Kitchen

Regional Mexican moves from the farmers' market to a charming new café.

PALO ALTO

*Hechos a mano* (“made by hand”) only begins to describe the labor-intensive cooking honored here by Ron Kent and his Oaxacan-born wife, Zaida. Their mole negro calls for 23 ingredients—each sautéed, toasted, or roasted before being ground into a sauce that’s finished with cocoa beans imported from Tabasco. Masa is treated with equal care: It’s ground coarse for plump tamales wrapped in banana leaves, with a finer grind reserved for thin tortillas pressed into small memelas or giant tlayudas topped with black-bean purée, mild salsa, guacamole, queso fresco, and salted beef or chicken. The only fusion you’ll find is on the dessert menu, which sneaks in flourless bittersweet-chocolate cake alongside Oaxacan hot chocolate thick with ground almonds. Make reservations—the restaurant is crowded with fans from the six farmers’ markets where the Kents still do business. 2323 BIRCH ST. (AT CAMBRIDGE AVE.), 650-321-8003 **\$\$ RW ★★**

BY SUSAN BRYAN

PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNIFER MARTINÉ

## Le Garage

A lively bistro drops anchor in Richardson Bay.

SAUSALITO

*Le* view at Le Garage of yachts sleeping in their slips is pure Sausalito, but *le* mood and *le* food are both *vraiment français*. A pair of Chez Papa Bistrot veterans, Bruno Denis and Olivier Souvestre, built this bistro in a corrugated warehouse on the waterfront and filled their menu with familiar Gallic touches. Weekend brunch brings rich basics, like eggs benedict, brioche French toast, and a Kobe beef burger with caramelized onions—standard-issue items improved by the setting and the soft breezes blowing off the bay. Dinner is much better. A creamy shiitake mushroom soup springs to life; plump mussels Provençal play sweetly in a garlicky white-wine bath; and tender duck confit receives a wintry upgrade from chanterelles and apple-cider gastrique. It’s a skilled kitchen, but a small one that often struggles to keep pace. Part of you will find this radiantly charming—the rest of you may feel like a gruff American trying to flag down a *garçon* at a Left Bank café. 85 LIBERTY SHIP WAY, STE. 109, 415-332-5625 **\$\$\$ RW ★★**

BY JOSH SENS

## Limon Rotisserie

It’s a buyers’ market at this shining Peruvian spot.

MISSION

For anyone who still hasn’t received a government bailout, Martin Castillo has your budget in mind. His offshoot of Limon, opened after the building that housed the original was scorched by fire, specializes in Peruvian small plates at a bargain price. Only one item goes for more than \$10: a whole roast chicken, cooked on a spit in the open kitchen. It’s seasoned with salt, hot pepper, and lime—the same zesty trio that enlivens an assortment of fresh-tasting seviches and hot dishes like aguadito de pollo, comforting chicken soup with a friendly kick. When those flavors get repetitive (which they do), milder, meaty options offer an escape, such as rich grilled beef hearts or hangar steak with a satisfying rice-and-bean cake on the side. The bare-bones dining room makes a good match for the menu: It’s awash in citrus greens and yellows, and buzzing with a crowd that has quickly realized you don’t always get what you pay for. Sometimes, you get a little bit more. 1001 S. VAN NESS AVE. (AT 21ST ST.), 415-821-2134 **\$\$ W ★★**

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, Peggy Nauts, Jan Newberry, Josh Sens, Lisa Trotter, and Nan Wiener.

**CHECK BACK EACH MONTH** for a new selection of reviews. You can search our entire database of reviews at [sanfrancisco.com](http://sanfrancisco.com).

### Prices:

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

### Symbols:

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

### Ratings:

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