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the East Bay

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**INSIDE** How to dine healthy, keep your  
resolutions, and win a World Series

JANUARY 2007 \$3.95



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the relatively accessible, quick convenience of the Americanized chains. Whether it's the delicious *sopa azteca* (a chili-laden broth strewn with shredded chicken and fried tortilla strips) or the more common chili-verde burrito, Picante seldom disappoints. *Platos*—complete with beans and your choice of meat, rice, and tortillas—make a meal for two, and the house-made habanero, green-chili, and tomato salsas are insidiously good. Extra credits: Corn tortillas are made in-house, and the pork and beef are from Niman Ranch. Lunch and dinner daily. ☹ ☺ + \$

### Rick and Ann's Restaurant

2922 Domingo Ave., (510) 649-8538, www.rickandanns.com. Since its 1989 opening, this cozy restaurant near the western base of the Claremont Resort & Spa has been a favorite Berkeley breakfast spot. Morning offerings include cornmeal pancakes, Ann's tofu scramble, and Rick's signature cereal, Morning Crunch. Since the weekend wait for these famous breakfasts can easily stretch to an hour, Rick and Ann's is also a nice place to pop in for supper. A catering menu has grown out of the restaurant business. Breakfast and lunch daily, dinner Wed.–Sat. ☹ ☺ + \$\$

**Rivoli** 1539 Solano Ave., (510) 526-2542, www.rivolirestaurant.com. Rivoli is one of the bright lights of Solano Avenue dining, with two small rooms awash in color and a window wall that brings the luxuriant garden inside. Service is every bit as warm as the decor. Chef Wendy Brucker seamlessly blends dishes and techniques from around the world, with large dollops of California and Mediterranean influence evident on the ever-changing, grill-intensive menu. There may be a lot happening on Rivoli's plates, but Brucker's complex compositions get the job done. Dinner daily. ☹ \$\$\$

**Sea Salt** 2512 San Pablo Ave., (510) 883-1720, www.seasaltrestaurant.com. It's easy to see why people love Sea Salt, a popular seafood restaurant from the owners of Lalime's and Fonda. Each dish achieves simplicity, seasonality, and flavor. Plump, sweet clams mingle with cubed potatoes, cream, and smoky bacon in the homey clam chowder. Pan-roasted wild salmon, cooked to a perfect medium rare, is accompanied by a hearty spoonful of olive oil—braised

artichokes. We're still savoring the memory of our favorite dish from the summer menu: a cleanly fried soft-shell crab resting on a bed of sweet corn and topped with a drizzle of green goddess dressing. The narrow, brick-walled dining room has large, street-facing windows; a sleek, polished-concrete entryway bar; and an open kitchen in the back. This is a restaurant for fish lovers, as only desserts and a few salads don't feature seafood. At your meal's end, those zippy desserts, such as lime frozen yogurt served with a crisp tuile, cleanse the palate. Lunch and dinner daily. ☹ ☺ + \$\$

**Spenger's Fresh Fish Grotto** 1919 Fourth St., (510) 845-7771, www.spengers.com. This landmark restaurant near the Berkeley Marina has been serving delicacies of the sea for more than a century. After a \$5 million renovation in the late 1990s, Spenger's is again offering fresh morsels from such faraway fishdoms as Japan (*tobiko* caviar), Hawaii (ahi tuna), Alaska (coho salmon), Prince Edward Island in Canada (mussels), and

Costa Rica (tilapia). A refreshing selection of salads and sandwiches provides for the lunch crowd, and the dinner menu boasts prime steaks alongside the ubiquitous fish. With cozy booths for family dining—as well as a steal of an early-bird menu—the restaurant creates a consistently charming ambience for a satisfying seafood feast. Lunch and dinner daily. ☹ ☺ \$\$\$

**Tacubaya** 1788 Fourth St., (510) 525-5160. Tacubaya is sister restaurant to the popular Doña Tomás in Oakland, where chef-owners Thomas Schnetz and Dona Savitsky made a name for themselves with soulful renditions of Mexican classics. At Tacubaya, the couple have stuck to using fresh, locally grown produce, Niman Ranch meats, and organic Hoffman Farm chickens. Chef Matt Ridgeway and his crew make everything from scratch every day, including heartbreakingly wonderful corn tortillas, icy and refreshing horchata, and some memorable salsas. Earthy, regionally authentic breakfast and lunch dishes include chilaquiles, ceviche, and tamales of sweet corn or pork with red mole—with nary a burrito in sight. Breakfast and lunch daily, dinner Wed.–Mon. ☹ ☺ + \$

**T-Rex Barbeque** 1300 10th St., (510) 527-0099, www.t-rex-bbq.com. Barbecue gets the gourmet treatment at T-Rex. The meat—juicy pulled pork butt, tender brisket, and addictive, smoky ribs—comes from small, high-quality ranches and is smoked in-house. The

## Veggie Meets Foodie

AFTER ALL of the ham, turkey, and prime rib dinners of the holidays, you might find yourself craving a plate of veggies. Robert Curry, the chef who recently earned a coveted Michelin star for Auberge du Soleil in Napa Valley, had just that hankering in mind when he created the vegetarian tasting menu for the resort's fine-dining restaurant.

"In the past, we had adapted to individual requests from vegetarians," says Curry, "but it seems like more and more people are eating that way anyway. Even nonvegetarians reach a saturation point [with meat]. Your body needs a break."

Curry's vegetarian menu may give your body a break, but it will take your taste buds on a wild ride. A meal might start with a bowl of subtle chestnut soup paired with brightly flavored *medjool* dates Columbo (stuffed with curried mascarpone). Your entrée could be tender gnocchi in a cloud of parmesan *nage*, and the meal might culminate with phyllo-wrapped molten-centered dark-chocolate dumplings served with tarragon ice cream and a drizzle of Arbequina olive oil.

Each course can be paired with an interesting wine, such as a Martin Alfaro Chardonnay from the Santa Cruz Mountains that plays beautifully with the sweetness and nuttiness of candied pistachios atop the stuffed dates, or a Bodegas Roda Tempranillo from Rioja, Spain, that matches perfectly with the notes of earth and spice of the wild mushrooms and pea tendrils in the gnocchi dish.

Curry changes the vegetarian menu at least four times a year to follow the seasons. "Produce has always driven my menus," he says. "Produce is what makes cooking seasonal, vital, and more exciting."

*The vegetarian tasting menu includes dairy products and eggs, unless a guest requests otherwise. Fish may be added upon request. \$85 per person or \$126 per person with wine pairings. Auberge du Soleil, 180 Rutherford Hill Rd., Rutherford, (707) 963-1211, www.aubergedusoleil.com. —Kathryn Jessup*

