

URBAN LIFE

CAFÉS, RESTAURANTS, BARS AND NIGHTCLUBS

The oceanside location and the verdant land outside the city mean that chefs in San Francisco are blessed with some of the best raw ingredients in the United States, and the locals pride themselves on having a seemingly endless selection of excellent restaurants to choose from, where seafood is invariably the star of the show. Couple this with the (admittedly sometimes tedious) reverence with which wine is viewed here, and the abundance of good bottles that are produced, along with a resurgence in micro-breweries, and it means that, whether it's an eight-course blow-out, a Scooby snack or just a quiet drink you're after, you'll be spoiled for choice. Reservations are *de rigueur* at most of the city's better restaurants but, curiously, even if you have booked, be prepared to kill time at the bar on arrival, because being seated at your table at the time you've arranged is a rare occurrence.

San Francisco boasts many great bars. Some of them take a bit of seeking out, but idiosyncratic venues, such as Bourbon & Branch (see p052) in the Tenderloin district, are well worth the effort. The club scene is not immediately obvious either, or as open as in cities such as London or New York, but there are plenty of eclectic and interesting nights to be found. Follow our lead and, whether you're a dancing queen or a lounge lover, rest assured there's something in this city that will scratch your itch.

For full addresses, see Resources.



Sebo

This small but beautiful Hayes Valley venue is a bit slicker than your average sushi restaurant, with bamboo floors and moss green walls. The menu focuses on sushi and sashimi, made solely with extremely high quality, sustainably sourced seafood. There's only one cooked entrée item on offer each night, so if raw fish is not your thing you may want to reconsider. For sushi fans, however, it doesn't get

much better. Star chef Anthony Bourdain even made a visit to Sebo on his TV show 'No Reservations', adding to the popularity of the restaurant. Be warned, the restaurant does not in fact take reservations, so be prepared for a wait. *517 Hayes Street, T 415 864 2181, www.sebosf.com*



La Mar

Chef Gastón Acurio is leading a *coup d'état* in the culinary arena. His Peruvian cuisine and mouth-watering ceviche have food critics agreeing that Peruvian restaurants are the next big thing. So take advantage of the opportunity while you are in San Francisco and visit La Mar's only American location.

Pier 1.5, Embarcadero, T 415 397 8880,
www.lamarsf.com



RN74

Named after Route National 74 (Route des Crus) in Burgundy, RN74 is designed to look like a European train terminal, with timetable boards on the walls showing different wines as 'destinations' that actually flutter and change periodically. Part wine bar, part Michael Mina restaurant, RN74 has a full menu, but the star here is really the wine selection. Savvy locals opt for a seat in the bar

instead of the dining room; in addition to putting the wines front and centre, the bar area features its own menu that by many accounts is a better match for the wine list. The bar also offers a late-night happy hour with drinks specials and small plates. 301 Mission Street, T 415 543 7474, www.michaelmina.net



Foreign Cinema

This Mission restaurant offers outdoor dining and film screening, as well as an indoor bar and restaurant with roaring fireplace. Of course, the main attraction is its courtyard area (overleaf) complete with wooden tables, heaters and cinema screen. The cuisine is a mix of French, Mediterranean and new American, with classics such as the two-tiered seafood platter, which includes crab, oysters,

clams, prawns and crayfish. Although movies only play once the sun goes down, brunch is still the most talked about and popular meal at Foreign Cinema, definitely worth a visit on a lazy Sunday. 2534 Mission Street, T 415 648 7600, www.foreigncinema.com

Courtyard, Foreign Cinema



**Coi**

With its earth tones and branch sculptures, Coi exudes an understated elegance that stands out in a neighbourhood better known for strip clubs than fine dining. Chef Daniel Patterson only features his 11-course tasting menu in the restaurant, but the lounge offers a more casual experience. 373 Broadway, T 415 393 9000, www.coirestaurant.com



Bar Tartine

The sit-down restaurant extension of the immensely popular Tartine Bakery (see p084) Bar Tartine is the epitome of today's Mission hot spot, due in equal parts to its local artisanal food, clean modern design and hipper-than-thou servers. Every meal here is preceded by a basket of the bakery's famous bread, which is reason enough for a visit. The rest of the restaurant's French bistro fare

is executed with fresh Californian flair; menus are written by hand and change daily depending on what looks good at the farmers' market. Tables are typically hard to come by at dinner, but people still haven't entirely discovered that it serves brunch, which means you'll have a short wait for a table on a Sunday morning. 561 Valencia Street, T 415 487 1600, www.bartartine.com



Bourbon & Branch

This high-end whisky lounge manages to do the whole speakeasy thing without feeling overly gimmicky, mostly because the spot was an actual speakeasy during Prohibition. The process of getting here is a bit of a build-up (you must make a reservation online, then get the password and show up at your allotted time), but the experience actually lives up to the hype. www.bourbonandbranch.com



Press Club

There are plenty of wine bars in San Francisco, but the Press Club's stated aim is to offer a wine country experience in the city, which it delivers with a selection of vintages from six different Napa Valley wineries, each represented by its own staff and vintners. Actually, in some sense, Press Club is a step up from the tasting rooms in Napa. It pairs its wines with delicious appetisers. And the décor

is far more interesting than the average Napa Valley tasting room – there is a modern Scandinavian-inspired wooden bar, backed by a floor-to-ceiling wine display and surrounded by white leather bar stools and low-slung banquettes. 20 Yerba Buena Lane, T 415 744 5000, www.pressclubsf.com



Revolution Café

Young Mission hipsters meet at Revolution to work on their novels or plot their next DIY movie project. Missing a front wall, the café spills out onto the street, with a dozen or so outdoor tables that are prime Mission-people-watching real estate. The coffee is almost an afterthought (and besides, most people here opt for a cocktail or Belgian beer anyway) – Revolution is all about seeing and being

seen, particularly on one of those rare sunny San Francisco days, when the outdoor tables fill to capacity and the place really buzzes. Revolution also displays good local art (several notches above the average café collection) and has live music most days and nights, often a sort of blues, which lends the place a gypsy Jean Seberg set vibe. *3248 22nd Street, T 415 642 0474*



Nopa

A giant folk art mural by local artist Brian Barnecllo runs the length of Nopa's main wall, encompassing two floors with scenes from San Francisco life. The restaurant is a favourite with locals who overall try and ensure it stays under the tourists' radar. The menu matches the boho vibe of the establishment, with an emphasis on wood-grilled and roasted meats and vegetables, handmade pasta and local

organic produce. Last-minute Nopa dinners are next to impossible, but there is one large communal table for hopeful diners without reservations.

560 Divisadero, T 415 864 8643, www.nopasf.com

Gitane

True to its name, Gitane feels like the boudoir of a hip gypsy. The two-storey dining room's mix of floral patterns, dim red light, chandeliers and glittery mosaics provides a sultry backdrop for its equally eclectic menu. Ostensibly a Basque restaurant, Gitane also serves Spanish tapas, Moroccan tagine and a handful of French classics. The wine list is similarly mixed, but while you may be tempted to try one of the Basque wines, do yourself a favour and stick with French or Spanish. Another piece of advice: make a reservation. It's next to impossible to get a table otherwise. Although the food is agreeable (and served late, until midnight on weekdays and 1am on weekends, a rarity in San Francisco), it almost doesn't matter: Gitane is a scene. Just grab an upstairs table, sit back and take it all in. 6 Claude Lane, T 415 788 6686, www.gitanerestaurant.com



**Spruce**

This New American restaurant in Laurel Heights has an interior that is as inviting as its menu is appetizing. Chef Mark Sullivan serves a seasonal menu with ingredients from local farms in a lush and comfortable setting. Try the hot and cold foie gras, butternut squash ravioli or the roasted halibut. 3640 Sacramento St, T 415 931 5100, www.sprucesf.com

INSIDER'S GUIDE

MAC BARNETT, AUTHOR

Mac Barnett is the author of several children's books, including *Billie Twitters and His Blue Whale Problem*, and the Brixton Brothers mystery series. Part of the Dave Eggers/McSweeney's crowd, Barnett is currently working on the next book in the series. While working to a deadline, he often sneaks off to Just For You (732 22nd Street, T 415 647 3033) to feast on beignets. For lunch, he heads to [Taqueria Cancun](#) (2288 Mission Street, T 415 252 9560), where he likes the vegetarian burrito, because they're very generous with the avocado. 'And their décor is insane – all those streamers... it's like a bon voyage party for Willy Wonka.'

[Mission Street Food](#) (2234 Mission Street), the pop-up restaurant, is a great dinner experience. On Thursdays and Saturdays they take over the same restaurant on Mission; the menu changes every time, as do the guest chefs, and proceeds are donated to charities. For drinks Barnett loves Maxfield's [Pied Piper Bar](#) at The Palace Hotel (2 New Montgomery Street, T 415 512 1111). 'It's not one of those pretend, rise-of-the-mixologist type of bars, this is a real place where they make those drinks – the Manhattan, the Old-Fashioned – because that's what they do and they've been doing it for years.' Soul Night at [The Makeout Room](#) (3225 22nd Street, T 415 647 2888) in the Mission, is always a good club option where you can dance to a good mix of old soul records and new songs.

For full addresses, see Resources.

