

# FOOD SCENE

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## Loaves of Plenty

A San Leandro bakery opens its doors—and it just might be the best thing since sliced bread.

BY LAUREN BONNEY

Thoughtfully designed with an East Coast bakery in mind, As Kneaded Bakery greets loaf lovers with a beautiful wall of challah, porridge, *miche* (a rustic sourdough), and other bread varieties, as well as an incredible fresh-baked aroma. The San Leandro shop, which debuted in early November, is run by head baker and owner Iliana Imberman Berkowitz.

In just two years, Berkowitz has taken her business from pop-up to farmers market stand to full-fledged brick-and-mortar and wholesale business. And in this relatively short time, As Kneaded Bakery has quickly become a beloved brand throughout the Bay Area.

It's easy to see why. Berkowitz's passion for bread making, attention to detail, and extra helping of love manifest in gorgeously browned artisanal loaves with indulgently crackling crusts.

Berkowitz's love of food and baking began early on, driven by her gastronomically inclined family. "I grew up in a Jewish household where food was constantly at the center of our home life, whether we were cooking together, developing a new recipe, or reviewing takeout from a restaurant," she says. Berkowitz further tapped into her creativity with self-assigned baking projects in college and professional experiences in bakeries and restaurants.

The baker hopes one day to open multiple As Kneaded retail locations and become a household name throughout the Bay Area for her expertly crafted bread. But until then, Berkowitz's mission remains the same: "Deliver wholesome breads of unparalleled taste, texture, and substance," she says, "and a few bread puns every now and then, for good measure." 585 Victoria Ct., San Leandro, (510) 924-7490, [askneadedbakery.com](http://askneadedbakery.com).



HANA MAASS PHOTOGRAPHY

In addition to fresh-baked bread, As Kneaded Bakery also sells house-made noshes such as bialys, sticky buns, and *bostock* (a kind of challah toast).

ANCIENT EATS

# The Art of Soba

Soba Ichi showcases rare, handmade Japanese noodles in a Zen West Oakland space.

BY CLARA HOGAN

The Bay Area is dotted with innumerable standout Japanese joints offering familiar favorites such as ramen, sushi, bento, yakitori, and matcha. But one dish has largely been left out of the mix: soba.

Made from buckwheat and water, soba noodles are prepared two ways: hot in a dashi broth, or cold with a dipping sauce. The dish—which is served at birthdays and weddings, on New Year’s, and even given as a going-away present—is as popular and beloved in Japan as pizza and hamburgers are in the United States.

“In Japan, soba shops are as common as convenience stores are here,” says chef Koichi Ishii of Soba Ichi, which opened in June. The restaurant is the first in the Bay Area—and one of the very few in the country—to serve authentic, house-made soba.

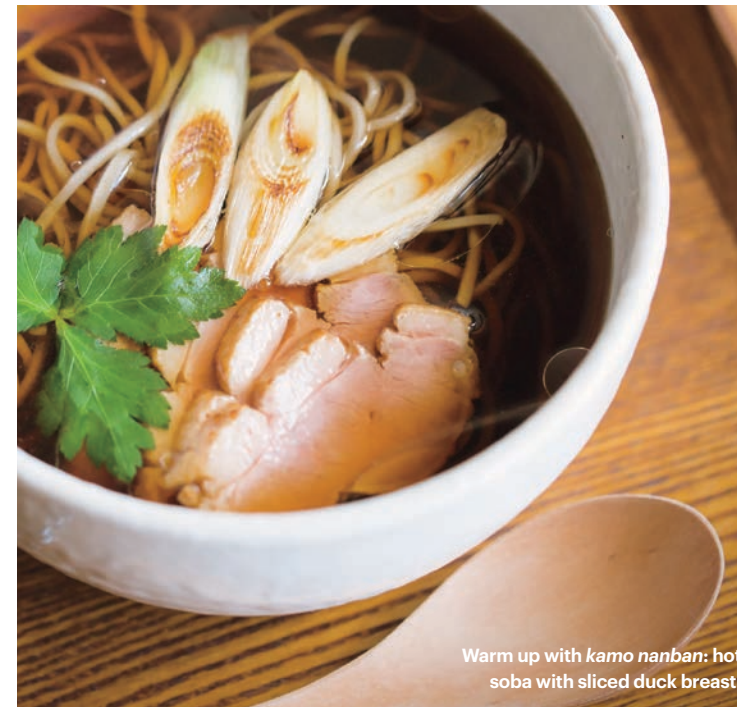
Located off an industrial block in the heart of West Oakland, Soba Ichi feels like a small family eatery in Kyoto, 5,000 miles away. A fountain trickles in a courtyard oasis, and the sleek interior (designed by Zen Buddhist priest and craftsman Paul Discoe) nods to the simple, clean lines valued in Japanese architecture. Several custom tables—made from cypress, elm, and black acacia—sit in an intimate dining room that features a redwood-paneled ceiling adorned with string lights.

It’s rare to find a restaurant serving traditional soba because making the noodle requires specialized tools and hard-to-source buckwheat seed. Ishii imported equipment from Japan and buys buckwheat from a farm in Washington that grows a Japanese variety called *kitawase*, then mills the flour in-house.

Plus, crafting soba is a skill that takes a long time to master. Ishii studied for three



Soba Ichi was brought to life by the team behind Berkeley’s uber-popular izakaya spot Ippuku.



Warm up with *kamo nanban*: hot soba with sliced duck breast.



For cold soba with tempura, order *nihachi ten seiro*.

years in his hometown of Yamagata, in northern Japan, before returning to the United States. “I would say that it takes a year or so to make decent soba—but a lot longer to make great soba,” he says. “I’m still always learning.”

Every day, Ishii arrives at the restaurant early to start a detailed, 45-minute (per batch) noodle-making process. He usually produces four batches of soba a day: one that’s 100 percent buckwheat, and three that are 80 percent buckwheat and 20 percent wheat. (Even though each batch of noodles yields approximately 25 servings, the eatery has been known to sell out.)

In a small nook adjacent to the dining room, the chef begins by adding water to the milled buckwheat in a special *kone bachi* kneading bowl. He fervently yet serenely mixes the flour by hand until it comes together, first as small pellets and then, as if by magic, into a firm ball of dough. Observing Ishii at work is like watching a dance: Focused, calm, and graceful,

he has clearly gone through these steps thousands of times before, but still seems alert to the needs and nuances of each particular batch of dough.

“California chefs are more like artists, creating [many] dishes, whereas Japanese chefs tend to learn one or two things and master it,” Ishii says. “I enjoy the repetitive nature of making soba; I still find it different every time.”

Once the ball of dough is formed, it’s time to roll it out—another intricate ritual that entails massaging the dough slowly, then folding it into 12 thin layers, which are cut with a special soba knife into perfect, 1.5-millimeter-wide noodles.

At Soba Ichi, patrons can order their soba hot or cold, on its own or paired with tempura, or accompanied by sliced duck or herring. The menu also features an izakaya section, with small plates like *dashimaki* (Japanese rolled omelet), *mushidori* (poached chicken with ume sauce), and *dashiyakko* (house-made tofu with Japanese salsa). Owner Shinichi Washino oversees the small but well-curated drink menu, which includes various local and Japanese beers, shochu, and sakes.

So far, Washino says, the community has been welcoming of the unique dining spot, and excited to learn about the art and taste of soba. “I would say that, for more than half of the people coming in, it’s their first experience,” he says. “It’s fun to explain it to them, and teach them how to enjoy it.”

2311A Magnolia St., Oakland, (510) 465-1969, [sobaichioakland.com](http://sobaichioakland.com). Lunch Sat.–Sun., dinner Wed.–Sun.



Customers slurp their noodles inside the minimalist space.

WAKI HAMATSU

WAKI HAMATSU (3)



## Satisfying Slurps

Intimidated by cold soba served on a strainer? Here’s the proper way to eat your noodles.

1. Pour half of the dipping sauce into the provided, empty *choko* cup. Hold the *choko* cup in one hand and bring it close to your chin. Hold your chopsticks in the other hand.
2. Use your chopsticks to lightly and quickly dip a bite-size portion of noodles into the sauce. (Only dip one-half to two-thirds of the noodles—do not submerge them.)
3. Immediately put the noodles in your mouth and slurp up every last one. Slurping isn’t rude here; it’s encouraged as a way to experience the full flavor and aroma of the meal.
4. Add your preferred amount of green onions and wasabi to the dipping sauce, gradually incorporating more as you go.
5. Once you’ve finished the noodles, a server will bring you soba *yu*—the broth the soba was boiled in. Pour the broth into the remaining dipping sauce to enjoy it as a soup.

ROASTED RECIPE

## Bountiful Brassicas

Give cauliflower a fresh twist with this must-try dish, courtesy of Happy Acre Farm.

Often the stuff of childhood nightmares, cauliflower is one seriously underappreciated veggie. A member of the Brassicaceae family—and a close cousin to broccoli—it's packed with vitamins C and B6 and is a great source of fiber and omega-3 fatty acids. Cauliflower is also incredibly versatile to cook. One of our favorite farmers, Helena Sylvester of Sunol's Happy Acre Farm, offers up a tasty recipe starring this delightful brassica.

### Roasted Harissa Cauliflower

*Yields two servings (for two moderately hungry farmers) as a side. Yields one serving (for one hungry farmer) as a main dish. Increase portions accordingly.*

- 1 medium head of cauliflower (approx. 1 pound)
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Harissa powder (from Oaktown Spice Shop)
- Finishing salt (from Big Sur Salts)

Preheat oven to 375°F. Break up cauliflower head into florets. (Tip: "Don't forget to eat the stems," Sylvester says. "They're delicious.") Place cauliflower in a large bowl and drizzle enough olive oil to fully coat. Season florets generously with harissa powder (a fiery spice blend) and salt. Toss until seasonings are evenly distributed.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Put seasoned cauliflower on the baking sheet, pouring any remaining harissa-laced oil from the bowl on top.

Bake 20–25 minutes, turning florets halfway through. Remove cauliflower from the oven once fork-tender and golden in color; let cool, and enjoy.

*Pick up some cauliflower at Happy Acre Farm's weekend farmers market stand in downtown Pleasanton. [happyacrefarm.com](http://happyacrefarm.com).*



For tacos, add harissa cauliflower to a warmed tortilla, top with shredded cabbage, pickled onions, crema, and—if you're feeling extra spicy—hot sauce.