



Sarah Verena Kleinman introduces SF newbies to their East Bay counterparts

I knew when I moved to Oakland a couple years ago that I'd have to do some convincing to get my San Francisco friends to come hang out in the East Bay. Oakland is rad. It has its own feel, pace, and character; there's so much going there. But it also shares so much of what we all love about SF. So for all of you who've feared to venture across the Embarcadero, here's a guide to the spots in Oakland (and Berkeley) that feel just like – or dare I say, even better than – home. Hopefully this will be the push you need to cross the bay and find even more amazing places – the ones that feel like the East Bay and nowhere else – on your own.

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RESTAURANTS

Blue Plate (The Mission) / Wood Tavern (Rockridge)

People go to Blue Plate and Wood Tavern for their refined takes on classic dishes. You're not going to be eating foams and dishes that look like feats of architectural prowess here. But you will leave these homey dining rooms completely satisfied. With staples such as grilled steak, roasted chicken, pork chops, and delicious fish, there is truly something for everyone.

flour + water (The Mission) / Pizzaiolo (Temesca), Boot and Shoe Service (Grand Lake)

With beautiful wood ovens that crank out even more beautiful pizzas, San Francisco's flour + water and Oakland sister restaurants Pizzaiolo and Boot and Shoe Service have done a fantastic job incorporating the traditions of their techniques into the feel of the restaurants themselves. On top of that, each offers well-crafted menus, great wines, good tunes, and truly friendly wait-staff, meaning I can guarantee these eateries will do you right.

Walzwerk (The Mission) / Speisekammer (Alameda)

I know that the Bay Area is home to a number of great German eateries, but as a native-born Kraut, I can say that there's something about these two down-home haunts that just feels right to me. Both spots are a step or two off the beaten path, meaning that the folks who make it here come specifically for the heartwarming food and unbeatable beers. I should mention that while Speisekammer features Bavarian cuisine, and Walzwerk puts an East German twist on the food, both places serve up authentic dishes that won't disappoint.

Brenda's Soul Food (Tenderloin) / Brown Sugar Kitchen (West Oakland)

If you wake up on a Sunday morning and want nothing more than to travel to a somewhat shady neighborhood to wait in line for amazing soul food, then Brown Sugar Kitchen in West Oakland will satisfy you every bit as much as Brenda's in the Tenderloin. Brown Sugar Kitchen serves up truly fantastic soul food and even has a piano player outside on weekends to distract you from that deep hankering (or *hangering?*) for fried chicken while you wait.



Toronado (Lower Haight) / The Trappist (Old Oakland)

In the heart of Old Oakland you'll find the Trappist, a bar that not only rivals Toronado's stunning beer selection, but also has delicious sausages and a festive atmosphere. As opposed to Toronado, where you go next door for your wieners, the Trappist serves up a small menu right inside the bar. Additionally, this Belgian/specialty beer bar feels less divey and more like a step into an old European pub.

Latin American Club (The Mission) / Cafe Van Kleeef (Uptown)

One of Latin American's best qualities is that as you start to get buzzed, the bar's walls and ceiling offer an endless amount of distraction and amusement. As one of the more popular establishments in Oakland's now-thriving Uptown district, Cafe Van Kleeef more than rivals Latin American with its divey decor. These joints are heavy on locals, but both draw a sizable crowd of revelers on weekends — and with stiff signature beverages, both spots stay packed late into the night.

Club Waziema (NOPA) / The Red Sea, Kingfish (Temescal)

From living on both sides of the Bay, I've learned that there's something about the combination of cheap beer, warm injera, and your favorite type of tibs that hits the spot. Waziema in SF is a bar that cooks its Ethiopian fare in-house, while Kingfish in Oakland has its menu delivered from its neighboring restaurant, the Red Sea. The food at both establishments is delicious, but Waziema's velvet-flocked wallpaper will always have a place in my heart.

Lexington Club (The Mission) / The White Horse (North Oakland)

If you're a young lesbian in the East Bay, you probably know about the White Horse (aka the Bay Area's oldest gay bar), just like if you're a young dyke in SF, the Lexington is most definitely on your radar. Inside the similarly subdued exteriors of these unassuming storefronts, the drinks are mediocre and you basically already know what is on each bar's jukebox, but I'm happy to overlook both those things for dance parties as good as the ones these spots serve up.

Bender's (The Mission) / Heart and Dagger (Grand Lake)

More often than not, I'm not going to a bar in search of a fancy cocktail, a special setting, or even the hippest music or crowd. Nine times out of ten I'm looking for nothing more than to kick back, have a beer, and hang out with my friends. And honestly, I'm thankful that good old-fashioned bars like Bender's and Heart and Dagger are still around. Both are super chill and have great bar amenities, including pool, outdoor patios, good jukeboxes, and a don't-give-a-shit vibe that will put any bargoer at ease. I should note that Bender's does have the added perk of serving great bar food, but Heart and Dagger is tucked right between Lakeshore and Grand, so it's surrounded by plenty of options for grub.



RECREATION

San Francisco Zoo (Outer Sunset) / Oakland Zoo (Eastmont)

SF and Oakland have zoos that are just as enjoyable for grown-ups as for kids. Both have great views: SF's is located seaside, right at Sloat Boulevard, and Oakland's sits way up in the hills overlooking the city below. However, the Oakland Zoo has a ski-lift-esque sky ride that allows you to float over animal enclosures, so its zoo-cool factor is pretty dang high.

The Castro Theatre (The Castro) / Grand Lake Theater (Grand Lake)

Do you only watch movies in beautifully restored theaters, with an appetizer of organ music? If so, the Castro Theatre is not the only Bay Area spot that can meet your needs. With more four screens, the Grand Lake hosts a similar spectrum of new releases and off-the-cuff titles you rarely get to see on the big screen. And on Friday and Saturday evenings, the Wurlitzer rises for a brief performance.

First Thursdays (Downtown) / First Fridays (Uptown)

Since 1993, SF galleries have stayed open late on Thursday nights to give folks a chance to drink wine while perusing the latest in the city's gallery scene. In recent years, Oakland's galleries have picked up the tradition and now offer First Fridays, evenings when locals can discover all the awesome art that is going on in their city. It's true that Oakland's version of the night has a much younger and somewhat punky vibe, but it also feels more like a community coming together than the somewhat formal Thursdays in SF. Whatever style strikes your fancy, these nights are rad and should both be checked out.

Golden Gate Park / Lake Merritt

Okay, I can already hear the Golden Gate enthusiasts up in arms about this comparison, but hear me out for one minute. Yes, I totally understand that Lake Merritt isn't the sprawling 1,000+ acres of glory that Golden Gate Park is, but the two spots do serve as central community spaces that are used in very much the same ways. Both parks host their share of boot camps, joggers, and other fitness fans. Each spot offers activities including paddleboats, bocce ball, and botanical gardens. While there are no museums within Lake Merritt, there is a bird sanctuary. Most importantly, on a sunny day you'll see lawns filled with friends and families gathering to enjoy each other's company and their awesome cities.



Rainbow Grocery (The Mission) / Berkeley Bowl (Berkeley)

Can you imagine Rainbow but twice as large, half as expensive, and with a fantastic meat and seafood selection? If not, go visit Berkeley Bowl, or its newer location, Berkeley Bowl West. The Bowl is an East Bay staple, and can satisfy every hippie, health nut, hipster, and politically conscious bone in your body.

Mission Cheese (The Mission) / Sacred Wheel (Temescal)

I consider these joints two sides of one very delicious coin, or really, round of cheese. Temescal's Sacred Wheel is primarily a retail outlet that offers a limited menu for dining in, and Mission Cheese is primarily a restaurant that also offers cheeses to go. That difference aside, they both stock a superb selection and aren't snotty about explaining what each cheese is all about.

Molinari Delicatessen (North Beach) / Genova Delicatessen (Temescal)

I'm not going to try to convince you that Genova (located in a strip mall) offers the same quaint experience as Molinari's turn-of-the-century North Beach shop. However, in terms of the quality of what is offered at each Italian deli – from mouthwatering fresh pastas to first-rate cured meats to spectacular sandwiches – the two are neck and neck.

Alemanya Farmers' Market (Bernal Heights) / Grand Lake Farmers' Market (Grand Lake)

For anyone who grew up in snowy climates, these markets must be what you imagined heaven to look like. Open year round, both serve as the main grocery stop for innumerable families and restaurants around the Bay Area. With countless stalls that have everything from bountiful produce to meats, dairy, bakery items, and prepared food, these farmers' markets are a one-stop shop for awesome locally sourced edibles. Furthermore, both weekly gatherings have become centers of their communities, somewhere you know you can count on running into friends, or even better, making a few new ones.



Four Barrel (The Mission) / Subrosa (Temescal)

While vastly different in size, it's the vibe of these two coffee shops that makes them dead ringers for one another. With stylish-as-can-be baristas, great coffee (In fact, Subrosa serves Four Barrel), good tunes, an awesome aesthetic, and plenty of bike racks, these spots are a hipster's dream come true.

Dynamo Donuts (The Mission) / Pepples Donut Farm (North Oakland)

Vegans should have their pick of unusually flavored donuts, too, and thanks to Pepples Donut Farm, they do. Just like Dynamo, Pepples offers handcrafted donuts in foodie varieties, such as salted caramel, orange creamsicle, and kaffir lime. Additionally, this relaxed donut farm also serves vegan lunch on weekdays and brunch on the weekends. As great as Pepples and its donuts are, I have to admit it doesn't offer the charming ambience you'll find at Dynamo.

Bi-Rite Creamery (The Mission) / Ici (Elmwood)

Is the next generation of adults going to look back on their youth and fondly remember cones of balsamic strawberry and crème fraîche ice cream? If Ici and Bi-Rite have any say in the matter, they will. Both ice cream shops have lines that circle city blocks for their inventive flavors of ice cream, sorbet, and sherbets.

Tartine (The Mission) / La Farine (Rockridge, Dimond, Piedmont, Berkeley)

The fact that I know what time loaves of bread come out of the oven at these French bakeries says a great deal about how serious each establishment is about its goods. While both Tartine and La Farine carry a gorgeous array of pastries and cakes, both bakeries' crowning achievement is their bread. Tartine specializes in a rustic country loaf, and although La Farine makes a variety of breads, the baguette is truly where it's at.

The Ice Cream Bar (Cole Valley) / Fentons Creamery (Piedmont)

There is no doubt that this match-up is a classic case of SF style versus East Bay traditionalism. But when you really get down to it, these soda fountains are two takes on one great thing. I'm happy to admit that Ice Cream Bar is cranking out far more esoteric creations, but the truth is that Fentons' fountain offerings are just as tasty.



Building REsources (Bayview/Hunters Point) / Urban Ore (Berkeley)

Have you ever wondered where your friends procured old windows for the awesome dividing wall they built in their loft? Or where you might find a clawfoot tub for the succulent garden you saw in Kinfolk? These spots are the answer to every builder's, artist's, and DIYer's dreams. Both sell repurposed materials ranging from single drawer pulls to vintage stoves and furniture pieces. While the places are very similar, Urban Ore is quite a bit larger and offers more in the realm of furniture and knickknacks, while Building REsources is a tad more focused on raw materials.

Green Apple Books (Inner Richmond) / Moe's (Berkeley)

If you're looking to get lost in numerous stacks of incredible used books of all varieties, these bookstores won't disappoint. Both booksellers are strongholds in their neighborhoods that encourage customers to pull up a stool, stay for the afternoon, and leave with cheap treasures they hadn't dreamed of spotting.

SCRAP (Bayview/Hunters Point) / East Bay Depot for Creative Reuse (Temescal)

I'll admit that at first glance both SCRAP and the East Bay Depot for Creative Reuse look like the DIYers episode of Hoarders, and in a way, they are. That being said, if you don't mind digging, you can find incredible stuff. Both places sell reusable materials such as textiles, magazines, buttons, paper, craft and office supplies, plastics, and wood at bargain prices. I myself have made light fixtures, art pieces, invitations, curtains, and more from the things I've found at these two spots.

Paxton Gate (The Mission) / The Bone Room (North Berkeley)

Is your passion for your ever-expanding rare bone and fossil collection stopping you from moving to the East Bay? I totally understand your thinking; I mean, where besides Paxton Gate could you purchase porcupine quills to enclose with your correspondence? The good news is that the Bone Room in North Berkeley will fill most of your anatomical- and scientific-decorating needs (Sadly, it doesn't sell plants like Paxton Gate does).

Freemans Sporting Club (The Mission) / Temescal Alley Barber Shop (Temescal)

There's no doubt that the dapper hairdo (short in the back, greased and slicked back in the front) has taken the Bay Area by storm, and these barber shops serve up the most classical renditions of the cut. The establishments both go for the old-timey look, but the Temescal Alley Barber Shop is smaller and offers a far more intimate experience. Freemans, on the other hand, offers a four-star setting with a price tag to match.

Box Dog Bikes (The Mission) / Manifesto Bicycles (Temescal)

The reason I like both Manifesto and Box Dog is that while these shops carry the very best in bike gear, they don't make you feel like you're passing a test when you're answering questions about your bike. Whether you ride for fun, competition, transportation, or adventure, these shops will hook you up.

CREDITS

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