

## DINING OUT

### Beer and Burgers Down Pat

#### 21st Amendment serves up the right combination

- Michael Bauer, Chronicle Food Editor

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If a restaurant can serve great beers and hamburgers in San Francisco, it will flourish. At first glance, that might seem like a slight at the seemingly sophisticated Bay Area palate, but when you think about it, there's something wonderful about such basic food.

The great thing about the Bay Area is we can appreciate french fries as much as pomme soufflé. Doing it right is 99 percent of the battle.

Beer and burgers are two of the saving graces of 21st Amendment, a brew pub that opened in July within the shadows of Pacific Bell Park. While the park may be dark, the brew pub is bustling, especially around the bar, where the house-made brews flow like water.

The seven selections -- including South Park Blonde, Winter Wheat, North Star Red and Oktoberfest -- are excellent. The house style perfected by Shaun O'Sullivan is more elegant and balanced than you'll find at other places. The restaurant also offers flights of vintage beers from Anchor Brewing and Sierra Nevada, as well as several Belgian selections.

The thick burgers (\$8.50), topped with either cheddar or Swiss cheese, are served on a soft bun with a thin, crunchy layer on top. The fries are big, crisp, steamy and creamy. They're an impressive duo.

The 21st Amendment -- if you're not a Constitution buff, that's the article that repealed Prohibition -- is no ordinary brew pub. The interior features the popular South of Market loft look: large-paned warehouse-style windows, polished concrete floors, smooth stained tables and crisp napkins at each of the 65 seats.

Large, bold 1920s-style portraits break up the brick walls, adding an aura of refinement. The open kitchen, where the chef calls out orders like a drill sergeant, competes with the boisterous conversations of the predominantly young crowd. While the place is noisy, the tables are far enough apart to allow patrons to

talk easily with others in their party.

On most nights the bar is so crowded it's hard to get through the door, and it's tempting to turn around if you haven't remembered to make reservations. However, the drinkers and the bar block the view to the dining room, and we were always able to get a table without a reservation.

Eddie Blyden, who has worked in New York, Switzerland and the Caribbean, has crafted a short menu of rib-sticking comfort food. To start, there's a very good arugula and baby spinach salad (\$6.50) that's tossed with toasted walnuts, shards of Parmesan cheese and juicy cubes of pear.

A soft, breadly pizza crust made from beer mash is topped in three ways: with tomato, mozzarella and basil (\$7.50); with wild mushrooms (\$10); and with pepperoni or sausage and vegetables (\$9). The flavors are fine, though I've never been wild about having to use both hands to pick up a slice. If you don't, you'll end up with most of the topping on your lap.

Pastas are surprisingly good, especially fettuccine with earthy wild mushrooms smoothed with a light and creamy lemon sauce (\$13.50). An "angry" penne (\$11), similar to puttanesca, packs a punch with a spicy tomato sauce and black olives.

Meat courses include a brined pork chop (\$16) that's about as juicy as you'll find, accompanied by braised cabbage, wedges of roasted potatoes tossed in butter, and undercooked Brussels sprouts.

I loved the grilled Niman Ranch top sirloin fillet (\$16), moistened with a red wine butter and served with a heap of deep-fried sweet potato straws. The baby half-chicken (\$12.50) is quickly seared to form a bronze crust and served with bits of ham and mashed potatoes, creating a very satisfying dish.

Alaskan halibut (\$16.50) is nicely cooked, too, accented with a citrus sauce, but the pumpkin puree underneath doesn't do much for either looks or flavor. There's also a filling vegetarian entree featuring grilled portobello mushrooms stuffed with mashed potatoes, spinach and roasted peppers (\$14).

Desserts have the same homey pedigree, but we weren't able to sample everything because on one visit our waitress brought the bill without even asking if we wanted dessert. We were then unable to get her attention.

That was the last straw in one of the worst service experiences we've had of late. It started when the waitress came over three times within 10 minutes to take our order. The place wasn't full, and never was, but she was intent on moving us along, acting more annoyed each time. She pretty much ignored us from then on, except to bring appetizers for the table, forgetting my pizza. After 10 minutes I flagged her down to let her know I was still waiting. She went to the kitchen and never returned to update us on what was going on. After another 10 minutes, someone else brought the pizza.

Fortunately, on other occasions it became clear that our first waiter was an anomaly because the rest of the staff was professional and helpful.

Even when the service is a little rough, you end up leaving with a sweet impression because of the first-rate desserts (\$6). Spicy gingerbread is paired with cider sabayon and pumpkin ice cream, warm chocolate cake with espresso ice cream. The best, however, is the individual banana coconut cream pie with a flaky crust, bits of macadamia nut brittle and a rippled blanket of whipped cream over the top.

Burgers and beer are nice, but pie has been added to my criteria for a winning combination.

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### Brew Pub's Wine List Satisfies

Beer is the drink of choice at 21st Amendment, and the brews are first-rate.

But the restaurant hasn't ignored the wine drinker.

In addition to nine by-the-glass offerings, the wine list contains 23 bottles, including four half-bottles.

Markups are reasonable, and the list is filled with easy-drinking wines: the 1998 Joseph Phelps Pastiche (\$19), the 1998 Adelsheim Pinot Blanc from Oregon (\$20), the 1999 Seghesio Zinfandel (\$23) and the 1998 Carmenet Dynamite Merlot (\$28), for example. Corkage is \$10.

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*Michael Bauer's reviews are online at [sfgate.com](http://sfgate.com). E-mail him at [mbauer@sfnchronicle.com](mailto:mbauer@sfnchronicle.com).*

#### 21ST AMENDMENT

Address: 563 Second St. (between Brannan and Bryant), San Francisco  
Phone: (415) 369-0900  
Hours: Lunch and dinner 11:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 11:30 a.m.-11 p.m. Friday-Saturday. Sunday dinner 5-10 p.m. Full bar. Reservations and credit cards accepted. Difficult street parking during the day; easier at night.

OVERALL: TWO AND A HALF STARS  
FOOD: TWO AND A HALF STARS  
SERVICE: TWO STARS  
ATMOSPHERE: TWO AND A HALF STARS  
PRICES: \$\$  
NOISE RATING: FOUR BELLS  
PLUSES: Excellent homey food and house-made beer in handsome loftlike surroundings.  
MINUSES: Service can be annoying.

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#### RATINGS KEY

FOUR STARS: Extraordinary  
THREE STARS: Excellent  
TWO STARS: Good  
ONE STAR: Fair  
(box): Poor

\$ Inexpensive: entrees under \$10  
\$\$ Moderate: \$11-\$17  
\$\$\$ Expensive: \$18-\$24  
\$\$\$\$ Very Expensive: more than \$25

When entrees fall between these categories, the prices of appetizers help determine the dollar ratings.

ONE BELL: Pleasantly quiet (under 65 decibels)  
TWO BELLS: Can talk easily (65-70)  
THREE BELLS: Talking normally gets difficult (70-75)  
FOUR BELLS: Can only talk in raised voices (75-80)  
BOMB: Too noisy for normal conversation (80+)

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All meals are paid for by the Chronicle.  
Star ratings are based on a minimum of three visits.  
Ratings are updated continually based on at least one revisit.

