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This year, more than 40,000 women will die from breast cancer.



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Cooking

Alameda Magazine » September-October 2008 » The Best Of Alameda 2008

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 YAHOO! COMMENTS

The Best of Alameda 2008 And the Winners are...

by Judith M. Gallman, Daniel Jewett and Derk Richardson

Photography by: Lori Eanes and Craig Merrill

Alameda may be a tiny island city, but it is chock full of great restaurants, nightlife, goods and services that are worthy of high praise. That's exactly what this Best of Alameda 2008 issue sets out to celebrate. The annual readers' poll spotlights the best in Alameda food, drink and amenities in 49 categories. At the same time, the editors get to weigh in with a few of our favorites. Read on to see what's the latest and greatest in this year's survey.

Food and Restaurants

Italian Restaurant C'era Una Volta

It's not just the great food. Alamedans seem to love the affable owners, wine events and bright atmosphere that make this Italian restaurant really shine. Chef Rudy Duran serves up traditional Italian tastes as well as delicious panini, salads and desserts, all accented by more than 50 Italian wine varieties. To experience all the restaurant has to offer, stop by one of its winemaker dinners, Essence of Italy events or first Tuesday wine club meetings.

1332 Park St., (510) 769-4828, www.ceraunavolta.us. —DJ

New Restaurant

(Open Less Than a Year)

Havana

The mojitos—more than a dozen variations, by the glass and by the pitcher—might have been enough to capture Islanders' imaginations and transport them to old Cuba on a daily basis. But owner Zachary Scott



Photo: Lori Eanes and Craig Merrill



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This seasonal recipe came about when I was searching for a way to serve two of my favorite foods, pumpkin and chocolate, together. My wife loves cheesecake, and she suggested combining both our loves:

Wine

Growing grapes is a lot like playing blackjack with a stacked deck that favors the house. The house in this case is also known as Mother Nature.

Taste Of The Town

Rare is the restaurant in today's epicurean climate that doesn't play the game and mobilize a phalanx of restaurant publicists, menu consultants and interior design gurus before a calculated grand opening;

[View Restaurant Listings »](#)

COMMUNITY CALENDAR [more▶](#)

2008.04.23 Interactive Kinetic Art and the Pinball Machine

Before the Nintendo Wii and PlayStation 3, there was the pinball machine. Instructed by multimedia artist Michael Schiess, this class introduces...

2008.11.11 Bedtime Story at the Bay Farm Library

If your child needs a bedtime story, no matter what his or her age.

2008.11.11 Bedtime Story at the Main Library

If your child needs a bedtime story, no matter what his or her age, visit the Main library. 7 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays. Free

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Real Estate

The latest hot home properties in the Alameda Area!

Retail

Your Shopping Guide to the Alameda Area!

and crew, already successful with the concept in Walnut Creek, throw in an ultra-hip ambience and pack the menu with sturdy, slightly upscale spins on tapas, classic Cuban sandwiches and such main dishes as chicken adobo, paella and plantain-crust ed halibut.

1518 Park St., (510) 521-0130, www.havanarestaurant.net. —DR

Brunch

The Hob Nob

Drinks, tapas and board games may be the big draw in the evening hours, but this relative new kid on the block scored big with Alamedans scouring Park Street for Sunday brunch. The menu includes everything from custom omelets and scrambles to eggs Benedict, ginger pancakes and buttermilk biscuits and sausage gravy, plus such signature small plates as truffle fries, grilled cheese sandwiches and mini burgers. The build-your-own-Bloody-Mary bar probably didn't chase away any votes.

1313 Park St., (510) 769-1011, www.thehobnobalameda.com. —DR

Chinese Restaurant

Ching Hua on Park

The 2007 winner in the Best Asian and Best New Restaurant categories, this spin-off of Berkeley's Shen Hua takes its name from proprietor Edward Chu's mother, Jane Ching Hua Chu, and parlays the indigenous cuisine of her northern Chinese heritage into a higher-concept but still homey Beijing- and Sichuan-inspired menu. Alamedans adore Ching Hua's use of fresh ingredients, signature lettuce cups and house-made noodles and its stylish modern interior capped by a full bar.

1650 Park St., (510) 522-8777, www.chinghuaonpark.com. —DR

Thai Restaurant

Toomie's Thai Cuisine



Located right on Park Street close to movies at the new theater, shopping and places to grab an after-dinner drink, Toomie's is an Alameda favorite, voted the No. 1 place for Thai food on the Island in Alameda Magazine's new category. Famous for its numerous curries, the stir-fries, papaya salad, sticky rice and tom yum soup are also worth investigating. Readers agree that a great night out (or in—Toomie's takes phone orders as well) starts with Thai from Toomie's.

1433 Park St., (510) 865-8008. —DJ

Vietnamese Restaurant

Dragon Rouge

Local brothers Jimmy and Scott Luu along with their cousin, Dan Nguyen, plate up inspired and eclectic Vietnamese dishes in their tony, cardinal red-walled space, using authentic recipes from their mothers' homeland to create armies of new fans. Tracing family roots to Oakland's famed Le Cheval, these hip restaurateurs use nuoc-nam, hoisin, lemongrass, cilantro and mint plus tangy sauces to recreate many of the dishes they grew up eating. Sure to please are their versions of classic rice paper rolls, crêpes, phở, beef carpaccio, bouncing beef and clay pot dishes.

2304 Encinal Ave., (510) 521-1800, www.dragonrougerestaurant.com. —JG

Overall Restaurant **Pappo** 2320 Central Ave., (510) 337-9100,

www.papporestaurant.com

Bakery **Feel Good Bakery** 1650 Park St., (510) 864-2733,

www.feelgoodbakery.com

Burrito **Taqueria Ramiro & Sons** 2321 Alameda Ave., (510) 523-5071

Breakfast **Jim's Coffee Shop** 2333 Lincoln Ave., (510) 523-5368,

www.jimscoffeeshop.com

Chef **Saboor Zafari**, Angela's Restaurant, 807 Marina Village Parkway, (510)

522-5822, www.angelasrestaurant.com

Coffee Shop **Peet's Coffee & Tea** 1365 Park St., (510) 473-0136,

www.peets.com

Deli Sandwich **Sandwich Board** 2412 Webb Ave., (510) 521-3366

Dessert **Tucker's Ice Cream** 1349 Park St., (510) 522-4960,

www.tuckersicecream.com

Hamburger **Nation's** 1432 Webster St., (510) 521-8888,

www.nationsrestaurants.com

Mexican Food **La Piñata No. 3** 1440 Park St., (510) 769-9110, www.lapinata.com

Pizza **Bowser's Pizza** 1330 Park St., (510) 523-7500, www.ast-pos.com/bowzers

Sushi/Japanese **Kamakura** 2549 Santa Clara Ave., (510) 521-9121,

www.kamakurarestaurant.com

Kid-Friendly Restaurant **Tomatina** 1338 Park St., (510) 521-1000,

www.tomatina.com

Drink and Nightlife

Beer Selection **Lucky 13** 1301 Park St., (510) 523-2118, lucky13alameda.com

Cocktails **Lucky 13** 1301 Park St., (510) 523-2118, lucky13alameda.com

Happy Hour **Lucky 13** 1301 Park St., (510)

523-2118, lucky13alameda.com

Live Music Venue **Rooster's Roadhouse**

1700 Clement Ave., (510) 337-9190,

groups.msn.com/roostersroadhouse

Margarita **La Piñata No. 3** 1440 Park St.,

(510) 769-9110, www.lapinata.com

Overall Bar **Lucky 13** 1301 Park St., (510)

523-2118, lucky13alameda.com

Theatrical Performance Group (TIE)

Alameda Civic Light Opera 523 South Shore Center West, (510) 864-2256,

www.aclo.com

Altarena Playhouse 1409 High St., (510) 523-1553, www.altarena.org

Wine List **Pappo** 2320 Central Ave., (510) 337.9100, www.papporestaurant.com

Wine Retailer **Farmstead Cheeses & Wine** 1650 Park St., (510) 864-9463,

farmsteadcheesesandwines.com

Wine/Spirits Maker/Producer **Rosenblum Cellars** 2900 Main St., Suite 1100,

(510) 995-4100, www.rosenblumcellars.com



Lifestyle

Yoga Studio

Alameda Yoga Station



Given their first chance to bring downward facing dog into their voting ruminations, Alamedans didn't find it a stretch to single out Alameda Yoga Station, since 1995 a cornerstone of Island hatha yoga practice in the Iyengar tradition. In addition to beginning, intermediate and advanced classes in asana that heighten body awareness and flexibility,

Yoga Station teachers offer special workshops and series in Buddhist meditation, Feldenkrais, stress reduction, prenatal yoga and more.

2414 A Central Ave., (510) 523-9642, www.alamedayogastation.com. —DR

Barbershop **Razor's Edge** 2516 Santa Clara Ave., (510) 521-9070

Dentist **Richard Tabor, DDS** 1821 Santa Clara Ave., (510) 865-2900,

www.alamedadentist.com

Event **Park Street Art & Wine Faire** www.shopparkstreet.com

Gym/Health Club **Harbor Bay Club** 200 Packet Landing Road, (510) 521-5414,

www.harborbayclub.com

Hair **Salon Spank** 1912 Clement Ave., (510) 521-9100

Massage **Sumbody & Sumtime Spa** 1350 Park St., (510) 523-2639,

www.sumbody.com

Goods

Women's Clothing/Accessories

M Zoe Couture

Haute couture comes to Alameda at this sleek, high-end, San Francisco–esque boutique where the best-dressed women come for arresting special occasion wear and stylish everyday separates. The great dresses, jeans, suits, sunglasses, shoes, suits, jewelry and more come from the likes of LinQ, Voom, Lacoste, Joe's Jeans, Nicole Miller, Via Spiga, Prada, Nora Horan and other chic designers. Tagalong spouses can get their sports fix from the big-screen TV while kids watch cartoons in the front of the store, which is owned by longtime Alamedan Rafael Perez and named for his daughter.

1424 Park St., (510) 814-6950. —JG

Kids' Clothing/Accessories

Lauren's Closet



This cute, little, filled-to-the-brim consignment shop has what Alameda parents need for growing kids—socks, clothes, shoes, accessories, toys, etc.—at affordable prices. Gap, Old Navy, Naartjie and Gymboree are usually among the brands hanging around, and the merchandise is consistently good quality.

There's often a mix of used and new clothes, so shopping here means not forking over top dollar for new stuff little ones won't be wearing for long. From babies to kids to adolescents, Lauren's Closet (with a closet-sized playroom) probably has something that will work.

1420 Park St., (510) 865-2219. —JG

Antique Store **Pauline's Antiques** 1427 Park St., (510) 523-9941,

www.paulinesantiques.com

Auto Shop **Alameda Auto Lab** 631 Buena Vista Ave., (510) 522-0510,

www.alamedaautolab.com

Bike Shop **Alameda Bicycle** 1522 Park St., (510) 522-0070,

www.alamedabicycle.com

Eyeglasses **Alameda Eyes Optometry** 1432 Park St., (510) 769-2020,

www.eyedocs.com

Florist **Mints** 1336 A Park St., (510) 749-0683, www.mintsflower.com

Gift Shop **Three Wishes** 1428 Park St., (510) 523-4438

Grocery Store **Trader Joe's** 2217 South Shore Center, (510) 769-5450,

www.traderjoes.com

Home and Garden Accessories Store **Pagano's** 1100 Lincoln Ave., (510)

522.1345, www.paganoshardware.com

Home Furnishings **Pillow Park Plaza** 1419 Park St., (510) 521-6227,

www.pillowpark.com

Shoe Store **Scott's Shoes** 1330 Park St., (510) 865-5565

Shopping Center/District **Park Street** www.shopparkstreet.com

Editor's choices

Best Way to Go Green

St. George Spirits

What can you do with fine brandy, star anise, mint, wormwood, lemon balm, hyssop, meadowsweet, basil, fennel, tarragon and stinging nettles? Well, if you are distiller Lance Winters, you make absinthe, of course. Yes, the little green fairy is back, and Alameda's St. George Spirits is the first American company to make and sell absinthe in almost a century. So grab your sugar cubes, spoons and cold water and give it a try—it worked for Vincent van Gogh and Ernest Hemingway.

2601 Monarch St., (510) 769-1601,

www.stgeorgespirits.com. —DJ



Best Music at the Water's Edge

Concerts at the Cove

When summer comes around, Alamedans love to grab a picnic basket and their lawn chairs or blanket and head to Crab Cove for the annual free concert series. Crowds are huge at this family-friendly event, and the best part is that the series of three summertime shows usually features local acts. Expect to hear such great local bands as House of Floyd and the Sun Kings as well as Bay Area favorites such as Herb (playing the music of Herb Alpert), the swing sounds of the New Morty show or the Steely Dan-inspired licks of Aja Vu.

1252 McKay Ave., (510) 523-5955, www.westalamedabusiness.com. —DJ

Best Snack Food That's a Meal in Itself

Bread Sticks from Feel Good Bakery



The savory alternative to cookies and scones, these crunchy, cheesy, seed-encrusted mini-loaves provide the fatty satisfaction of various cheeses (cheddar, pepper Jack, smoked gouda—they change daily) melted into the dough and baked all crispy on the outside, plus the crackle and nutrition of oats, coarse corn meal and

myriad seeds (pumpkin, poppy, sunflower, sesame, caraway) that stud the exterior. A different wow factor explodes in the mouth depending on the bite and the day of the week—for only \$2.

1650 Park St., (510) 864-2733, www.feelgoodbakery.com. —DR

Best Little Gourmet Lunch Place

Little House Cafe

In this restored century-old craftsman bungalow next to software giant Perforce, manager-chef Donna Meadows exercises her well-traveled culinary touch and crafts a menu full of enticing breakfast goodies and remarkable lunch choices. From chicken Caesar salads and the quiche of the day to sandwiches assembled with high-end ingredients (grilled steak, truffle oil, brie, Lombardi peppers, sheep's milk pecorino) on premium breads and rolls, this tiny parlor-like charmer sets lofty standards for noon-hour meals.

2300 Blanding Ave., (510) 864-4044, www.littlehousecafe.com. —DR

Best Reinvented Webster Street Bar

The Fireside Lounge

The Fireside used to be a dive bar full of ill-tempered rowdies whose alcohol-induced brawls were legendary. But thanks to owner Patrick Brown, a Renaissance guy who has mostly recently reinvented himself as a barkeep after having been a paramedic and a pastry chef, The Fireside is the west side's most stylish and clubby hangout, high ceilings and all. Brown has added a great selection of wine and international and local beers, including brew from pals at Linden Street Brewery and Trummer Pils. Bartender Cristi Hegranes, a talented mixologist, adds a touch of class with scrumptious seasonal cocktails.

1453 A Webster St., (510) 522-7400, www.thefiresidelounge.com. —JG

Best Online Town Meeting

Blogging Bayport Alameda

For the last two years, housewife, mother and relatively new Alameda resident Lauren Do has produced one of the most prolific, educational and entertaining blogs on the Island. With new posts every day and comments that lead to more comments, this is a must read for new and old Alameda residents alike, covering crucial topics such as education funding, the theater, Measure A and base redevelopment. Nothing goes better with your morning cup of coffee than a few minutes with Lauren.

www.laurendo.com. —DJ

Best After Dinner Treat

Vietnamese Coffee Float at Dragon Rouge

Stylish Dragon Rouge has invented quite a taste treat in its Vietnamese coffee float. This simple and yummy dessert is a tumbler-size frosty glass of vanilla ice cream swimming in sea of Vietnamese coffee and syrupy sweetened condensed milk. As the hot coffee slowly drips, it melts the ice cream, creating an icy coffee-flavored milkshake. Use the spoon until the lumps smooth out, then pick up the glass and down the rest. Restaurateur Jimmy Luu issues a warning about the caffeine-sugar bombs to those who partake: "It'll make you shake."

2304 Encinal Ave., (510) 521-1800, www.dragonrougerestaurant.com. —JG

Best Place to Play Connect 4 With a Bloody Mary

The Hob Nob

The gaming in this hip and popular Park Street joint is neither casino-style slots and craps nor high-tech video war-making but rather old-school board and table games that involve rolling dice, moving tokens or, in the case of the Milton Bradley classic, dropping checkers down shoots to line up four in a row. A beer or a cocktail from the Bloody Mary bar may grease the moves in Sorry! or Careers in a nonetheless family-friendly atmosphere.

1313 Park St., (510) 769-1011,
www.thehobnobalameda.com. —DR



Best Reason to Don Lederhosen

Speisekammer

True Alamedans know that the best time to grab their favorite pair of lederhosen and head to the streets is in September. That's when Alameda's favorite German restaurant, Speisekammer, throws open its doors and closes down part of Lincoln Avenue for drinking, drinking games, songs about drinking and a little more drinking—and pretty good food, too. One of the best Oktoberfest