

# Restaurants

HAIGHT ASHBURY V&amp;V

# Eclectic food in an energized setting

Eos' Euro-Asian menu and extensive wine list excite, even if they don't always match

By Patricia Unterman  
SPECIAL TO THE EXAMINER

**A**N ENERGY field surrounds this once quiet neighborhood corner since Eos moved in last December. Who would have thought that a restaurant serving theatrically constructed East-West creations with a mind-boggling collection of wines would take hold at this funky Cole Valley crossroads? But it has. The passion behind Eos and the scale and depth of its vision have brought The City to its doorsteps.

There are two parts to Eos (the name also belongs to the Greek Goddess of Dawn): a wine bar and a restaurant. They are next to one another in separate spaces connected by a pass-through window. More than 40 wines by the glass and hundreds of bottles from a wine list of tremendous depth and originality move from the wine bar into the restaurant, while small and large plates of food that look like flower arrangements from outer space land on tables in both operations. The combination of dramatic, Euro-Asian food and



\$10 glass of 1989 N. Joly Coulée de Serrant, Savennières, a hugely aged Chenin blanc, when I told her it tasted oxidized. Well, shut my mouth. The replacement poured from a fresh bottle had much the same character. I learned something about this eccentric Loire producer at the expense of the restaurant. My lack of familiarity with the wine couldn't have been handled in a nicer way. One of the best food/wine match-ups in all my visits came from a \$4.25 glass of 1995 Qupe Syrah, one of many new California wines that seem to be made with this kind of eclectic eating in mind.

If you're serious about wine drinking, accompany a great bottle of red with one of 10 cheeses (\$9.95) or a selection of three (\$19.95). No fewer than 20 dessert wines by the glass are offered to drink with a delicious pastry-wrapped baked pear (\$5.95) or the spectacular looking and tasting Bananamisu (\$5.95), a whole, unpeeled banana sliced in half lengthwise, caramelized on top and garnished with many fancies. And finally, tea, brewed in heavy, cast iron, Asian tea pots, poured into hand-thrown pottery tea cups, soothes the stomach and the psyche from sensory overload.

Eos is so sophisticated and so outrageous at the same time that it baffles me. The wild look of the food has certainly been inspired by Kirk Webber at Cafe Kati where Eos chef/owner Arnold Wong

EXAMINER/BOB MCLEOD



ing — even if they often don't go together.

But no one cares because everyone is having such a good time. Both the wine bar and the restaurant are perpetually full and very crowded toward the end of the week. As a testament to its popularity, Eos is one of the few neighborhood restaurants that serves late and stays busy right until closing.

The dining room (which used to be the Ironwood Cafe) roars, packed with talking people amid the hard surfaces of black granite tables, red tile floors and wood slat banquettes. Skewed light fixtures on metal tubes and a network of exposed metal earthquake beams give the room its stark, functional style. Sound bounces off the low ceiling of a mezzanine used for additional seating, and the rumble of the N-Judah street car shakes Eos on a regular schedule.

When diners sit down, perhaps after a wait in the busy wine bar

where people jockey for unreserved seats, they are faced with many choices — the regular menu of odd-sounding dishes augmented by a small specials menu and a multi-paged wine document. My advice is to seek advice from the amazingly well informed service staff. They not only know every preparation but also a huge amount about the wines, an interest in which may have drawn them to work here.

Many of the starters are irresistibly good, like crispy rock shrimp cakes (\$7.95) served with spicy, ginger aioli and a radicchio cup full of little lettuces and dressing. Everything works lusciously when eaten together. The same formula — crisp fried thing, mayonnaise, greens — also charms in a starter called Five Pepper Calamari Filets (\$8.95), though the squid itself gets lost under a thick, gravelly coating.

Defining individual ingredients does not concern Eos cooks. The kitchen exults in piles, mounds and

and raw baby carrots.

The popular Tuna Tower (\$9.95) is a case in point, a tall construct of deep fried won ton skins layered with thin slices of seared tuna and a juicy "Asian" salsa in which I detected lime zest, bits of shiitake, tomato, chiles and ginger. Flanked by ribbons of deep fried carrot, pickled red onions, jicama threads and shaved cucumber, the Tower was tasty, fun and edible. This wasn't the case with a baby lettuce salad (\$8.50) of deliciously dressed greens rimmed by piles of blue cheese, candied pecans and then some unpleasant-to-eat raw beet slices, under-ripe pears

and raw baby carrots.

Everyone will like clams steamed with lemongrass and sake (\$12.50) for its haunting, buttery broth, though I was disappointed by an inedible raw garnish of knotted long bean entwined with a baby corn in a foot-long husk and a fantastic whisk make of a lemongrass stalk. I'm not going to belabor my distaste for lavish, uneatable garnish that is so much a part of the style here, but I like to nourish myself with what's on my plate, especially vegetables! A whole meal can be made of starters if they include thick-skinned shiitake mushroom dumplings in a rich, dusky sauce (\$8.50) and tender, delicious, pan-fried Chinese long

beans in a spicy sauce (\$7.95).

Main courses have been voluptuous, like an exceedingly velvety, moist, Moorish marinated chicken breast (\$15.95) with a gorgeous crispy skin on a bed of Israeli couscous (little balls of semolina); or an intense house-smoked duck breast (\$17.95) with mashed sweet potatoes. Powerful fruit chutneys came with both these dishes. A lamb stew in green coconut milk curry with orange squash (\$16.95) tasted awfully good over jasmine rice.

How do you choose a wine to go with all these strong flavors? I say take advantage of the wine by the glass program, though bottles that you rarely see on wine lists, like 1994 Stony Hill Chardonnary (\$33), are available at excellent prices — \$5 over retail on inexpensive bottles, \$10 on pricier wines. A 1982 La Lagune, gracefully served in the wine bar one night in elegant Reidel Bordeaux glasses caught my eye at \$75.

In the restaurant, a waitress didn't hesitate to bring me a second

recipes. The stupendous wine collection was started years ago by brother Wilfred Wong when he was the wine buyer for the family's Ashbury Market. But Eos wine manager Debbie Zachareas, who worked at the market, has put her stamp on the restaurant with an ambitious tasting program, impeccable wine service and in-depth training of staff. Eos really has an identity that is greater than the sum of its many parts, and different from any other restaurant in town.

The possibilities at Eos intrigue. Here is a place to drink a \$36 glass of rare Burgundy with a green papaya spring roll. Does it work? Maybe. If you are of a mind that accepts excess and invention you'll be electrified. If you're a minimalist or a traditionalist, you may blow a fuse. The people who work here are the force field that holds the concept together. They believe in what they do and their professionalism keeps the circuits open and the patrons coming to the door.

## RESTAURANTS

Here are capsule comments on recently reviewed restaurants:

**ROCCO'S ★★½** 2080 Van Ness Ave. at Pacific. Rocco's is San Francisco's newest old-fashioned seafood restaurant. Only a few months old, its walls are crowded with art work from the 1920s. As befits a traditional restaurant, it has a full bar and a good, reasonably priced wine list. Try the cracked-crab cocktail, crusted rock shrimp "popcorn," seared scallop salad, roasted salmon, or the brilliantly red Maine lobster. Reservations accepted. \$\$\$. Valet parking for \$3. Major credit cards. Open daily at 5 p.m. Wheelchair accessible. (415) 567-7600. (Jim Wood)

**LANZONE'S PLACE ★★★** 498 Broadway. Modesto Lanzzone has resurfaced at the old Vanessi's on Broadway, with his spirit and cooking sensibility intact. Start with a selection of antipasti, especially the deep fried, stuffed, fresh anchovies, and shrimp wrapped in pounded chicken breast. Lanzzone's gnocchi, delicate stuffed pastas, and fettucine carbonara are worth a pilgrimage alone. An interesting Italian wine list and personal service elevate the experience. Reservations accepted. \$\$\$. Major credit cards. Lunch Monday through Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; dinner nightly, 5 to 10 p.m., until 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Wheelchair accessible. (415) 772-9115 (Patricia Unterman)

**SLANTED DOOR ★★★** 584 Valencia St. This hip, perpetually full Vietnamese restaurant represents a breakthrough in ethnic eateries. In the dining room, you will find a Zuni Cafe-level of urbanity; from the pantry, a Chez Panisse-like dedication to

freshness. Out of the open kitchen come unusual Vietnamese dumplings, super crisp Imperial rolls, superb shrimp and watercress soup, velvety five-spice chicken and lovely house-made tropical ice creams for dessert. The menu changes every week. The wine list categorizes bottles by their qualities: floral and soft, crisp and dry, aromatic and rich. You end up eating and drinking in a new way. Reservations accepted. \$. MasterCard and Visa; Open Tuesday through Sunday for lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., dinner 5:30 to 10 p.m. Closed Monday. Wheelchair accessible. (415) 861-8032. (Patricia Unterman)

**THE MEETINGHOUSE ★★★** 1701 Octavia St. In a strikingly simple dining room in a turn-of-the-century Victorian, Joanna Karlinsky and Bryant Snell serve delicious, handsomely presented, regional American cooking with rigorous attention to detail. The meal begins with Karlinsky's warm house baked breads and biscuits. The house-pickled salmon, airy shrimp johnny-cakes, braised pork, crispy fried catfish with black-eyed peas, and strawberry shortcake have graced recent menus, which change regularly. The level of service, appointments and wine list go beyond a neighborhood persona, but the small scale and involvement of the owners make customers from next door or across The City feel right at home. Reservations accepted. \$\$\$. MasterCard, Visa, American Express. Wednesday through Sunday, 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. Wheelchair accessible. (415) 922-6733. (Patricia Unterman)

## EOS

► **LOCATION:** 901 Cole St.

► **PHONE:** 415-566-3063

► **HOURS:** Open for dinner Monday through Wednesday from 5:30 to 11 p.m., Thursday through Saturday from 5:30 to midnight, Sunday from 5 to 10 p.m.

► **CREDIT CARDS:** MasterCard, Visa, American Express.

► **WHEELCHAIR ACCESS:** Yes.

► **RESERVATIONS:** Yes.

► **PARKING:** On street and impossible; be prepared to walk several blocks.

► **AMBIENCE:** Noisy, crowded, high tech, hard-surfaced.

► **SERVICE:** Astoundingly well informed, professional, helpful, warm.

► **RECOMMENDED DISHES:** Rock shrimp cakes, Tuna Tower, shiitake dumplings, Moorish chicken, clams steamed in sake and lemongrass,

lamb in green curry, Bananamisu, pears baked in pastry.

► **UPSIDE:** Spicy, tasty, East-West cuisine plus a huge, intriguing wine list.

► **DOWNSIDE:** The food clashes with many of the wines; too many inedible garnishes.

► **PRICE:** \$\$

► **RATING:** ★★½

► **COMMENT:** Interesting and hard-to-find wines at excellent prices; a separate wine bar where you can really explore the list with food.

The Examiner's price-rating system follows:

\$ Inexpensive (less than \$15 a person for dinner, exclusive of drinks, tax and tip)

\$\$ Moderate (\$15 to \$35 a person)

\$\$\$ Expensive (more than \$35 a person)

★ Fair

★★ Good

★★★ Excellent

★★★★ Magnifique!