

FOOD SCENE

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Dan Good Cookies crafts an impressive lineup of treats, including seasonal and low-gluten options.

MITCH TOBIAS

Sugar and Spice

Tie on your apron and heat up the oven, because it's time for some holiday baking.

There's nothing like the smell of fresh-baked cookies wafting through the house to get the whole family in the holiday spirit. Enter Livermore baker Dan Floyd, of Dan Good Cookies, who turned his decade-long confectionary passion into a bona fide business in 2016. Here, Floyd offers his seasonal twist on a ginger molasses cookie to help keep your winter days merry and bright.

Oh, Snap!

4½ cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon ground cloves
2 teaspoons ground ginger
2 teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1½ cups unsalted butter, chilled
1½ cups granulated sugar (plus extra for rolling)
½ cup molasses
2 eggs

Preheat oven to 350°F and line baking sheet with parchment paper. Combine flour, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, baking soda, and salt in a bowl and set aside. In a separate bowl, beat together butter and 1½ cups of sugar until mixture is homogeneous and pulls away from the sides of the bowl. Add molasses and mix until fully combined. Add eggs, then scrape butter mixture from sides of bowl. Beat together until evenly mixed. Add flour mixture and combine until flour disappears. (Add flour a little bit at a time if working with a smaller bowl.) For each cookie, scoop approximately 2¼ tablespoons of dough, roll dough ball in remaining sugar, and press it down lightly onto baking sheet.

Bake for 8 to 10 minutes, or until cookies lose their shine and barely jiggle when the cookie sheet is shaken. When baking sheet is cool enough to touch, place cookies on a clean surface or wire rack to cool completely. (Tip: Eat some warm ones for quality control.)

Don't feel like baking? Find Dan Good Cookies at the Dublin and Livermore farmers markets, select Safeway stores, or online at dangoodcookies.com.

For Floyd's top baking tips, visit diablogmag.com.

RESTAURANT REVIEW



Stuffed with gulf shrimp, pork, and mint, the spring rolls come with a delectable peanut dipping sauce.

Key to the City

Renowned for its innovative Vietnamese fare, San Francisco standout The Slanted Door anchors San Ramon's new City Center Bishop Ranch.

BY NICHOLAS BOER

With 2018 marking my 20th straight year as an East Bay food critic, I predict San Ramon's The Slanted Door will be—straight up—our region's most exciting dining destination to open in decades.

As the anchor food-service tenant of the new City Center Bishop Ranch—designed by internationally acclaimed architect Renzo Piano—The Slanted Door boasts 7,500 square feet of modern restaurant space contained by 14-foot glass walls that offer people outside a 360-degree view of everything going on inside.

At the heart of the sophisticated Vietnamese eatery is an exhibition kitchen with a wood-fire oven, grill, and smoker surrounded by 60 counter seats—a configuration not unlike a horseshoe bar. “You really get to see the action,” says The Slanted Door's executive chef and owner, Charles Phan. “It's almost like a boxing ring with the kitchen [acting] as center stage.”

To get a sense of what to expect from the food at the new Slanted Door (the City Center location had yet to open as of press time), I made two trips to San Francisco's Ferry Building

Marketplace, a food mecca featuring many of the Bay Area's greatest cafés and purveyors. The Slanted Door has been one of the compound's top attractions since 2004, when it moved from its original, humble venue on Valencia Street.

At the Ferry Building, our lunch of pho was astonishingly good, with a sweet, clear yet full-flavored beef broth delicately accented with star anise. Crunchy bean sprouts, Thai basil, and paper-thin slices of raw Prather Ranch London broil swam amicably in the soup.

During dinner we tried some of Phan's best-known dishes, including garlicky spinach and

wild shrimp fried in pork fat and stuffed into hearty dumplings; crunchy imperial rolls wrapped with mint and lettuce and doused in sweet fish sauce; cellophane noodles and Dungeness crab sprinkled with golden sesame oil and scallions; and, of course, shaking beef—caramelized blocks of rare filet mignon with sweet red onion, raw watercress, and lime juice to cut the salty richness.

In truth, many of these dishes struck me as a little heavy and tired, but after serving 900 meals day in and day out—many of them signature plates (Phan told me he goes through at least 20 whole tenderloins each day just for the shaking beef)—it's a challenge to keep dishes tasting fresh, even when using the freshest ingredients.

But what continues to remain innovative and compelling, both at lunch in the upscale lounge and at night alongside our views of undulating water and a glowing Bay Bridge, were the energy and community vibe radiating throughout the space. The happy hum of fully absorbed diners provided the uplift of a church choir. And that's what makes the prospect of a second Slanted Door so exciting. (Psst: A third is on its way in Las Vegas in 2019.)

The San Ramon Valley's rolling hills provide a backdrop nearly as lovely as the Ferry Building's waterfront, while the new City Center itself, complete with a mini clock tower, inspires a lively community spirit. Its grassy, tree-lined plaza is as big as a football field—dotted with modern sculptures—and features a shallow reflecting pool that can easily transform into a concert stage or other entertainment showcase. A plethora of shops helps to round out City Center's 300,000 square feet of glass-enclosed retail, café, and restaurant space.

“It's a soulful place,” says Jeff Dodd, senior vice president of retail for Sunset, the developer of City Center Bishop Ranch. “The glass allows the inside to become the outside. ... It makes you feel good.”

As for the shiny new Slanted Door and its menu, chef Phan notes that most of his signature dishes at the original and Ferry Building locations were developed in the restaurants'



Chef Charles Phan opened his first eatery in 1995.

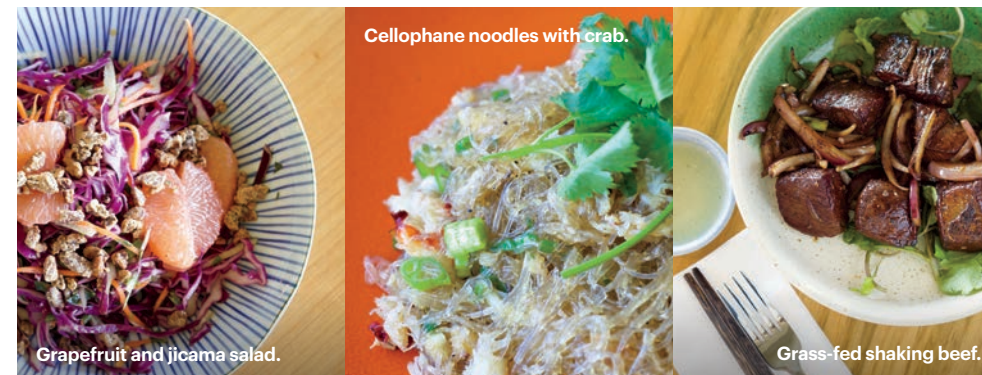
opening months, when creativity flows like pho. The main attraction at the Tri-Valley spot, however, is the smoker, where whole fish and any number of authentic Vietnamese specialties take on new flavor profiles.

The fully open kitchen is headed up by the contagiously enthusiastic chef de cuisine, Dong Choi, whom Phan came to admire as a chef at Rice and Bones—Phan's UC Berkeley “cafeteria.” Choi has worked under star chefs Michael Mina and Daniel Patterson, as well as abroad in Japan and Singapore. He also brings a rich Korean heritage to Phan's established Vietnamese background and expertise.

Phan had never considered opening a location in the 'burbs until he learned about City Center's clean, transparent design. “It's not like some maze,” he says of Piano's venture. And in the end, the chance to reinvigorate The Slanted Door in a landmark luxury complex was too irresistible to pass up.

“It's old, like a giant machine,” Phan says of his Ferry Building spot. “A new restaurant is where the magic really happens.”

6000 Bollinger Canyon Rd., Ste. 1300, San Ramon, slanteddoor.com. Lunch and dinner daily.



Grapefruit and jicama salad.

Cellophane noodles with crab.

Grass-fed shaking beef.



A Growing Project

Plenty of enticing dining options are headed to City Center, reaching as many as 18 by summer 2019. Here's a taster of what's coming up.

NOW

- **Boba Guys:** Quality loose-leaf teas, Straus Family Creamery milks, and organic ingredients have garnered Boba Guys a bicoastal following, and the brand's sleek aesthetic meshes perfectly with City Center's design.
- **Fieldwork Brewing Company:** With five taprooms throughout the greater Bay Area, Fieldwork boasts a beer garden, rock playground, and an open-food policy at its City Center location, as well as ready-to-go food options catered by the Berkeley-based Mexican spot Comal.

WINTER

- **A Social Affair:** A modern outfit serving wines by the glass, craft cocktails, and tapas, this lounge embodies City Center's we-are-family ethos.
- **Mixt:** Another small franchise—there are only a dozen locations in San Francisco and Los Angeles—Mixt dishes up ultra-fresh DIY salads and grain bowls, along with a couple of serious meat sandwiches.
- **Roam Artisan Burgers:** We revisited this fast-casual Lafayette eatery—whose signature burgers feature grass-fed beef (elk and buffalo are available too, plus local beers on tap)—and we've got to say, Roam looks like a great fit for City Center.

SPRING

- **C Casa:** The authentic yet modern taqueria—with fun choices such as spiced lamb and rotisserie duck—offers shoppers a sophisticated fast-food option.
- **Gio Gelati:** Serving super-premium ice cream with a Cal-Ital focus, Gio Gelati's desserts debuted at the company's first store in San Francisco earlier this year. Licking gelato while kicking back on the plaza is destined to be a favorite City Center pastime.
- **Mendocino Farms:** This cutting-edge SoCal chain produces the kind of sandwiches you'd imagine Thomas Keller would create if he got into the BLT business.

See more openings at diablomag.com.

STAYCATION SIPS

Island Time

These four East Bay tiki bars provide the perfect rum-soaked antidote to winter's chill.

BY KRISTEN HANEY

Between the frantic holiday shopping, cold temperature, and frazzled race to year's end, an island idyll sounds pretty, well, idyllic right now. In case you can't escape for a quick jaunt to Tahiti or Hawaii, consider slipping into one of the East Bay's top tiki hangouts for a fruity drink, Polynesian decor, and a laid-back feel.

TRADER VIC'S

Tiki historians credit Vic "Trader" Bergeron with inventing the original mai tai cocktail in 1944 in Oakland, and his eponymous restaurant overlooking the San Francisco Bay is the best place to sip the rum-based concoction under the watchful eye of carved tiki totems. 9 Anchor Dr., Emeryville, (510) 653-3400, tradervics.emeryville.com.

> **VIBE:** More refined than the Jimmy Buffet set, the crowd at this Emeryville institution works a smart-casual look that borders on formal, and the backdrop feels like Polynesian fine dining rather than backyard barbecue.

> **DRINK:** Ride the Mai Tai Wave, which consists of three tropical tweaks on the classic drink served on a surfboard. If you're smitten with the set, you can take it home for \$75.

> **BONUS:** Most beverages come in unique, covetable glassware and taste especially good when paired with the lounge's view of the sun setting over the bay.



In addition to creating the original mai tai, Trader Vic invented more than 200 signature drinks.

WAYDE CARROL

ZERO COORDINATE, INC.



Forbidden Island's cocktail menu highlights new twists on authentic pre- and post-1960s tiki recipes.

THE KON-TIKI

This low-lit Uptown Oakland hideaway draws a slightly younger crowd with its kitschy mugs and high-octane cocktail bowls served by hip (but unpretentious) bartenders. 347 14th St., Oakland, (510) 823-2332, thekon-tikiokland.com.

> **VIBE:** The restaurant bustles most nights, but try and score a seat under the thatched roof of the bar so you can watch Hawaiian shirt-clad bartenders expertly navigate the jars of garnishes and bottles of mixed spirits while classic rock and Hawaiian tunes float above the noise of the crowd.

> **DRINK:** Guests go nuts for the frothy, coconut-flavored Uma Uma, but you'll risk *actually* losing your mind if you order The Kon-Tiki Zombie (it has a recommended two drink limit), which packs a powerful punch in its rum-laden secret recipe.

> **BONUS:** Happy hour will score you a mai tai, piña colada, or daiquiri for \$4 off the normal drink price. If you're feeling flush and altruistic, order the Rum and Honey: Its proceeds benefit charitable efforts in Haiti.

FORBIDDEN ISLAND

Launched in 2006 under the guidance of master mixologist Martin Cate, this Alameda escape may be the closest the East Bay gets to a true island bar. Fresh-squeezed juices, house-made ingredients, and quirky garnishes give it a distinctive feel. 1304 Lincoln Ave., Alameda, (510) 749-0332, forbiddenislandalameda.com.

> **VIBE:** Expect a laid-back hang featuring live rockabilly music; wicker chairs; an inviting back patio; and a ceiling littered with scribbled-on dollar bills, glass puffer fish lights, and other flotsam and jetsam.

> **DRINK:** The cocktail menu is helpfully split between tiki classics, modern riffs, large-scale bowls, and other mainstays, but our vote is for the Tropical Itch—a passion fruit, rum, and bourbon elixir that comes with a back scratcher.

> **BONUS:** Join the Kill Devil Club by sipping your way through all of Forbidden Island's 100-plus rums, and you'll earn a lifetime discount and your name on a commemorative plaque hanging behind the bar.

THE KONA CLUB

Slings its signature "chi-chis" for 13 years and self-proclaimed as "Oakland's little slice of paradise," this nondescript bar on Piedmont Avenue welcomes with its friendly staff, potent Scorpion bowls, and relaxed atmosphere. 4401 Piedmont Ave., Oakland, (510) 654-7100, konaclub.net.

> **VIBE:** Bamboo-walled and strung with hanging blowfish lights, The Kona Club manages to seamlessly blend tiki decor with a rock 'n' roll energy amplified by a killer music selection on the sound system.

> **DRINK:** As the bar's retro-style T-shirts say, "Real men drink chi-chis"—a reference to the bar's most popular drink: a deceptively boozy, blended combination of vodka, macadamia nut liqueur, coconut cream, and pineapple juice.

> **BONUS:** No, that's not the rum playing tricks on you: There really is a topless hula girl whose animatronic hips sway from side to side, and the volcano behind the bar periodically erupts with smoke, covering the bar in a soft glow.