

metrosantacruz.com

News, music, movies, events & restaurants in Santa Cruz, California
from Metro Santa Cruz weekly

- ▣ [home](#)
- ▣ [music & nightlife](#)
- ▣ [movies](#)
- ▣ [the arts](#)
- ▣ **restaurants**
 - SANTA CRUZ
 - Find a restaurant
 - Aptos
 - Capitola
 - Santa Cruz
 - more restaurants
 - SILICON VALLEY
 - SONOMA / NAPA / MARIN
- ▣ [classifieds](#)
- ▣ [columns](#)
- ▣ [news & features](#)
- ▣ [the papers](#)
- ▣ [blogs](#)
- ▣ [coupons](#)
- ▣ [advertise](#)
- ▣ [about us](#)
- ▣ [contact](#)

We can help you with your green home improvement project

LOOK FOR OUR GREENER CHOICE SYMBOL ON HUNDREDS OF ITEMS IN OUR STORES




Every step counts-- we're trying to do our part

Santa Rosa • Sonoma • Ukiah

restaurants North Bay

OCTOBER 25-31, 2006

[home](#) | [north bay bohemian index](#) | [sonoma_napa_marin_county_restaurants](#) | [column](#)

Zut, Abhors!

The Michelin Guide's Bay Area picks miss the mark

By Clark Wolf

Splitting his time between Guerneville and Manhattan, acclaimed consultant Clark Wolf graces these pages with the occasional diatribe from the periodic local.

Who cares what the French think?! Well, lots of people do, but when it comes to restaurants in the Bay Area, the recently published Michelin Guide seems like it was written for an elite coterie of reserved French businessmen--circa 1964.

When I first discovered the Guide Michelin (*geed-misch-lahn*, as I was instructed to call it), it was the '70s. My formerly waist-length raven hair was clipped to a sort of television bob eerily reminiscent of Suzanne Pleshette's. I'd been a waiter on the railroad between Oakland and Chicago--on the Silver Zephyr, no less--where some of the dining cars still sported woodburning stoves. Really.

I won't discuss my long nights in Mafia-run dance clubs, but I will admit that dinner in the Windy City was often at the Pump Room, after a languid amble through the stunning galleries of the Art Institute. I was starved for urban and world-class culture.

Back in the City by the Bay, I got hired to open a cheese and wine shop at the base of Nob Hill, from which I was plucked to help open the legendary Oakville Grocery in San Francisco.

Yes, I was the first to bring arugula to the West Coast. I swear it wasn't my idea-- I just did it. But in the quick bit between a cute little shop and the big time that led to a world of now-accepted up-market staples, I was a curious, quick study with a keen interest in useful cultural history and any chance at a really good meal. I'd had my fill of mom's tater tots and the impoverished college years of clutching boxes of Kraft Dinner.

I got myself to Europe a few times, occasionally invited by trade boards that helped cushion and cosset. I was long past the sleeping-bag-and-hitchhiking portion of our show and started on my list of must-try temples of excess: Caviar Kaspia (before the Caspian was endangered) in Paris; Alain Chapel (by the side of the road in an exurban French village, and the inspiration for the Inn at Little Washington, outside of D.C., as well as for a generation of culinary drama queens); and some solid one-star treasures that served stuff like tripe and pigeon.

I also got to eat--six times in two years, I'm embarrassed to confess--at a Parisian place called Jamin, where the chef was a guy called Joël Robuchon, who was soon after pronounced, and arguably so, the best chef in the world.

These days, Joël spoons up the rare and wondrous at a couple of stylish counters: one in Paris, one in Las Vegas (natch) and one in Manhattan, at the Four Seasons Hotel. They're called L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon. An atelier is usually a sort of design workshop or studio. I guess after all his success, it's the tinkering he really craves.

The great Alain Senderen has sent back his stars from his exquisite spot on Paris' Place de Madeleine and gone more casual, renaming his restaurant Senderen's at a hallowed location that once housed the legendary Lucas Carton. I mean, really, if these guys are turning in their tuxes and starched toques for jeans and flip-flops, who are we to hold out for tiaras?

Don't get me wrong. The French Laundry is arguably a classic, American-based, three-star Michelin restaurant. Cyrus is clearly a two-star by wise choice. They both bridge old world and new in commendable and often transporting ways.

But my long favorite, solid, heartfelt and delicious one-star category choices would clearly include Santa Rosa's ZaZu and Graton's Underwood; San Francisco's Zuni Cafe and the Slanted Door; Oakland's Oliveto; and a whole lot more. This recently published book was light on reality and devoid of saucy treasure. Unlike old France, where one star was the road to two and two was hoping for three, these restaurants and many others are delightfully fulfilling--and fulfilled--just as they are.

Advertiser Links

[San Francisco.com Real Estate](#)

Moving to the Bay Area just became easy. Let San Francisco.com show you all the homes currently for sale.

[San Jose.com Real Estate](#)

Relocating to San Jose or Silicon Valley? Let San Jose.com introduce you to some expert area real estate agents.

restaurant guide [View All](#)

- ▣ [FIND A SONOMA | MARIN | NAPA RESTAURANT](#)
- ▣ [FIND A RESTAURANT REVIEW](#)
- ▣ [SEARCH AVAILABLE RESERVATIONS & BOOK A TABLE](#)

columns [View All](#)

[First Bite](#)

Quick dining snapshots by Bohemian staffers.

[Wine Tasting Room of the Week](#)

Winery news and reviews.

[News of the Food](#)

Food-related comings and goings, openings and closings, and other essays for those who love the kitchen and what it produces.

[Real-Life Kitchen](#)

Recipes for food that you can actually make.

Ads by Google

[Duffy's Napa Valley Rehab](#)

Detox at a Premier 28 Day Program
Private rooms starting at \$13,000
www.DuffysRehab.com/

[Fish Market & Restaurant](#)

Mesquite Grilled Fish, Clam Chowder Longtime Bay Area Restaurant Family
www.PierMarket.com

[Web Design San Jose](#)

Professional Web Design Agency Serving San Jose, CA and Beyond.
Design-Works.com/Web-

[Buy The Nexus One Online](#)

New Phone By Google Available By Itself Or With A T-Mobile Plan!
www.google.com/phone

Truth is, Marin has some major dairy and organic farming going on. Sonoma has so many sorts of brilliant, down-to-earth agriculture that restaurants are almost an afterthought, or for visitors, or for an occasional celebration. Good, solid, local spots abound or are popping up from Alameda to San Jose (really!), and have always been a part of life in Berkeley.

Our show-off corridors are mostly clustered in San Francisco and the Napa Valley, but the food splendor of Northern California is most often at home, on our own table.

So, I'll keep calling them French--not freedom--fries (even though they really oughta be Belgian) and enjoy an occasional big deal meal, but I'll buy American tires for my hybrid car (let's face it: the Michelin Guide was designed to promote their rubber meeting the road) and take my cue about where and what to eat from friends, the assorted trustworthy critic and my own experience of nibble and sip.

And as far as the Michelin Guide's sense of photography, factual detail and critical viewpoint? No stars, honey. Not even a satisfactory.

[Send a letter](#) to the editor about this story.

 [SAVE THIS](#)  [EMAIL THIS](#)  [PRINT THIS](#)  [MOST POPULAR](#)  [RSS FEEDS](#)



©Copyright 2010 Metro Newspapers. All rights reserved.