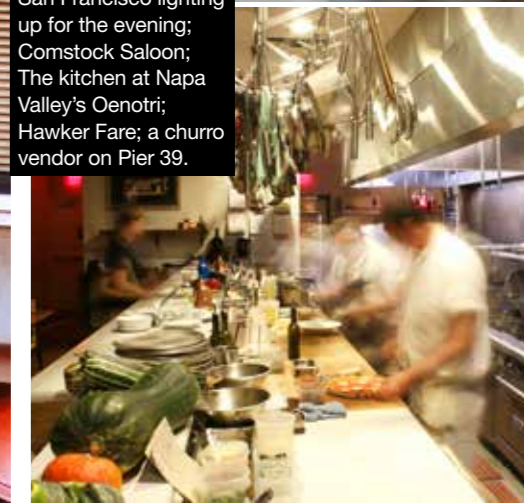


An abundance of hip watering holes heats up the cool nights of San Francisco.



Clockwise from left: San Francisco lighting up for the evening; Comstock Saloon; The kitchen at Napa Valley's Oenotri; Hawker Fare; a churro vendor on Pier 39.



In summer, a layer of thick fog plays hide and seek with the Golden Gate Bridge, often bringing a frosty chill to San Francisco that forces residents and travellers to celebrate extended daylight in innovative ways. With a bounty of produce growing throughout the Bay Area, creative mixologists are taking cues from world-class chefs and crafting their own creations. Paired with a slew of new local distilleries, breweries and tasting rooms, and the influence of nearby Napa Valley, San Francisco has never been a more vibrant place to drink. After a few days of imbibing in cocktail bars, speakeasies, restaurants and historic watering holes, you'll find that the City by the Bay knows how to play.

classic bars

You can't talk about drinking in San Francisco without first paying tribute to The Buena Vista Café (thebuenvista.com). At the end of the cable car line in Fisherman's Wharf, this historic dive bar – dark yet cheery – is home to the city's most iconic foggy-day beverage. A labour of love, Buena Vista's Irish coffee mimics the frothy sweetness of Ireland's finest cocktail, and makes the perfect pick-me-up after a morning of



city sips



Clockwise from top left: The Eat Drink SF event; beautiful, bucolic Napa Valley; a Napa street market; San Francisco is blessed with excellent seafood; the Napa riverfront.



touring the former prison isolated in the middle of the bay, Alcatraz (alcatrazcruises.com).

Over in North Beach (an Italian artist community bustling with al fresco cafes and boutiques) is San Francisco's oldest bar – The Saloon. This bar has survived gangsters, rowdy gold seekers, the 1906 earthquake and the brothel reportedly housed upstairs. Every night, devoted crowds still line the barstools to sip Jim Beam and Seven as local blues musicians bemoan lost loves.

Nearby, the Comstock Saloon (comstocksaloon.com) is a toddler by comparison, with only five years in the business. Yet the experienced bartenders' classic takes on turn-of-the-century faves like a Sazerac, a Moonraker (starring a shot of absinthe) or a Blood & Sand pay tribute to the saucy history – this area was once the city's red-light district. And like most new watering holes, Comstock also features a tantalising menu for lunch and dinner, including fried chicken livers, or a steak to pair with that Manhattan.

Not far away, tourists orbit Union Square, a grassy gathering place ringed with shops and restaurants. After a day of swiping that credit card for souvenirs at Gumps (gumps.com), there are plenty of bars ready to help ease the pain, including Tradition (tradbar.com), a two-storey temple to liquor. With eight drink menus, most of these featuring whiskey, you can wet your whistle in the snug booths (reserve in advance) or on the swivel chairs rescued from an old courthouse.

For an insider's guide to the wealth of bars in Union Square, book a Craft Cocktail Tour with Edible Excursions (edibleexcursions.net). Led by local *bon vivant* Quinn Sweeney, fork over US\$119 for enough spirits to intoxicate without leaving you stumbling home. Sample the famed Pisco punch at Cantina, a Basil Gimlet at Rye, and a smoky number at The Royale. *Banh mi* sandwiches and snacks are included in the experience.

eating and drinking

Long a tradition in San Francisco, no decent meal is complete without a glass of wine. An oenophile's destination *du jour* (and a fave for local chefs and musicians) is Nopa (nopasf.com). Cathedral ceilings, a vivacious bar and consistently delightful food makes Nopa one of the city's toughest tables to snag. Determination wins out, especially if you're willing to line up at the bar to sample some bubbly and warm olives while you wait for a seat. Flatbreads always win hearts, as do the wood-roasted king salmon topped with horseradish, and the house-made pappardelle with braised duck and pecorino. After dinner, hit up a show at the Independent (theindependentsf.com), one of the



Clockwise from left: San Francisco is well served by its famous cable cars; Oxbow Public Market; The Buena Vista Café; a farmers' market at Outside Lands festival; local spices.



city's liveliest music venues.

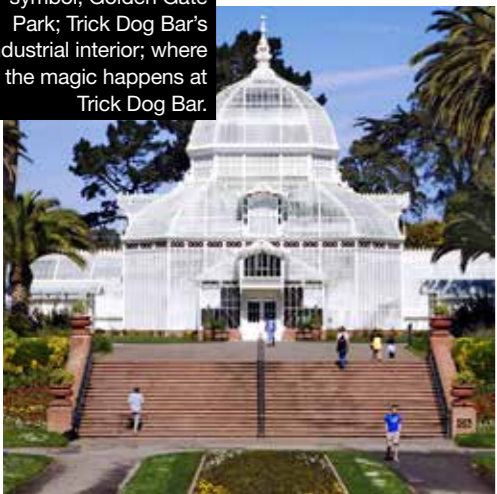
New on the scene, but beloved since its inception, Liholiho Yacht Club (liholihoyachtclub.com) salutes Hawaii without losing sight of refined California sensibilities. Chef Ravi Kapur's spare dining room allows the food and drinks to shine. Cocktails like the Super Rosa (hibiscus mezcal with dashes of lemon and soda) highlight the intricacy of the cuisine. Sample the beef tongue and kimchi steamed bun, fried Cornish game hen with tamari glaze and flowering kale, or the roasted octopus with curried raisins for a new twist on Californian cuisine.

After dark, the streets of the Mission District swell with revellers and two new eating establishments have popped up within the past year to cater to those wanting choice food as well. The spicy Thai street food at Hawker Fare (hawkerfare.com) begs to be paired with this colourful joint's fruity cocktails – all of which manage to provide the requisite amount of sweetness without being overly saccharine. Chef James Syhabout's small plates are best doled out among a crew to enable you to sample the width of his vision. Blistered green beans, poached chicken and durian ice cream are some of the flavours that tempt brave eaters.

For those craving simple, still-delicious fare, Trick Dog Bar (trickdogbar.com) has no sign out front, but the lines spilling out the door clue you in that you've found the spot. Sidle up to the bar, manned by charming mixologists of yesteryear – handlebar mustaches and bow ties abound – and order the Yin Héluóbo, possibly



Clockwise from top left: Napa Valley grapes; San Fran's most famous symbol; Golden Gate Park; Trick Dog Bar's industrial interior; where the magic happens at Trick Dog Bar.



the finest cocktail in San Francisco (a blend of carrot juice, absinthe, tequila and other hush-hush goodies). Hipsters crowd the bar area, so trek upstairs, find a seat at the modest collection of tables, and order a kale salad and a trick dog (a hamburger shaped like a hot dog).

beyond the bar

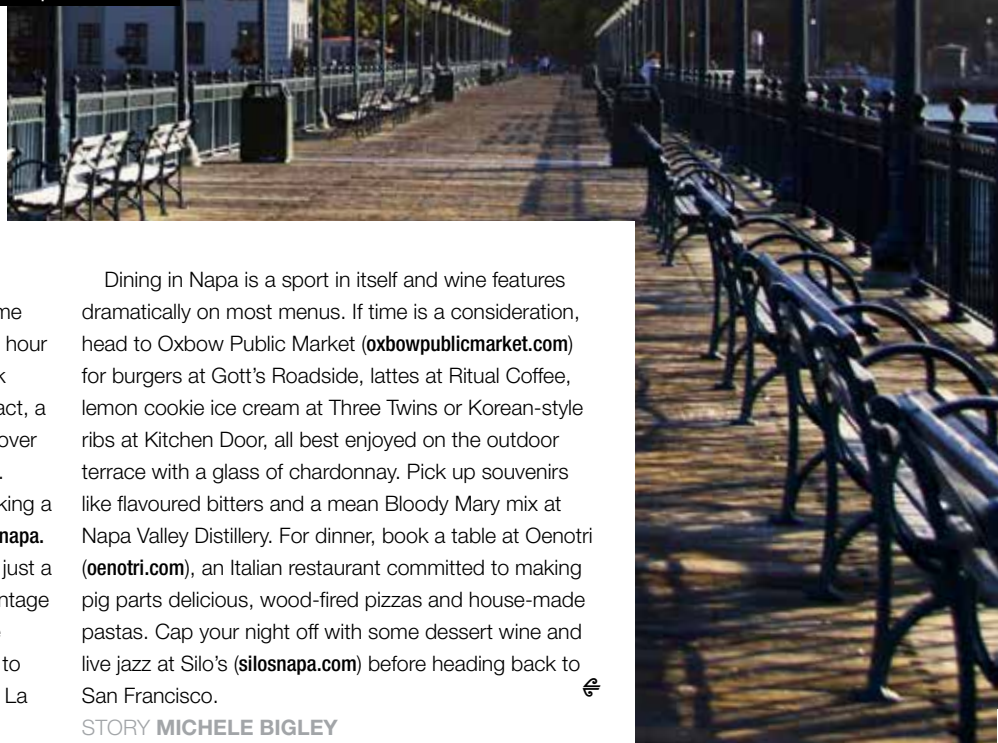
Late summer brings three major epicurean events to San Francisco. Outside Lands Music Festival (sfoutsidelands.com) descends on Golden Gate Park in August. This year D'Angelo, Mumford & Sons, Elton John and Sam Smith will serenade the masses in the city's largest green space. It's considered one of the best music gatherings for foodies: don't miss the on-site farmers' market hosted by Full Belly Farm, fried-egg sandwiches from il Cane Rosso or Wine Lands, a makeshift wine bar featuring the region's finest winemakers.

No festival celebrates the power of the food truck better than the annual San Francisco Street Food Festival (sfstreetfoodfest.com) this August 15 and 16 at Pier 70 in the Dogpatch neighbourhood. This year the massive feast (more than 50 trucks gather to serve eats and drinks) joins forces with Noise Pop music, so you can boogie while enjoying cheesesteak and local brews.

Eat Drink SF (eatdrink-sf.com) is SF's largest epicurean fiesta, August 20-23. Featuring cooking classes from top chefs, grand tastings, wine tutorials and a raucous brunch party, you're sure to find the city's finest taste makers, mixers and eaters all under one roof.



Clockwise from top left: The Whitehouse Inn in Napa; San Francisco's skyline; the alluring lobby at the Westin Verasa Napa.



straight to the sauce

When the fog clouds the senses and you need some sun to accompany that sauvignon blanc, motor an hour north to Napa. A year after a 6.0 earthquake shook residents awake, the city has not lost its mojo. In fact, a dizzying number of spots to sip, swirl and salivate over choice eats are popping up throughout downtown.

While a day trip is a cinch, you won't regret booking a couple of nights at the Westin Verasa Napa (westinnapa.com), a calming resort along a tree-lined riverbank, just a short walk from the heart of downtown. Take advantage of the warm summer sun at the saltwater pool, the complimentary evening tastings, or retreat indoors to savour the pan-fried frog legs or Alaskan halibut at La Toque restaurant (latoque.com). If you prefer more intimate quarters, book a couple of nights at the sublime White House Inn (whitehouseinnnapa.com). Three blocks from downtown, the quiet finesse of the sleek décor, jetted spa tubs, and the decadent breakfast makes this a prime choice for romance seekers.

Scoop up a Downtown Napa Wine Tasting Card for US\$30 (donapa.com), which grants you 10-cent tastings at 12 tasting rooms, all within walking distance of each other. Sample those big red cabernets at Vermeil Wines, Bounty Hunter Wine Bar (they also serve Napa's best BBQ) and Uncorked (in the Oxbow food hall) without having to secure a designated driver. If you prefer to meander through the bucolic landscape, drive high into the hills to sample CADE Winery's (cadewinery.com) sustainable vinos and you'll be rewarded with one of the best views in the valley.

Dining in Napa is a sport in itself and wine features dramatically on most menus. If time is a consideration, head to Oxbow Public Market (oxbowpublicmarket.com) for burgers at Gott's Roadside, lattes at Ritual Coffee, lemon cookie ice cream at Three Twins or Korean-style ribs at Kitchen Door, all best enjoyed on the outdoor terrace with a glass of chardonnay. Pick up souvenirs like flavoured bitters and a mean Bloody Mary mix at Napa Valley Distillery. For dinner, book a table at Oenotri (oenotri.com), an Italian restaurant committed to making pig parts delicious, wood-fired pizzas and house-made pastas. Cap your night off with some dessert wine and live jazz at Silo's (silosnapa.com) before heading back to San Francisco.

STORY MICHELE BIGLEY

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