

BayArea's best new al fresco restaurants

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Late summer brings the Bay Area some of its best weather for dining outdoors, and restaurants, such as Livermore's new Pura Vida, are happy to oblige with inviting decks and patios. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group) (Doug Duran)

The calendar may say summer is waning, but the thermometer disagrees. The Bay Area enjoys some of its most spectacular weather in September, when the day's heat turns to balmy evening and we yearn to linger and dine outdoors.

Fortunately, the Bay Area's restaurant world understand that desire. Many of the new bistros that have opened over the last year have added al fresco-perfect decks, terraces and patios to their dining spaces. Here are nine of the most irresistible new spots to brunch, lunch or dine al fresco.

1 BLACK SHEEP BRASSERIE

Late summer brings the Bay Area some of its best weather for dining outdoors, and restaurants, such as Lafayette's new Sideboard, are happy to oblige with inviting decks and patios. (Doug Duran/Bay Area News Group) (Doug Duran)



When the Black Sheep said "bonjour" to San Jose's Willow Glen late last year, it brought its classic French bistro fare and chic decor, with a color palette reminiscent of Toulouse-Lautrec, to the neighborhood. Then they upped the French factor even more by adding outdoor dining for the warmer months.

The patio: The coveted sidewalk tables along bustling Lincoln Avenue allow diners to watch the Willow Glen world pass by as they sip and savor. Heaters are available for when the nights get chilly. For those who don't score a prime patio position, a wall of roller doors are usually open to let the outside in, giving the entire front half of the dining room a decidedly al fresco feel.

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The dish: While Black Sheep has a number of summery salads, it doesn't get much more French than mussels (\$16) in a delicate saffron cream sauce, topped with crisp shoestring fries and a drizzle of aioli. Pair it with a chilled rosé or a cocktail from the menu's "bright and refreshing" section, like the classic French 75 (\$11), a gin and sparkling wine duo, and you'd swear you could see the Seine from San Jose.

The details: Reservations accepted. Open Tuesday-Sunday for dinner; Sunday brunch. 1202 Lincoln Ave., San Jose; www.bsbwillowglen.com

-- Jennifer Graue, Correspondent

2 ROOFTOP RESTAURANT & BAR

It's right there in the name: This small- and large-plate eatery in the center of downtown Walnut Creek sits atop a building shared with two other restaurants, offering great views of the surrounding area.

The patio: Depending on the weather, almost the entire place is patio; a central bar is covered by a permanent roof, but most of the dining area sits under a retractable roof that's open in good weather. A separate section of smaller tables has a full roof and open-air sides. (They're open rain or shine, with heaters ready to keep things toasty on a cold day.)

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The dish: Chef-partner Justine Kelly keeps the menu fresh with seasonal selections, but on a warm day, you could make a fantastic two-person lunch out of the Grilled Little Gem salad (\$10), with roasted cherry tomatoes and a tangy lemon-basil dressing, and the Tuna Tartare (\$16), with tart tamari and ginger giving a bite to the big chunks of tuna and smaller bits of Japanese cucumber.

The details: Reservations advised. Open for lunch and dinner daily. 1500 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Suite 300, Walnut Creek; <http://rooftopwc.com>.



-- Daniel M. Jimenez, Staff

3 PURA VIDA COCINA LATINA & SANGRIA BAR

Sangria may be the ultimate summer sip, especially when dining outdoors. So say hello to the new Pura Vida Cucina Latina, which offers an entire sangria bar, complete with flights. This new addition to Livermore's dining scene hails from Sanctuary Ultra Lounge's Gianni Schell, whose pan-Latin menu was inspired by his family's Colombian roots.

The patio: Schell has created a little oasis on the cozy back deck, complete with winery bottle light fixtures and metal lizards scaling the back wall. In addition to umbrella-covered tables, there are three fire pits at the ready to chase away the evening chill. If you're lucky, you may spot Schell presiding over a big pan of his paella.

The dish: The Pura Vida sangria menu includes eight white and red versions, which you can sample with a flight (\$12 for three). Dining with a group? Go for a pitcher instead (\$35, serves five). Pair the libations with chunky Ahi Tartare in Mango Salsa (\$13.95) served with crunchy, salty plantain chips. Paella is always a crowd pleaser, and Schell's Colombian Paella (\$14.95), with chicken, chorizo and shrimp-studded saffron rice, is savory, spicy and satisfying.

The details: Reservations accepted. Open for dinner Wednesday-Sunday. 2241 First St., Livermore; www.puravidalivermore.com

-- Mary Orlin, Staff

4 SIDEBOARD

Like its Danville sister, Lafayette's new Sideboard offers an eclectic, laidback and delicious spot to nosh and linger -- but Erin and Ford Andrews' new spot offers not only a deck, but a picnic option. Order at the counter, grab a grassy spot in the small wisteria-draped park just across the way, and a server will deliver your picnic straight to your blanket. (Or theirs. They keep a stack of colorful picnic-ready blankets on hand for happy picnickers.)

The deck: Sideboard's airy, wood-accented interior -- complete with antlered animal heads -- may beckon when temperatures drop. But when the weather's balmy, it's all about the restaurant's popular deck, where cheery turquoise market umbrellas provide shade for diners.

The dish: We love pretty much everything here, but we have a soft spot for the BLTA, a sandwich generously filled with ripe avocado, heirloom tomatoes and applewood-smoked bacon. (Especially when washed down with a local craft brew or a glass of Hogwash rosé.) And nothing says picnic like a bucket of crispy, organic fried chicken.

The details: No reservations. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. 3535 Plaza Way (the tiny line at the corner of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Moraga Road); www.itsonthesideboard.com.

-- Jackie Burrell, Staff

5 ROOTS + RYE

After spending a sultry summer day seeking out the best in fall fashion at San Jose's tony Santana Row, you'll find this whiskey-focused bar and restaurant is a hotspot for refreshment. Sleek and trendy, much like its clientele, Roots + Rye has an impressive list of craft cocktails, with a menu of sophisticated small and large plates to match. The patio is ideal for meeting up with friends. Since it's not traditional table seating, it's especially easy for those who get caught up in a shopping frenzy to join their party a little late.

The patio: Just off the lounge, the outdoor space, partially protected by a wall of two by fours, was meant for mingling. Wooden benches and green leather ottomans surround three rectangular gas fire pits that have ledges for balancing small plates of food and drinks.

The dish: The loungy seating means that easily shareable dishes are the way to go, like the summery Margherita flatbread (\$16) topped with burrata, tomato and basil. Whiskey is the name of the game here, and the Blackberry Julep (\$13) made with fruit-infused bourbon is a potion made with produce at its peak season.

The details: Reservations accepted. Open daily for lunch and dinner; weekend brunch. 3055 Olin Ave., Santana

Row, San Jose; www.rootsandrye.com

-- Jennifer Graue, Correspondent

6 BEREVINO CUCINA & WINE BAR

When you're craving pasta and other Italian fare, head for Dublin's newest eatery from restaurateurs Omar Etemadi and Sadaf Shaghasi, who also own Pleasanton's Oasis Wine Lounge and Dublin's Coco Cabana. The couple took over the former Tomatina's space and not only renovated the dining room, they expanded the outdoor dining area, too.

The patio: Festive black-and-white-striped umbrellas keep diners cool as they enjoy al fresco sips and bites.

The dish: Fruity red sangria (\$7) hits the spot on a warm summer night. We couldn't get enough of the light, crisp fritto misto (\$13), with its batter-kissed shrimp, calamari, and green beans topped by thin, butternut squash moons, zesty fried lemon slices and crisp, flash-fried sage leaves. Follow it up with the delectable citrusy chicken piccata (\$18), with chicken breasts, sauteed lemons and crunchy broccolini bathed in a silky lemon-butter wine sauce.

The details: Reservations accepted. Open for lunch and dinner daily. 4590 Dublin Blvd., Dublin; www.berevinocucina.com

-- Mary Orlin, Staff

7 DRAKE'S DEALERSHIP

One of the newest entries in the rapidly growing East Bay beer scene, Drake's is already a go-to, not only for a rotating line of California's best beers, but also for a standout kitchen offering snacks, sandwiches, pizza and even fancier fare (duck confit, anyone?).

The patio: High walls suggesting an exclusive compound give way to this expansive gravel beer garden, with an open roof, plenty of smaller tables, bench seating for groups and Adirondack love seats around fire pits. A small stage frequently hosts live music or DJs.

The dish: About that duck confit (\$23): Get it. Tender and succulent, it's served with kimchi spaetzle and pistachios. If you're looking for something a little less fancy, Frito pie (\$7) with bacon fondue or poutine (\$13) with "double duck gravy" will serve as a solid side to your suds.

The details: Reservations for large groups only; open for lunch and dinner daily. 2325 Broadway, Oakland; <http://drinkdrakes.com/visit/dealership>.

-- Daniel M. Jimenez, Staff

8 VERGE

Tucked away inside the Toll House Hotel on the edge of downtown Los Gatos, Verge Restaurant is a bit of a hidden gem. It's not something people will just stumble upon, making this comfortable, recently refurbished modern space decidedly mellower than other restaurants in the heart of downtown. There's a large horseshoe shaped bar, marble topped tables with midcentury modern chairs and comfy cushion-lined banquettes. A seat on the balcony is a particularly relaxed spot for tucking into chef Albert Nguyen-Phuoc's somewhat eclectic menu, whether for a sun-drenched weekend brunch or a quiet dinner under the stars.

The patio: The small balcony holds only four tables, so even when it's full, it feels pretty private. The tables look out over the hotel's light bedecked courtyard with shimmering mosaic fountains on either end -- and a weekly dog-friendly happy hour.

The dish: The menu here is heavy on comfort foods, so while the duck confit poutine (\$19) may not scream summer, it's hands down one of the best dishes on offer. Lighten things up with one of several local craft beers on tap or a refreshing basil cucumber gin fizz (\$12).

The details: Reservations accepted. Open daily for dinner; weekend brunch. 140 S. Santa Cruz Ave., Los Gatos; www.vergerestaurant.com

-- Jennifer Graue, Correspondent

9 BEAVER CREEK SMOKEHOUSE

Owner Rob Zavatero, who competed in local barbecue shows for years, finally set up a shop to show off his skills, and they are impressive skills indeed. The only downside of sitting down to a plate of his fantastic food on Beaver Creek's patio is that you'll be ready for an afternoon nap when you're done -- and Rob hasn't set up any cots or hammocks for that (yet).

The patio: A simple patio setup with small and large tables, plenty of umbrellas for shade, and enough plants to give it a quasi-urban garden feel. The most dominant feature is the enormous pile of wood that powers the smoker; once you get your first bite of one of the many smoked meats offered, you'll see why it's your best friend.

The dish: You can't go wrong picking, whether you choose the chicken, pulled pork or brisket, but the spare ribs (\$15 half rack/\$28 full) are the stars; tender and rich, holding their shape on the bone, but sliding off with the tiniest effort. If you're there on Friday, get the smoked prime rib, which is offered only that day. You'll thank me later.

The details: Reservations not accepted. Open for lunch and dinner Wednesday-Sunday; 601 Main Street, Martinez; <http://www.beavercreek-smokehouse.com>

-- Daniel M. Jimenez, Staff
