

# San Francisco

Spring Fashion

Color-splashed style hits the city's new art district

**MAD FOR TOKYO**  
WHY ARE SO MANY CHEFS STEALING IDEAS FROM JAPAN?

**THE VISIONARIES**  
A CENTER FOR THE BLIND OPENS THE WORLD TO THE SIGHTLESS



## Short Orders More New Spots to Try

### Volta

**Soma**  
This French-Scandinavian spot from Perbrocker's Umberto Ekblom and Stefan Tveit is a win for the Westfield San Francisco Centers, which now has an urbane, beautiful restaurant to call its own. It's also a win for Francophiles longing for local bouillabaisse—which here is braised to peak tenderness—or an impeccable sofale riceise. And it's a win for underserved herring fans, who get a platter with five varieties of the fish. **Deal:** Volta is an all-around winner. 618 MISSION ST. (NEAR 5TH ST.) 415-450-6306. RESERVA RIGHT NOW.

### Bird Dog

**Palo Alto**  
From its brief menu to the recording of Julia Child's voice on its bathroom PA, it's clear that Bobbie Wilton's handsome new spot follows its own nose. As well it should. Save for some undercooked eggplant, a recent meal here hit all the right marks. A crispy-sweaty potato-battered squash terrine resembled the world's most elegant latke, while a grilled asocato—served with barrel-aged pork—could be California's state dish. Wilton's deceptively simple cooking is worth sniffing out. 430 RAYBURN ST. (NEAR LYTON AVE.) 650-958-8574.

### Shangri-La Vegan

**Daly City**  
Like the original Shangri-La near the Oakland-Berkeley border, the new Temescal edition deals in generous portions of delectable dishes that evoke memories of the Moabwood era. Recently, kidney bean soup gave way to a platter on which brown rice was ringed by sautéed chickpeas, braised hump and dahlia, and collard greens. The baked goods—like the cloying mango pie with leaven pecan-pecan crust—are a bummer. But the savory cooking is a welcome dose of hippie-dippy for our hipster age. **AVAIL:** TEL: 510-974-6667. SAT 4PM-11PM, SUN 12PM-10PM.

### Alamo Drafthouse

**Menlo**  
San Francisco's newest cineplex is all about dinner and a movie. Each of its seats comes with a table and a menu. The latter, from *Roque Hens*, goes far beyond popcorn, with a roster of pizzas, sandwiches, and snacks. Some of the food is a bit—sistered *oh-shito* peppers are enjoyably Fracé—and some, like a vegetarian Reuben sandwich overwhelmed by a pile of slippery roasted beets, is not. The popcorn, for the record, is overly good—and it comes in a bowl big enough to bustle an infant in. 2108 HURDIS ST. (NEAR 23RD ST.) 415-548-5929. 4/24.

that an entrée billed as Little Vegan qualifies as the menu's biggest miss. A combination plate of chickpea-and-lentil stew, curried cauliflower, and braised chard, it righteously withholds all depth and flavor save for the chickpeas' whiff of cumin. If you sprayed the table with patchouli, the dish would come perilously close to the off-campus co-op cooking at Oberlin or Reed. (Lilavois and co. may have reached a similar conclusion: The dish is no longer on the menu.)

But that's the exception at a restaurant that works deftly under self-imposed constraints. Meats and fish at Little Gem come perfectly prepared. Slabs of succulent pork shoulder serve as tender tribute to the power of slow roasting, while a seared five-ounce flatiron steak punches well above its weight. And a dish called the King of Hayes showcases exceptionally tender king salmon that flakes at first fork, prodded onto a bed of red quinoa, spinach, and slivered almonds that itself is beautified by a lively lemon-scallion vinaigrette.

In keeping with its cooking, Little Gem's interior is barebones and organic, with concrete floors and walls, Douglas fir chairs, and a blond bar fashioned from the wood of a single elm tree. It's a pleasant space whose modern, utilitarian aesthetic suggests a kinship with any number of tech-company cafés.

Which makes sense. Though mod-



Top: The spinach and endive salad. Above: The King of Hayes.

### The Ticket

A recommended dinner for two at Little Gem.

The King of Hayes (salmon, red quinoa, kalamata olives, spinach, almonds, and lemon-scallion vinaigrette)	\$22
Tuscan pork (roasted pork shoulder, brussels sprouts, chippola beets, brown-and-wild rice, and lemon-mustard)	\$19
Spinach and endive salad with blueberries, tangerine, avocado, and honey-citrus vinaigrette	\$9.50
Russet potato rounds with rosemary sea salt	\$6.50
Lemon custard	\$6.50
Chocolate pudding	\$5
Côtes de Provence Cabernet rosé	\$9.50
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$76</b>

estly priced by San Francisco standards, with entrées topping out at \$22, the restaurant clearly targets that young and privileged demographic who can afford to refuse to eat a lot of things because they know there are always lots of other things to eat. Further expanding on their abundant options, Little Gem greets the morning with a mix of sweet and savory breakfast items, from thick berry smoothies to wild rice stir fry, before easing into salads and wraps in the afternoon.

The pay-and-take-a-number format holds throughout the day, so come evening, don't expect the kind of service that normally attends food this carefully made. Even if you have no food allergies, you might be irritated, as I was, at having to stand in line again to get another glass of wine or a dessert. A first-world problem, sure...but still.

Of those desserts, a feisty lemon custard with blackberries and oat crumble is worth the wait. So is the chocolate pudding, a short, dark, and handsome character thickened with arrowroot and turned just sweet enough with honey. It's as lushly delicious as any dairy-based pudding you've ever had. Who could have a hard time tolerating that? ■

### Little Gem

415 BUSH ST. (AT DOUGLASS ST.) 415-764-6201

