

# FOOD SCENE

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## Booze with Bite

Elevate your cocktail game by crafting homemade, seasonal bitters.

Traditionally added to such classic drinks as an Old Fashioned or Manhattan, bitters are a concentrated, aromatic flavoring element—crafted from botanicals, spices, or fruits—that provides a cocktail with a little extra oomph. Casey Carr, the bar director at Lafayette's Batch and Brine, says he “geeks out” and makes his own bitters using seasonal ingredients to create the perfect sip. Here, Carr offers his take on citrus-infused bitters that are guaranteed to kick your drink up a notch.

### CHAMOMILE-CITRUS BITTERS

*Yields approximately 5 ounces.*

*Peels from 3–4 fresh lemons  
1 bottle 40-proof vodka  
4–6 ounces dried orange peel  
4 ounces coriander seeds  
1 bottle Everclear  
2 chamomile tea bags  
1 cup cane sugar  
1 cup water*

Get three 8–12-ounce mason jars. In jar No. 1, submerge lemon peels in vodka; seal and label. In jar No. 2, submerge dried orange peels and coriander seeds in Everclear (or other high-proof grain alcohol); seal and label. In jar No. 3, submerge tea bags in Everclear; seal and label. Store jars in a cool, dark place for the allotted amount of time: jar No. 1 for two weeks; jar No. 2 for five days; jar No. 3 for two days.

At the end of each time frame, strain contents into another container to separate infusing ingredients from liquid before pouring the liquid back into its original, labeled jar.

Combine sugar and water in a saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a light simmer until sugar is completely dissolved and the mixture is clear. Remove simple syrup from heat. Once cool, store in an airtight container.

After all liquids are infused, combine 2½ ounces from jar No. 1; 1 ounce from jar No. 2; 1 ounce from jar No. 3; and ½ ounce of simple syrup in another container. Over a separate container, place 2–3 coffee filters inside a funnel, then pour mixture through them. This may take some time, but once liquid has strained through, the bitters are ready for use.

For a stronger citrus flavor, add a few lemon or dried orange peels to the finished bitters for a week or two. Double strain when finished.

RESTAURANT REVIEW

# Fired Up

The new barbecue joint Pig in a Pickle steals the show at Public Market Emeryville.

BY NICHOLAS BOER

**Damon Stainbrook has true chef cred.** He went from shucking oysters as a teenager at The Lark Creek Inn in Larkspur, to dodging hot pans thrown by an intense (and sometimes angry) chef at the four-star French restaurant The Heights in San Francisco, to eventually training and working at Thomas Keller’s legendary The French Laundry. There, he started as commis under chef de cuisine Grant Achatz (one of the pioneers of American molecular gastronomy) before eventually ascending to a sous chef role.

And although Keller played a major part, it was Mom who would be the first to inform Stainbrook’s culinary character: The whole lambs she spit-roasted in the Greek tradition

transfixed him and turned him on to the transformative power of fire. After his late-night shifts at The Lark Creek Inn and The Heights, Stainbrook would often light up the grill and cook some chicken.

“It was primal and peaceful,” Stainbrook reflects. “Grab a beer, and light a fire.”

Not surprisingly, the most critical job at Emeryville’s Pig in a Pickle (the original launched in Corte Madera in 2013) is tending to a clean-burning fire—for up to 16 hours at a time—to make Stainbrook’s heavenly brisket. Nearly a quarter of the 430-square-foot space, located inside Public Market Emeryville (a food court to end all food courts), is devoted to the smoker and stacks of dry oak. The result



The smoked chicken, tossed in an Alabama white sauce, is offered in quarters, halves, or whole birds.



Mari and Damon Stainbrook in their Corte Madera eatery.

speaks for itself: The chicken and the links, the ribs and the pulled pork, and the brisket especially are the bomb.

Working as a private chef, following his stint at The French Laundry, allowed Stainbrook to travel the country, seeking out restaurants wherever he landed. But his aha moment came during an extended layover in Dallas. After wandering into a random barbecue place and tasting his first bite of real brisket, Stainbrook recalls telling himself: “So *that’s* what good is.”

Completely self-taught through reading and trial and error, Stainbrook has no allegiance to any particular style of ‘cue. He relies on his palate and food knowledge, and uses only the best local ingredients, right down to the California oak that perfumes his meats. “I didn’t grow up with anything [other than the chain eatery Tony Roma’s], which is why I ended up with a hodgepodge of barbecue from around the country,” Stainbrook says.

And what a hodgepodge it is. Each of the sustainably sourced meats gets its own dry rub. The chicken has a sweet note of coriander; the ribs are more herbal, with a salt cure working the rub deep into the meat before it sees a lick of smoke. That brisket (Stainbrook literally goes through a ton each week between his two restaurants; that’s 2,000 pounds of meat!) tastes peppery and a little garlicky, with a hint of paprika. The pork for the Andouille-style links—stuffed as tight as a balloon that’s ready to pop—is emulsified for a smooth texture, the fat lingering in every bite.

There’s also an assortment of sauces, including one based on world-renowned barbecue joint Big Bob Gibson’s famous Alabama white sauce—which is designed for chicken, but Stainbrook has been known to swipe a slice of brisket through it on occasion. For his not-too-sweet red sauce (hot or mild), he ferments fruity habaneros. So if you want a little tang to your ribs or a hit of mustard for your sausage, there’s an array to choose from, but trust me: This barbecue is just fine naked.

The sides best reveal Stainbrook’s California-chef side. Among the clean, bright, and deeply satisfying options are savory pink beans, sourced as fresh as dried beans can be and flavored with roasted pasilla peppers and a little brisket spice. The coleslaw is light, coated with a touch of mayo, red sauce, and a pinch of celery seed. And the collard greens are the real deal: Braised in a ham hock broth, they’re hearty, nutritious, and as delicious as Grandma’s soup.

As for the pickles, Stainbrook makes his own bread and butters and fermented dills. But the restaurant’s name isn’t meant to showcase cucumbers; it’s a play on the word’s origin. *Pickle* stems from the word *pekel*—which is thought to refer to the acidic condiments used on big game and fowl in medieval England.



Decadent pulled pork with a crisp slaw.



The tender brisket pairs well with ranch-style beans.



Juicy sausage links accompany dry-rubbed ribs.

When Stainbrook tosses his well-shredded pulled pork with a little vinegar and spice, it’s literally a “pig in a pickle.” (Besides, the name Bubba’s was taken, and “Damon’s” just wouldn’t cut it.)

So grab a beer (Stainbrook recommends pilsners, sours, or an oyster stout when eating some ‘cue) from The Public Bar next door or The Periodic Table on the far side of the market, and get yourself a taste of what a carefully tended fire can produce.

5959 Shellmound St., Emeryville, [piginapickle.com](http://piginapickle.com). Lunch and dinner daily.



## Pick Your Pleasure

Try these other grilled (aka barbecued) options at Public Market Emeryville.

**C Casa:** With a commitment to sustainably sourced ingredients, C Casa serves an array of tacos, including a grilled shrimp version, which we tried to round out our meat-heavy recommendations. Thin but large blistered corn tortillas came with oversized prawns and a thoughtfully balanced combo of raw chilies and cabbage. [myccasa.com](http://myccasa.com).

**NabiQ:** As the capital Q implies, this spot specializes in Korean barbecue. Of the several dishes we sampled, NabiQ’s classic Korean short ribs—cut thick and more sweet than spicy—were our favorite. [nabiq.com](http://nabiq.com).

**Paradita Eatery:** This casual restaurant from chef Carlos Altamirano (who owns Parada in Walnut Creek and Barranco Cocina Peruana in Lafayette) is located directly across from Pig in a Pickle and offers decadent barbecue dishes, including mega chunks of skewered and grilled pork belly (a mere \$13.50 on our visit) and sweet-spicy, Inca Kola-marinated pork spare ribs served over piquant Peruvian rice. [paradita.com](http://paradita.com).

**Wazwan Indian Cuisine:** With colorful Le Creuset-style pots filled with ready-made classics, this Indian wonder features dual tandoor ovens (or Indian barbecue) that turn knobs of marinated chicken into tender bites. Choose the mild lemon-honey version or the more familiar red tandoori, with its flavorful chilies. [wazwan.com](http://wazwan.com).

FROM TOP: CALL GODLEY; MARIN INDEPENDENT JOURNAL/STUART LIRETTE

CALL GODLEY (3)

EXPERIENTIAL DINING



The multicourse menu at Anaviv's Table offers fresh, local dishes, such as oysters from Hog Island Oyster Co.

## Fine Dining on the Fly

An increasing number of East Bay chefs are eschewing brick-and-mortar restaurants for “permanent pop-up” dining experiences that push culinary boundaries.

BY KRISTEN HANEY

The most exciting dining options in the East Bay aren't happening in Michelin-starred restaurants or typical fine-dining stalwarts. For truly transportive evenings (or a more casual yet elevated adventure), head to one of the seemingly oxymoronic “permanent pop-up” culinary events cropping up in Oakland, Richmond, Emeryville, and beyond.

While the concept varies by location and according to the chefs' whims, permanent pop-ups tend to involve talented cooks descending on a kitchen they don't necessarily own or lease (but have permission to use) to prepare food ranging from prix-fixe high-end fare, to

down-home fried favorites, to globally inspired recipes passed down from generation to generation. The reason behind this business model is simple: Rent and labor costs in the Bay Area continue to skyrocket, making opening (and sustaining) a traditional restaurant increasingly difficult—plus, it makes sense to test out ideas before taking the plunge on a lease. And oftentimes, local businesspeople—whether they are bar owners, restaurateurs, or landlords of underutilized commercial spaces—are more than happy to rent out their kitchen or entire restaurant part-time to make a little extra cash.

### CULINARY ART

Take, for example, Uptown Oakland's Abstract Table, which transforms breakfast-sandwich spot The Gastropig into a Friday and Saturday evening exercise in innovative flavor combinations, precise plating, and seasonal themes. Without the pressure of appealing to diners throughout the week, chefs Andrew Greene and Duncan Kwitkor are able to combine their fine art and culinary backgrounds to produce true works of epicurean art. That manifests as vibrantly colored dishes—served as a dining exhibition—currently inspired by the intersection of Norwegian and Japanese cooking. And The Gastropig owner Loren Goodwin—who became a fan of the pair when they were refining their pop-up chops at San Francisco's Naked Kitchen—reaps the benefits of dinner business on nights the restaurant would normally be dark.



Abstract Table's chef-owners Duncan Kwitkor and Andrew Greene.



On the latest Abstract Table menu, mussels bathe in a bacon-infused dashi with charred citrus toppers.



Soba tossed in nori butter and garnished with ikura.

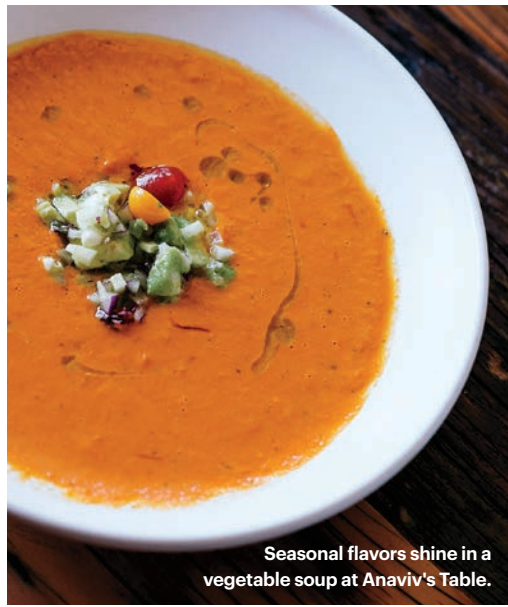
“We wanted to work for ourselves, to find a way to work together, not under the umbrella of someone else,” Greene says. “It was about starting small and trying to be humble and build something organically—the idea of getting back to basics, of being artists without all of the things that get in the way. Loren has been gracious enough to provide this space, where we feel like we're in the studio. The kitchen turned into our studio.”

While embarking on a new venture can be daunting—especially when it requires diners to embrace a unique menu with a distinct vision—the duo was up to the task.

“We didn't have any qualms. Having that creative freedom is a hugely important aspect and a big part of the appeal, so we were buoyed by the potential,” Kwitkor says. “It takes some bravery to do this; if you have a normal restaurant, you have an owner taking a huge percentage of the risk. But I'm confident in what we're doing.”

SUSAN ADLER

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JASON HENDARDY; DANA PLUCINSKI (2)



Seasonal flavors shine in a vegetable soup at Anaviv's Table.

### A SHARED EXPERIENCE

Over in Richmond, chef Arnon Oren capitalized on the existing commercial-kitchen space he uses for his businesses, Oren's Kitchen and Anaviv Catering and Events, to launch Anaviv's Table—a striking communal-dining destination anchored by a 10-person wood table. Three nights a week, the chef begins by inviting guests into the kitchen with a cocktail or glass of wine to watch him dish up appetizers before plating a three- to four-course meal paired with small-production California wines.

"We noticed anytime we invited guests into our working commercial kitchen, they got excited. So when we started thinking about the dining experience for Anaviv's Table, we decided to definitely keep that as an element," says Dee Wagner, the director of operations. "It's such a great icebreaker before everyone sits down to dinner."

The peek into the kitchen and the intimate dinner-party feel allow chef Oren to form a connection with each patron while also sharing his passion for organic, seasonal, and locally grown ingredients, often sourced from nearby farmers and ranchers. And though it's been a challenge to convince folks that an industrial area near Point Richmond hides a convivial, farm-to-table dining destination, those willing to take a walk on the wild side stroll away with a one-of-a-kind experience dictated by that evening's unique combination of ingredients, diners, and conversation.

"[The response has been] overwhelmingly positive. I think we were actually surprised by how much guests enjoy the experience," Wagner says. "Even though the dinner starts with a group of people who often don't know each other, by the end of the night, you would think everyone had been friends for years."



At Anaviv's Table, amuse-bouches—such as tapenade with grilled octopus—are offered before guests are seated.

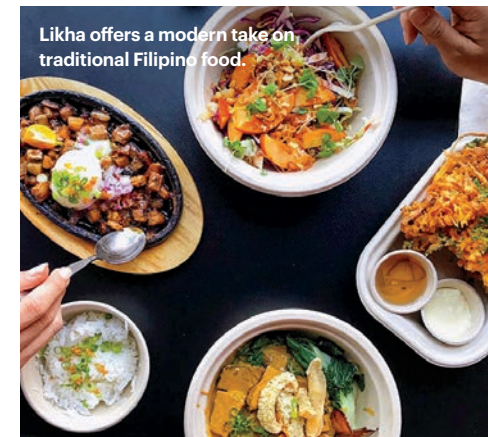


Pork belly, a diver scallop, and a grilled prawn are finished with a gastrique.

### BETTER BAR BITES

That's not to say the term "permanent pop-up" necessitates multicourse menus, intricate plating, and forging friendships with fellow diners. A number of neighborhood bars—including The Lodge and Mad Oak, both in Oakland—have embraced the opportunity to add a food menu to their drink roster without the stress of maintaining a full kitchen. And some of these more casual pop-ups are your best bet for scoring highbrow cuisine in a lowbrow setting.

The Filipino pop-up Likha debuted in Emeryville's Hometown Heroes sports bar this past summer, with chefs Bobby Punla and Jan Dela Paz using their impressive fine-dining pedigrees to elevate traditional Filipino dishes and typical bar fare. Punla and Paz create food that manages to straddle the line between gourmet and pub grub—from *meriendas* (snacks) such as Mary's free-range chicken lumpia and Thai basil-dusted fried brussels sprouts, to mains that veer from pork belly rice to Eureka rock fish escabeche complemented by the spicy-sweet flavors of papaya, peppers, and a tangy sauce. Punla or Paz personally delivers each dish to the table, thanks guests for coming, and blows diners' minds with the fact that there's food this good in a place bumping Drake as the Warriors battle on the TVs.



Likha offers a modern take on traditional Filipino food.



Ube ice cream and jackfruit top the halo halo shaved-ice sundae.



A Likha favorite: braised short rib smothered in peanut sauce and topped with eggplant and crispy tripe.

### A FORK IN THE ROAD

Diners clearly have been craving these new eating experiences and opportunities to connect over food in a setting more intimate than a traditional restaurant. But some successful pop-ups have drawn scrutiny from the Alameda County Public Health Department.

In August, a food inspector shut down the bustling Nokni—a pop-up inside Oakland's The Kebabery—after strolling by and noticing business outside of normal operating hours. Likewise, the Alameda County Public Health Department forced one of the East Bay's most popular and long-running pop-ups, Chef Smelly's, out of its space inside the Complex Oakland entertainment venue in October. (As of press time, the Chef Smelly brand is once again dishing out meals at One Story Building in San Leandro.)

Both shutterings drew public ire and negative media buzz. And though all pop-ups

are technically illegal in California—regardless of the chefs' certifications, food-handler cards, or use of a commercial kitchen—some counties have adopted their own policies regarding pop-ups, a move that may be on the horizon for Alameda.

In January, Alameda County introduced a new plan that allows pop-up eateries to continue operating—provided they "pop up" in permitted restaurants and meet a number of other requirements. Whether it's necessary to sanction a spate of popular businesses that often adhere to strict, self-imposed standards (most pop-ups have certification, training, and permitting in line with restaurants) is up for debate. But if the recent spike in avant-garde dining experiences sprouting up in the East Bay is any indicator, the "permanent pop-up" dining trend has already taken root—and will require more than a little haphazard weeding to eradicate completely.

SUSAN ADLER (3)

COURTESY OF LIKHA (3)