



Kitchen prep at Saison; the Bay Bridge; squid and pork belly at Commonwealth; Bar Agricole's black cod croquettes.



NAVIGATOR

san fran bites back

San Franciscans still smart over “Fig-Gate”—the bicoastal war of words ignited by Manhattan chef David Chang’s griping at a food conference in late 2009 that “f---ing every restaurant in San Francisco is serving figs on a plate with nothing on it.” Translation: Bay Area chefs can’t stop worshipping at the Alice Waters altar, eternally showcasing local produce without interference—or, sadly, innovation—from the kitchen. Chang had a point. San Franciscans knew it, and lamented that New York had become the center of the American food universe. Well, that is just so 2009, because the 12 months after Chang’s crack saw the greatest explosion of San Francisco restaurant openings in modern memory, with a single message trumpeted by all those ambitious new menus: The future of Bay Area fine dining has arrived.

DANIEL DUANE

EAT

1/ **commonwealth**

On a downscale urban block in the hip, multiethnic Mission District, virtuoso chef Jason Fox harmonizes a dizzying array of international ingredients. Standouts include sea urchin with sweet potato tempura, chrysanthemum leaf, *shiso*, scallion, and *yuzu kosho*; and squid and pork belly with *jidori* egg salad, potato croutons, and herb vinaigrette. 2224 Mission Street; 415-355-1500; commonwealthsf.com



Cotogna warms up the Financial District; Matt McNamara and Teague Moriarty, co-chefs at Sons & Daughters.



2/ saison

Featuring an eight-course prix fixe in a casually elegant setting, Saison is tucked behind a café on San Francisco's unlikely new "Avenue of the Great Restaurants": deserted Folsom Street. The open wood fire allows chef Joshua Skenes to create a distinctive cuisine, conjuring deep, soothing umami from a bowl of bonito dashi with toasted grains and greens, followed by a big slab of roasted beet and bone marrow. 2124 Folsom Street; 415-828-7990; saisonsf.com

3/ bar agricole

Sourcing small-label spirits with the same fervor as local meats and produce, this big, splashy South of Market

(SoMa) neighborhood spot offers sophisticated tipples like the Moonraker Cocktail, combining brandy, peach whiskey, Cocchi Americano, and absinthe. Smoked black cod croquettes pack a wallop under their crust, and the chopped liver on toast is a delight. 355 11th Street; 415-355-9400; baragricole.com

4/ sons & daughters

New American Cuisine with a touch of molecular gastronomy is showcased here, with four courses going for a reasonable \$54. Just up Nob Hill from Union Square shopping, the cozy room serves a fine squab breast with squab leg confit, squab pâté, pear, and hazelnuts. 708 Bush Street; 415-391-8311; sonsanddaughtersf.com

5/ heirloom café

This charming bistro has high ceilings, old wood floors, and a bar overlooking the open kitchen, which serves new takes on simple fare like marinated-beet salad. But the best dish isn't on the menu: Ask for the Heirloom burger, which has Époisses cheese worked into the ground sirloin. 2500 Folsom Street; 415-821-2500; heirloom-sf.com

6/ prospect

A dazzling SoMa space with floor-to-ceiling windows and a brilliantly complex menu. Rich, crispy pig's-trotter croquettes pair with luscious pig's-head salumi and bright chile-lime vinaigrette; seared calamari and octopus bring char-grilled notes to spicy chorizo and clams. 300 Spear Street; 415-247-7770; prospectsf.com

7/ wayfare tavern

Tyler Florence's faux 19th-century hunting lodge with 1906-earthquake memorabilia is plopped among the Financial District's office towers. It serves nostalgic menu items like abalone, Dungeness crab, and the Gold-Rush-era Hangtown Fry, blending local eggs and bacon with fried oysters. 558 Sacramento Street; 415-772-9060; wayfaretavern.com

8/ cotogna

The copper bar glows near the wood-burning pizza oven; the aroma of spit-roasting pork fills the rustic dining room; and pastas include a raviolo filled with ricotta and an egg yolk that breaks under your knife to bleed into a brown-butter sauce. 490 Pacific Avenue; 415-775-8508; cotognasf.com

9/ benu

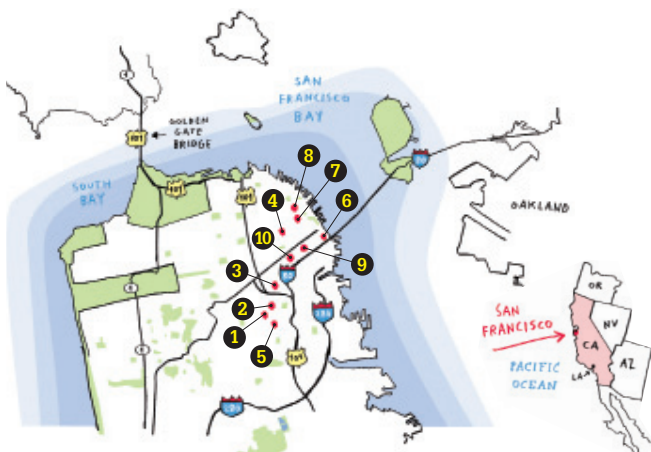
Corey Lee, former *chef de cuisine* under Thomas Keller at The French Laundry, swings for the Michelin-starred fences with profoundly original eastward-looking dishes. Mock shark's fin soup with Dungeness crabmeat and black truffle custard is set inside a pork stock made from a rare Chinese prosciutto. 22 Hawthorne Street; 415-685-4860; benusf.com

STAY

10/ intercontinental san francisco

This 32-story tower is walking distance from downtown and from the great Saturday Ferry Plaza farmers' market. Rooms from \$229; 888 Howard Street; 415-616-6500; intercontinentalsanfrancisco.com

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