

FOOD SCENE

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Wine Country Comes Home

A Walnut Creek winery opens to the public.

BY SARA HARE

To experience the grape harvest at its peak, East Bay vino lovers often head north to Wine Country. But now, they can just hop over to Shadowbrook Winery—the first winery and tasting room to open in Walnut Creek since Prohibition.

Situated on a quiet lane in the Northgate area, Shadowbrook's attractive modern building, rustic tables, ornate wrought-iron decor, stainless steel fermenters, and new oak barrels create an impressive wine-tasting experience that's been years in the making. Owners Tim and Courtney Jochner, both Walnut Creek natives, produced their first vintage in 2005 but dreamed of something more: a winery open for tours and tastings.

With eight acres of vines blanketing the rolling hillsides, Shadowbrook offers big red varietals—such as cabernet sauvignon, zinfandel, syrah,

and petite sirah—that thrive in warm Contra Costa County.

“The weather near Mount Diablo, with cool, breezy nights, is very similar to the climate in Rutherford [in Napa County],” Tim says of growing high-quality grapes in Walnut Creek.

Plus, it doesn't hurt that Rick Tracy—who previously worked for Sonoma's Bonneau Wines, among other vintners—is Shadowbrook's consulting winemaker, helping the brand produce several award-winning vinos. (At the prestigious 2017 *San Francisco Chronicle* Wine Competition, all 11 of Shadowbrook's entered wines medaled, even over Napa wineries.)

Tours and tastings are available by appointment, so stay in town because local wine is officially back in The Creek. shadowbrookwinery.com.

Shadowbrook vintages won five gold medals at last year's *San Francisco Chronicle* Wine Competition.

RESTAURANT REVIEW

A Fourth Star Is Born

Farmhouse Kitchen Thai Cuisine brings its dazzling fare to Jack London Square.

BY NICHOLAS BOER



The succulent *panang nuea* short rib is slow braised and served with grilled broccolini and fried basil.

In less than four years, Kasem Saengsawang has built a Thai dynasty. With the June debut of Farmhouse Kitchen Thai Cuisine in Jack London Square, he and his wife, Kumuth Chatterjee, have given birth to four restaurants. Their latest Oakland eatery boasts an ornate 3,600-square-foot dining room, bar, and tiki-style patio, and serves inventive and stunningly presented Thai food.

The original Farmhouse Kitchen opened to popular acclaim in San Francisco in 2015. The following year came Daughter Thai (the name refers to the couple's hardworking young apprentice and manager, Kimberly Gamble) in Montclair. Encouraged by their early successes, the pair launched Farmhouse Kitchen in Portland, Oregon, less than six months later.

While the genesis of Saengsawang's restaurant empire can be traced to his boyhood in Thailand, the whole venture seems improbable.

After immigrating to the United States in 2005, Saengsawang—a bright, soft-spoken man—went to City College of San Francisco with the idea of becoming the next Bill Gates. But after taking a kitchen job to support his studies, he discovered a passion for cooking.



Sit at the bar and sip the 36-ounce Kick Boxing Bowl cocktail with a friend.



Enjoy a meal in Farmhouse Kitchen's flower-adorned dining room.

"I totally fell in love with the way customers came to me and said, 'Thank you so much. Your food is fantastic,'" Saengsawang says.

So, he abandoned his interest in a high-tech career and spent the next decade working in both small and corporate Thai restaurants, eventually deciding to start his own business.

Ironically, as a young boy, Saengsawang resented grocery shopping and prepping food for his grandmother. He recalls whining, "Why me?" Now, he reflects back on those days with deep gratitude.

On our first visit to his new Farmhouse, we started with the textural blue rice salad. The jasmine grains are steamed and then tinted with pigment from the colorful butterfly pea flower; it's a perfect example of Saengsawang's refined interpretation of the countryside fare he enjoyed as a child. Encircled by a ring of peanuts, coconut, and seasonal shredded green mango, the dish is inspired by his

grandma's impromptu snacks. But the alluring presentation—along with crispy shallots and puffed brown rice (steamed, dried, and fried)—makes it pop. The salad is tossed tableside with ginger, kaffir lime, and bitter leaf.

While the menu is priced higher than that of a typical Thai restaurant, the portions are as generous as the flavors are explosive. Two hearty fillets of salmon—marinated in fish sauce and herbs, then seared to juicy perfection—are served with a mountain of fresh herbs, cool vermicelli noodles, and a creamy, spicy peanut sauce spiked with sour tamarind. The entrée comes with lettuce wraps, but it's difficult not to just dig in.

A massive short rib that's braised in *panang nuea* curry for 48 hours evokes a childhood memory, Saengsawang says, of when a whole cow was cooked *luau*-style for two days to celebrate Thai New Year. (He still recalls the beefy aromas wafting into his

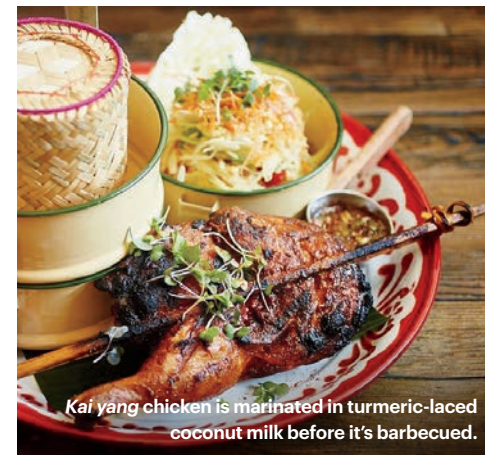
bedroom.) Served on a red plate with blue rice and fresh greens, it calls for a party. Even the chicken is dramatic: A whole breast is fried in a red curry-paste batter and served with a giant knife thrust into its crunchy skin.

And these are just a few of the specials; the menu itself is extensive, featuring an assortment of curries—all prepared with fish sauce for authenticity—and street-style snacks, such as the green beans (perfectly pan-fried in spicy chili paste with crispy tofu).

Guests can also graze on appetizers, such as the sticky whole chicken wings (tips included because nothing goes to waste in Saengsawang's homeland) steamed through, twice-fried, and coated in a smoky chili oil infused with garlic and Sichuan peppercorns. Wow. We also loved the succulent beef wraps: marinated strips of Wagyu flank meat rolled around refreshing bits of cucumber and earthy cilantro.

This sort of fare is best enjoyed at the '80s-inspired, retro-chic bar, where diners can watch fresh oysters being shucked and choose from American and Thai beers, as well as craft cocktails. Or sit out on the relaxed, bamboo-adorned patio; it's particularly nice on warm nights.

One would think Saengsawang would be content to rest for a while, but he already has plans to combine Farmhouse Kitchen with the vacant space next door, practically doubling its size. Luckily, Grandma—who's almost 90 now—is visiting more often and can help look after his young daughter while the dynasty continues to grow. 336 Water St., Oakland, (510) 419-0541, farmhouseoak.com. Lunch and dinner daily.



Kai yang chicken is marinated in turmeric-laced coconut milk before it's barbecued.



Prepared in the traditional Southern Thai style, *hat yai* fried chicken comes with a curry sauce.

COURTESY OF FARMHOUSE KITCHEN THAI CUISINE

COURTESY OF FARMHOUSE KITCHEN THAI CUISINE (4)

CULTURE AND CUISINE

Artful Eats

Satiate your appetite and broaden your palate at these three museums, which offer fresh takes on creative dining.

BY CLAY KALLAM

There's nothing like wandering through a gallery and feeling an unexpected emotional connection with a painting or a sculpture. And while the original intention of visiting a museum is to experience art, part of the fun is the food. Here are three cultural institutions curating deliciously artistic eats.



What's On View

After filling your belly, check out the latest exhibitions on display.

OMCA

Through October 21, take in a tribute to the Oakland Athletics in *Homegrown Heroes: Oakland A's at 50*; or, beginning November 10, *Cruisin' the Fossil Coastline*, a prehistoric-themed examination of California's natural environment.

BAMPFA

The museum showcases portraits by photographer Peter Hujar (*Peter Hujar: Speed of Life*) through November 18, while the film archive explores the cinematic works of Ingmar Bergman (*Bergman 100: Discoveries and Rarities*) until November 4.

SFMOMA

The marvelous *René Magritte: The Fifth Season* installation runs through October 28, and the contemporary photos of *Susan Meiselas: Meditations* are on view until October 21. *Wayne Thiebaud: Artist's Choice* (featuring works hand-selected by the artist himself) will be on display until March 10.



Indulge in a four-course dinner at BAMPFA's next Film to Table gathering on October 13.

A MOVEABLE FEAST

The weekly Friday Nights @ OMCA (Oakland Museum of California) events are big fun. Not only is museum admission half-price for the evening, but also Off the Grid's food trucks roll up to serve killer street food. Though their lineups vary week to week, chances are you can taste everything from Lamas Peruvian Food's lomo saltado to Southern Comfort Kitchen's crawfish étouffée to Scotch Bonnet's jerk chicken, and so much more. Add beer, wine, live music, and dancing into the mix, and it's definitely a party. Just don't forget to check out OMCA's exhibitions, too. museumca.org.

QUIRKY CAFÉ

You may already know that BAMPFA stands for the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, but you might not realize that you can grab a bite at the very cool Babette café without paying museum admission. The eatery is tucked under a curving orange ceiling on the center's second level, where diners can look down on the main exhibition floor while savoring breakfast (such as a bowl of ricotta, poached pear, hazelnuts, honey, and mint), brunch (try the red rice bowl with roasted turmeric yams), or lunch (bite into the roasted lamb sandwich with smoky babaganoush). Regardless of when you eat, leave room for dessert—the house specialty—and relish a morsel of Sicilian lemon almond pistachio cake. For a different dining experience, consider attending one of the monthly Film to Table dinners to enjoy a cinematically themed menu following a film screening. babettecafe.com.

FINE-ART TREATS

Not surprisingly, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) features the Bay Area's most ambitious on-site museum restaurant with In Situ. Chef Corey Lee views his food as both art and a celebration of innovative ideas. To that end, Lee and his staff replicate dishes created by some of the best chefs from around the world—including East Bay culinary icons Alice Waters of Chez Panisse, Tanya Holland of Brown Sugar Kitchen, and James Syhabout of Commis. While the menu rotates on a regular basis, there just might be a shorter wait for Holland's shrimp and grits at SFMOMA than at her Oakland eatery. The food is high-end with prices to match, but having the opportunity to try award-winning meals surrounded by fine art is priceless. insitu.sfmoma.org.