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49 Square Miles: Square 29, a primo butcher shop

Paolo Lucchesi

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Mike McGee (left), Paula Guerra (middle), 20 years old, and John Franco Tuccori (right) working at Guerra Quality Meats in San Francisco, California, during the lunch hour on Friday, September 16, 2011. Guerra's has been a family business for over fifty years. Photo: Liz Hafalia, The Chronicle



Video

For an overview of the 49 Square Mile project, go to sfg.ly/49miles. Now we're delving further into each neighborhood, 1 square mile each week.

A butcher shop is the ultimate neighborhood foundation. Before supermarkets dotted the city, home-cooked meals began at the local butcher counter, where the meat guy was equal parts provider, support system

and neighbor.

Once a common sight throughout San Francisco, butcher shops are less ubiquitous nowadays, even with the influx of a new generation of meat markets (go to sfg.ly/HcuJ1D for a rundown).

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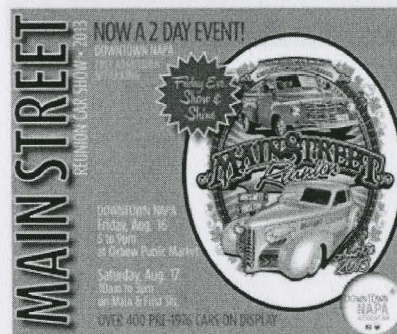
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But Guerra Quality Meats, our winner for Square 29, has been a presence in the Sunset and Parkside neighborhoods since 1954, when Mark and Battista Guerra opened it on Taraval and 22nd Avenue. A half-century later, it's still run by the Guerra family, though it moved a few blocks east and now features a deli, sandwich counter, prepared foods and catering service.

Even though Guerra might be old-school, it's not old-fashioned. It's embraced sustainable and organic purveyors like Marin Sun Farms and Mary's Organic Chicken, and brings North Beach treats from Liguria Focaccia and Dianda Pastry to the west side of town.

Around the same time that Guerra opened on Taraval, so did the Gold Mirror. The joint had been a jazzy cocktail bar on Fillmore, complete with its namesake Art Deco-inspired mirrors. It moved to its current location in the 1950s, and a decade later, Giuseppe Di Grande bought it and turned it into an Italian restaurant. These days, Di Grande's two sons run the show, serving classics like homemade cannelloni, chicken cacciatore and veal scaloppini.

Moving farther down the Taraval strip, decades-old Marco Polo has carved a unique niche with its Asian-flavored Italian gelato. But if you're not in the mood for durian, sesame, taro or guava ice creams, there are always the less-exotic staples like vanilla and chocolate.

Not everything in this square mile of the city is old. Take, for example, Brown Owl Coffee. The stylish year-old cafe, which looks like it could fit right into the Mission, is from a husband-and-wife team who made it the next step in their home coffee-roasting hobby.

Coffee is the focus, but the pastry shelves are filled with products from other small local businesses, including Heartbaker, Mi2Sweets and Pepples Donuts.

Also only a few years old is Kingdom of Dumpling. It's a tiny, unassuming storefront, but as the name implies, Chinese dumplings of all shapes and sizes are the name of the game. You can't beat a dozen fresh, piping hot ones - especially for a couple bucks.

Brown Owl Coffee: 1131 Taraval St. (near 21st Avenue), San Francisco; (415) 242-1426. brownowlcoffee.com. Open daily.

Gold Mirror: 800 Taraval St. (at 18th Avenue), San Francisco; (415) 564-0401. goldmirrorrestaurant.com. Lunch weekdays; dinner nightly.

Guerra Quality Meats: 490 Taraval St., (at 15th Avenue), San Francisco; (415) 564-0585. guerrameats.com. Open daily.

Kingdom of Dumpling: 1713 Taraval St. (near 27th Avenue), San Francisco; (415) 566-6143. kingdomofchinesedumpling.com. Open daily.

Marco Polo: 1447 Taraval St. (near 25th Avenue), San Francisco; (415) 731-2833. Open daily.

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