

FOOD SCENE

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The NorCal Night Market builds on the success of its SoCal sister event (pictured here).

Tender Is the Night (Market)

An Asian-inspired culinary event heads to the East Bay.

BY MARISSA WU

“What hath night to do with sleep?” poet John Milton famously asked. Very little, it turns out, when you’re exploring the NorCal Night Market. This massive food event—organized by the gastronomic minds behind the wildly popular 626 Night Market in Arcadia, a city northeast of Los Angeles—sets up shop at Pleasanton’s Alameda County Fairgrounds September 28 through 30.

Night markets have deep roots in Asian culture, but the concept—in which a wide range of food purveyors dishes out grub in a central space—has slowly made its way around the globe. The 626 Night Market was the first of its kind in the United States; it’s also the nation’s largest, enticing tens of thousands of people each year with signature goodies such as potato swirl skewers and creative drinks sipped out of lightbulbs.

The three-day East Bay event brings together more than 100 food vendors and features live music, games, art, and merchandise, too. Visitors can expect traditional Asian street fare and desserts, such as Taiwanese shaved snow, as well as fusion bites like crispy chicken bao from San Ramon’s April 8 Cafe.

There are also plenty of opportunities to see and taste some of the unique food trends sweeping the country. Try the Hong Kong-style bubble waffles from Bubble and Wrap, Thai rolled ice cream by Glazier, and any (or all) of the numerous types of boba tea. Admission is only \$5, so come hungry. norcalnightmarket.com.

RESTAURANT REVIEW



Take a bite out of a classic cheeseburger featuring dry-aged beef and a Tartine sweet-potato bun.

Henry's Scores Big

A reimagined Cal-centric restaurant in a venerable hotel has got game.

BY NICHOLAS BOER

The last time my dinner date—aka Mom—set foot in Hotel Durant (now the Graduate Berkeley) was for UC Berkeley's sorority rush week. She accepted my invitation to return 70 years later to sneak a peek at Henry's—the hotel's restaurant. Much has transpired in the ensuing decades. In the current popular imagination, Henry's is at best a campus pub—a go-to spot for eating deep-fried grub and drinking deep. It's reputed as a safe place for of-age students to lay down their heads once pints consumed surpass points scored by Cal (the football stadium is a 10-minute walk away).

So, when Graduate Hotels took over the Durant in 2016—entailing a brief closure and a thoughtful renovation—the culinary makeover was daunting. How does a tired kitchen capture Berkeley's politically correct cuisine—sustainable, innovative, and fussed—without antagonizing ravenous beer-loving Golden Bears fans? How does a hotel restaurant rise from the ashes of Mom's cigarette-happy generation, welcoming

old-time alums without appearing staid? And, above all—considering Graduate Hotels' cross-campus business concept—how does one best create a residence where out-of-state parents feel welcome and well fed?

Graduate's answer? Chris Kronner. Best known for Piedmont's KronnerBurger—whose eponymous sandwich (made with beef ground daily from dry-aged cuts) inspired a loyal following and spawned the cookbook *A Burger to Believe In*—the chef has created a worthy counterpart in Henry's all-day brunch burger. Served on a sweet-potato bun with house-made pickles, it comes with the option of roasted marrow bones—a delicious deal for an additional \$5. Not to be outdone, Kronner's soufflé-style omelette—which arrives with crisp edges and a gooey white-cheddar center, and is garnished with shaved speck that tastes like smoky prosciutto—just might inspire a second cookbook.

During that first weeknight dinner with Mom, Kronner's roots at San Francisco's Bar

Tartine came into focus. A dish of crispy Monterey squid served over creamy shell beans loaded with olive oil-stewed heirloom tomatoes, topped with crisp bits of pole beans, and drenched in thick aioli was perhaps my favorite dining-out discovery of the year.

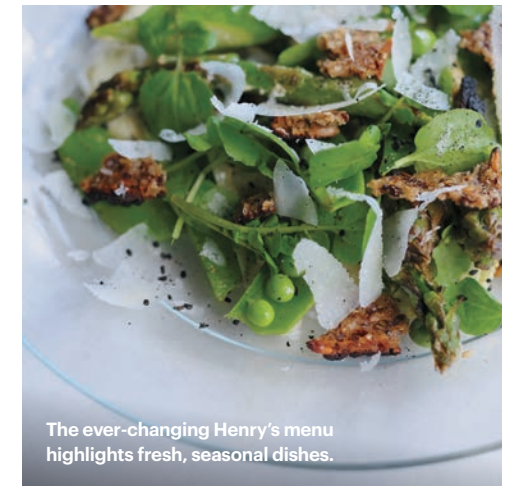
Meanwhile, Mom was absorbed with her charred Tartine country toast, dipping it into a smoky-sweet lemongrass coconut broth, and almost entirely disregarding the mussels as she scanned the table for more bread. (Our aloof server eventually brought us a few more slices.)

Tartine Bakery's bread is a revelation and stands on its own, but just wait until you've dipped a holy, chewy chunk of it into a pool of spicy buttermilk dressing from Kronner's serpent cucumber and avocado salad. Bold food, indeed.

Many, if not all, of the summer dishes I sampled may be gone by your visit, but the bread—and Kronner's dedication to the



The mussels are topped with Tartine breadcrumbs, marcona almonds, and a drizzle of absinthe butter.



The ever-changing Henry's menu highlights fresh, seasonal dishes.

season—ensures a happy outcome. One winning dish that has perennial potential is the New York steak, cut of the highest quality and drenched in a peanut-spiked chimichurri sauce blessed with mint, cilantro, garlic, chili, sherry vinegar, and lemon juice. Served with blanched, smashed, and fried potatoes, this entrée best captures Kronner's overarching philosophy of how a rich preparation needs to be, as he puts it, “balanced by salt and acid with strong flavors of herbs and garlic.”

There are two distinct dining areas at Henry's, and if anyone can reconcile them into a discernible concept, it's Howie Correa, the affable general manager with a dual-coast résumé (including a stint at Chez Panisse). But no matter the design, Henry's is a long-haul project with an ever-evolving clientele; summer is an especially challenging time for a campus-centric restaurant to get a read on its regulars.

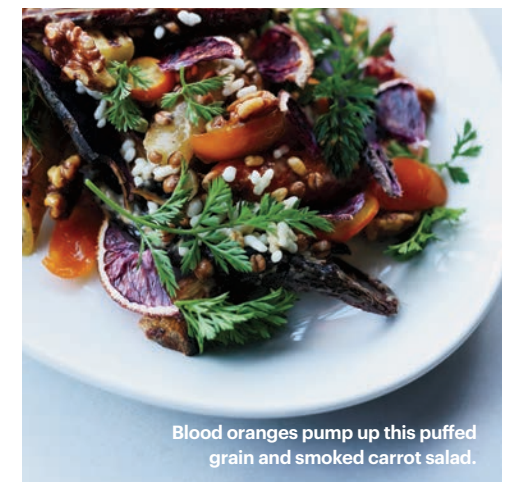
The bar-lounge on our July visit was filled with older couples tucked into corner booths, with groups of students sliding in and out of the communal table. Meanwhile, the separated dining room was overrun by a wedding rehearsal dinner complete with unchecked children.

Even with a solid team (including a former KronnerBurger chef) running the kitchen, it's up to the locals—Cal students and their friends and family—to define what Henry's will be in decades to come. But I would return tomorrow in a heartbeat to dive deeper into Kronner's menu.

While Mom can't appreciate one updated touch by Graduate Hotels—the men's urinal is painted a bright Cardinal red (take that, Stanford!)—the new space is sure to foster team spirit. That should certainly encourage more beer sales from Henry's 14 taps at the antique bar. 2600 Durant Ave., Berkeley, (510) 809-4132, graduatehotels.com. Breakfast and dinner daily. Brunch Fri.–Sun.



Crispy flowering broccoli and asparagus are paired with a chili tsuyu sauce.



Blood oranges pump up this puffed grain and smoked carrot salad.



Chris Kronner goes beyond burgers in his new post at Henry's.

COURTESY OF HENRY'S

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: ROBERT CHAD; COURTESY OF HENRY'S (4)

SENSATIONAL SIPS

Vino Extraordinaire

An Oakland bar brings the natural-wine movement into focus.

BY CLARA HOGAN

Tucked away on Oakland's Grand Avenue, the cozy and chic wine bar Ordinaire—so trendy that *Esquire* recently named it one of the 21 best bars in America—displays a blue neon sign in its window reading “natural wine.”

As the sign suggests, Ordinaire embraces the natural-wine movement that has taken off in the East Bay (and across the country) over the past five years. And it's really no surprise—given the increased demand for organic foods and products—that people want sustainable wine options.

Still, there is a lot of confusion about what exactly natural wine is.

“My answer to that question changes every time,” says Ordinaire owner Bradford Taylor. “There's nothing cut and dry about it; natural wine is more complex, and I've learned to accept that.”

Explaining “natural wine” is difficult, in part because the term has no legal definition, and there is no official certification process to ensure a vintage meets “natural” standards. However, people in the industry agree on some basic principles: Natural vino is made from organically farmed grapes and uses minimal intervention throughout the wine-making process, with no chemical enhancements. That includes little to no sulfur, a preservative added to the vast majority of wines to stabilize them and prevent oxidation.

The lack of sulfur and other chemicals is thought to make natural wine healthier—and less likely to induce a hangover. Fans also rave about its expressiveness and bright acidity in tasting notes.

“With natural wine, it's going to be different every time because it's not being messed with in order to taste the same as a preconceived idea,” Taylor says. “Natural wine is alive. There's a certain energy to it that doesn't exist in conventional wine.”

Taylor opened Ordinaire after falling in love with *vin naturel* while living in France. “In Paris, the natural-wine crowd was different than those into conventional wine,” he says. “They were more down-to-earth, with no pretentiousness, and the wine shops had very close relationships with winemakers.”



Bradford Taylor and his staff are happy to guide first-time natural-wine drinkers at Ordinaire.

FERRI LOEWENTHAL



Choose from a wide selection of *vin naturel*, available by the bottle and on tap.

He strove to give Ordinaire that same kind of accessibility. Despite the bar's hip factor, there is no snobbery among the staff, who have a deep knowledge of each bottle's terroir and story.

Along with owning Ordinaire, Taylor also cofounded and started the annual natural-wine fair Brumaire three years ago—helping to put Oakland on the map as a hub for natural wines. The event in March featured 50 American and European winemakers and drew 500 attendees (with another 450 on the waiting list).

In the end, Taylor believes natural wine reflects the fundamentals of winemaking, returning vino to the way it aged and tasted before it became mass-produced. “Basically,” he says, “it's made without humans getting in the way.” ordinairewine.com.

Grab a bottle to go, or settle in for a wine-by-the-glass sampling.



FERRI LOEWENTHAL (4)

The wine haven is located on Oakland's bustling Grand Avenue.



Natural Wine Hot Spots

Explore the trend at these other vino venues.

Donkey and Goat Winery

This family-owned urban winery sources grapes from sustainable and biodynamic vineyards in the Sierra Nevada, Mendocino, and Napa regions. Enjoy a glass or bottle of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, or Rhône varietals on the tasting room's spacious patio. *Berkeley, donkeyandgoat.com.*

Minimo

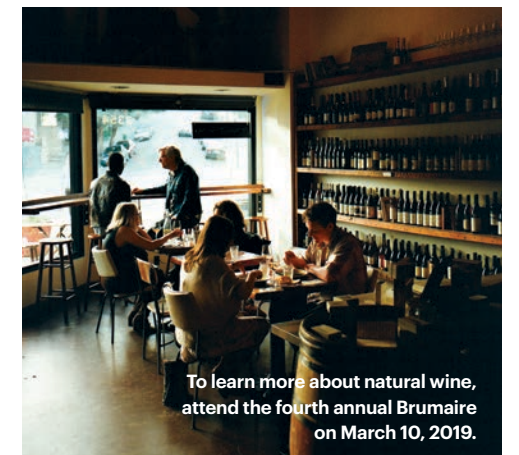
At this neighborhood wine shop—whose name means “minimal” in Italian—you'll find wines from small-production and family-owned wineries that use sustainable practices. Located in an airy, industrial building in Jack London Square, Minimo offers themed flights on Wednesday evenings and most of the day on Saturdays. *Oakland, minimowine.com.*

The Punchdown

The East Bay's first natural-wine bar specializes in wines from around the world including Georgia, Australia, and Spain. Choose a curated flight, and pair your vino with cheese, charcuterie, or the nightly dinner offering. *Oakland, punchdownwine.com.*

Starline Social Club

Housed in a renovated space built in 1983, this multiuse venue features a lounge, kitchen, and full bar. As a little-known bonus, it boasts one of the most extensive and well-curated natural-wine lists in the Bay Area. *Oakland, starlinesocialclub.com.*



To learn more about natural wine, attend the fourth annual Brumaire on March 10, 2019.