

FOOD SCENE

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It's Alive!

Discover the fascinating world of fermentation, a salty preservation technique that's good for your health.

BY LAUREN BONNEY

Fermentation: It's often associated with the forgotten juice bottle or piece of overripe fruit decomposing in the back of the fridge. But fermentation is nothing to be concerned about; in fact, it's a natural process that has some pretty incredible health benefits.

"Fermented foods, like sauerkraut and kimchi, are great for your gut health," says fermentation expert Elizabeth Vecchiarelli, the owner of Preserved—an Oakland shop that sells fermentation starter cultures and offers weekly workshops on preservation methods. These types of foods help the body break down carbohydrates and

proteins, Vecchiarelli notes, which in turn makes those compounds easier to digest and absorb. Plus, fermentation creates new enzymes and vitamins (such as vitamin B) without losing any of the nutrients found in a vegetable's raw form.

A simple, ancient technique involving salt, water, and produce, "vegetable fermentation is a biological transformation that occurs when you create an optimal environment for ambient bacteria to thrive," Vecchiarelli explains. But don't worry: This is the good kind of bacteria (aka lactobacillus) that's found in yogurt and often labeled a probiotic.

Creating a probiotic-rich microbiome is an easy—and exciting—process. "Since kraut and kimchi are living foods, they're always changing and develop more nuanced flavors as time goes on," Vecchiarelli says. "Fermentation is holistic nutrition that you can put a fork in and say, 'Mmm, that's delicious.'" preservedgoods.com.



STOCKSY/ALITA ONG

Ready to try fermentation at home?
Find Preserved's apple-fennel sauerkraut
recipe at diablogmag.com.

RESTAURANT REVIEW



Order a bite in the midcentury-themed lounge downstairs, or indulge in a multicourse meal at the intimate supper club upstairs.

Retro Bardo Delivers

The '60s-inspired Oakland supper club and lounge offers a dual concept infused with painstaking creativity.

BY NICHOLAS BOER

The name Bardo is a play on “Zendo”—a place for Zen meditation—but the word also refers to an in-between state, like purgatory, in Tibetan Buddhism. After owners Jenni and Seth Bregman shuttered their Oakland eatery Michel Bistro last spring, there was a protracted limbo before Bardo Lounge and Supper Club opened in October (restaurant build-outs always drag on), making the name seem particularly apt (Seth studied and practices in the Buddhist tradition).

But there’s another sense to “Bardo” that really gets to the heart of the business: Seth sees its curvy downstairs lounge space—with its cushioned niches and come-hither couches, framed by exposed brick and anchored by a glamorous bar—as a “soft landing pad” for folks transitioning from work to bedtime.

The lounge is where drive-in-inspired burgers are slathered in Bardo sauce (aioli with fermented chili-garlic paste), topped with house-made pickles and silky aged white cheddar, and tucked into fresh-baked and toasted English muffin buns. It’s clear the chefs, Brian Starkey and Anthony Salguero (co-chefs at Michel Bistro when the Bregmans took over), are having a heck of a good time riffing on *Mad Men*-era hors d’oeuvres such as deviled duck eggs with crispy duck skin; porcupine meatballs (using kaffir lime, lemongrass, and mint pesto rather than garlic powder and watery tomato sauce); and a crusty, voluptuous dish of fresh roasted peppers and Castelvetrano olives, standing in for the Depression-era jumbo versions stuffed with cold cream cheese and canned pimentos.

Upstairs is a more meditative and celestial-themed dining room with twinkling, starry lights. It overlooks the sultry lounge and offers a refined yet imaginative set menu (à la carte options are available as well) with only the slightest nod to the Baby Boomer generation.

Two tables for two by the railing allow couples to soak up the lounge’s energy; our party of six sat at a handsome communal table in the center of the brick wall-accented room. (Reservations are recommended for upstairs dining on weekends.)

Our multi-choice, three-course, prix-fixe menu was mostly extraordinary and complemented by attentive if somewhat unengaged service from a thoroughly professional waitstaff.

My favorite plate (there are four choices on offer for each appetizer and entrée, and three options for dessert) presented as an ode to old-school fondue: ripe Camembert melted into cream and accented with briny sea urchin. It was playful and decadent, served on a platter with a colorful display of uniquely prepared seasonal veggies (including brilliant red, grilled Jimmy Nardello peppers and yam confit), marinated quail eggs, and crusty cubes of just-fried torn bread.

Shockingly good, too, was the chicken appetizer. Brined and boneless half chickens, smeared with jerk spice and rolled into tight bundles, were steamed, chilled, and sliced into tender rounds. The succulent poultry, enhanced with bold seasoning, was accompanied by caramelized ginger and crunchy garnishes, including house-puffed rice and



Raise a glass at Bardo’s glowing bar with a house-made cocktail.

rice crackers. A third option (the pumpkin tart) balanced sweet kabocha squash against shaved and marinated fennel, chervil, and nutty yuba (tofu skin). It seemed like a refreshing and delicate dish until we got to the pumpkin seed tart shell—so hard and dense, we were convinced at first it was a ceramic mold.

The vintage plates and glassware at Bardo bring a fun flair and set the tone of a bygone era. Seth has been collecting cocktail glasses for a decade and “bartending” since he was 10 years old, when he prepared drinks for his parents’

guests. The newfangled and old-fashioned cocktails, such as the bright green Grasshopper sprinkled with dehydrated parsley powder, reflect what Seth calls his “spirit of experimentation.” Meanwhile, Jenni—who works at Salesforce as the senior manager of strategic events—chooses the music, deejaying some nights and recruiting bands for the weekends.

I doubt any East Bay chef was cooking sous vide back in the '60s, but Starkey and Salguero take full advantage of the slow and precise cooking technology. Triangles of pork shoulder, soaked in an aromatic Vietnamese-style marinade, emerged impossibly tender. Slabs of short rib steak, on the other hand, were surprisingly firm, cooked a perfect medium-rare edge to edge, and crusted to order with bone marrow hash browns. And the cod, fried in a Pabst Blue Ribbon beer batter, was prepared brilliantly, the crispy crust set off by piquant elements of a deconstructed gribiche (a classic French mayonnaise-style sauce).

Clever but disappointing were the period desserts; as part of a \$59 prix fixe, they should make diners swoon. The lonely-looking bananas foster semifreddo, however, was more of a meringue pudding-cake: cold and overly sweet, and seemingly sliced from a sheet pan rather than flambéed to order.

Still, less than a month in, Bardo was remarkable in almost every sense. And though the servers and owners appeared harried during our anonymous visit, the lounge crowd was grooving, oblivious to the 1,001 details it takes to run a great restaurant.

3343 Lakeshore Ave., Oakland, (510) 836-8737, bardooakland.com. Dinner Wed.–Sun.



Green bean casserole with mustard and Gruyère.



Grilled kanpachi with sunflower hearts.

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NEIGHBORHOOD NOSHES



Sample different plates during Oakland Restaurant Week's progressive dinners.



Comfort foods abound at Concord's Eureka!.

Shaking Up Restaurant Week

East Bay cities are adding some delectable new features to the annual foodie festivities.

BY CLARA HOGAN

January can be a challenging month for restaurants. Patrons often take a break from dining out after overindulging during the holidays; others set New Year's resolutions to be healthier or save money—both of which usually require eating at home.

Enter “restaurant week,” an event many cities hold each January to encourage diners to get out and enjoy all things gastronomic in their communities. In years past, restaurant weeks have traditionally involved higher-end restaurants offering reasonably priced prix-fixe menus for lunch and dinner. And while fixed menus are still the norm, some East Bay cities—such as Alameda, Berkeley, Concord, and Oakland—are getting more creative this year.

Berkeley's 11-day event, for example, features specials at local breweries (Triple Rock Brewing) and wineries (Broc Cellars), and expands the deal to include breakfast and brunch options at eateries such as Doc's Refresher (classic American), ZINO (upscale Mediterranean), and Henry's (the recently reinvented gastropub in the Graduate Hotel).

Chris Kronner of Oakland's Kronnerburger—who revamped the 90-year-old Henry's—views restaurant week as a chance to show off the pub's exciting updates, such as an innovative menu from executive chef Kristian Allen. “We have a new energy and more interesting food,” Kronner says. “We think this will get more [of our] neighbors into the restaurant.”

Oakland is also mixing things up a bit. For the first time, the Town will host a series of progressive dinners in different neighborhoods, such as Uptown and Temescal, in which diners can purchase tickets to sample bites and drinks at multiple restaurants over the course of a single evening.

“A multi-stop culinary experience is a fun way to showcase our diverse food scene and allow people to try a lot of restaurants in just one night,” says Allie Neal of Visit Oakland. “It's also a chance for chefs to work together and bounce ideas around to make a cohesive pairing.”

On the east side of the Caldecott Tunnel, Concord celebrates its second annual restaurant week this month—and the city is putting a unique spin on the dining experience by giving



Weeks of Feasts

Eat your way through four local dining scenes this month.

Oakland Restaurant Week

January 11–20
oaklandrestaurantweek.org

Alameda Restaurant Week

January 17–27
alamedarestaurantweek.com

Berkeley Restaurant Week

January 17–27
berkeleyrestaurantweek.com

Concord Comfort Food Week

January 18–27
visitconcordca.com

it a “comfort food” theme. (Think fewer prix-fixe menus and more discounts at fast-casual spots like Super Duper Burgers and Bambino's pizza, as well as the cookie dough dessert shop Out the Dough.)

“A lot of people don't know how diverse a food scene we have here—more than 25 ethnicities [such as Brazilian, Burmese, and German] are represented,” says Serena DeChristofaro of Visit Concord. “Restaurant week offers so many great excuses to try something new.”