

HOT NEW COOKBOOK

"The 150 Best American Recipes: Indispensable Dishes from Legendary Chefs and Undiscovered Cooks"

by Fran McCullough and Molly Stevens (Houghton Mifflin)

The authors of this übercollection edited the annual Best American Recipes series for years. I know both of them personally and can attest that they tested and debated every single recipe in the book. Most are easy and all of them are mouthwatering. — *Patricia Unterman*

Vietnamese noodles with wine

Jimmy Kwok, the Hanoi-born chef/owner of Bodega Bistro, has put a luscious new noodle soup on his daily lunch menu: bun rieu, a tomato-tinged crab soup.

Its amazing depth of flavor comes from a paste of pounded crab and shrimp that melts into the broth. Fresh crab meat and crab fat enrich the noodles and the aroma of fresh herbs — purple shiso, mint and rau ram — wafts into your nose with every slurp. You garnish from a side plate of shredded lettuce, lime and green chile. Bright, light and voluptuous, the crab noodle soup only costs \$6.30.

But don't neglect Bodega's extraordinary pho ga, chicken noodle soup or pho bo, beef noodle soup, both \$6.30. The secret is the pure, clean, rich broths, the essential building block of any bowl of noodles. You won't find better.

A new, reasonably priced wine list of bottles hand-picked by Kwok to go with his food adds to the pleasure of eating here. — *Patricia Unterman*

» **Bodega Bistro**, 607 Larkin, San Francisco, (415) 921-1218



Chef Eddie Blyden, above, has created a menu of dishes that harmonize perfectly with the selection of beers at Magnolia Pub and Brewery on Haight Street, including the Niman Ranch pork chop, right, which is brined, marinated, grilled to perfection and served with sautéed fresh vegetables on a bed of mashed potatoes.

— Jason Steinberg/Special to The Examiner

PATRICIA UNTERMAN » RESTAURANT REVIEW

Magnificence at Magnolia

Six small glasses of beer, a rainbow of amber, gold, brown, black and ruby, stretched before me, each glass securely placed in a wooden rack (\$7.50). One tasted like coffee; another like cider.

Pearly Baker's Best Bitter was surprisingly refreshing and not bitter at all. Saison de Lily, a Belgian-style brew, had a sweet, almost apple-like finish. Sara's Ruby Mild, despite its scary dark crimson hue, tasted like cherries and was light and food-friendly.

As someone who regards beer as a big waste of stomach space, I couldn't help noticing how each worked with different dishes. Who knew that beer could act like wine?

Even wine drinkers like me have reason to visit Magnolia Pub and Brewery, a Haight Street mainstay now in its 10th year. New chef Eddie Blyden, a Jamaican whose cooking first seduced me at another brewery, The 21st Amendment, has tweaked the old favorites and added his own dishes. He takes advantage of our fresh local pantry and throws in spice with a skillful hand. His cooking has an affinity with beer.

On Tuesdays, you might find oyster gumbo (\$12), an integrated stew with lots of heat, served over rice — comfort food at its most exciting. I discovered that Ashbury Alt, a Dusseldorf-style ale on my rack (all chosen, by the way, by our waitress) went with it brilliantly.

On the regular menu, Blyden's delicious spice-rubbed Niman pork chop (\$16) is moist and gently smoldering. Perfect grilling adds an extra level of flavor. The chop perches on creamy mashed potatoes wreathed with tons of crisply sautéed fresh vegetables. This dish is my favorite.

But Blyden's Roast Jerk Half Chicken (\$13) must be the neigh-

borhood's favorite. What value! I've rarely tasted such a moist, velvety breast, usually my least favorite part of the bird. Every morsel of this chicken is delectable, including resonant natural juice that picks up heat from the jerk spices. I love the sweet, creamy fried plantains that come with it.

To start, generous salads are almost meals by themselves, such as an excellent, classically dressed Caesar (\$8) and a chunky beet salad (\$10) with big tender cubes of gold beets, green beans, goat cheese, walnuts and a little bit of lettuce.

Since a 20-ounce pint (\$4.50) of any of Magnolia's meaty house-brewed beers almost constitutes a meal, a vegetarian white bean and vegetable stew in a bright pesto broth (\$13) can be an apt pairing.

The pub is located in an historic corner building that survived the 1906 earthquake. For years, it housed Schumate's Pharmacy and in the late '60s became the famous Magnolia Thunderpussy. The interior still suggests a pharmacy, especially the weathered wooden backbar with many drawers. Well-worn, dark wooden booths and tables and chairs look at home in a room with original tiled floors, colorful stained glass transoms and expansive plate glass windows that allow diners to gaze out onto both Haight and Masonic.

Though Magnolia surprised me with the variety of its brews, I am really attracted to this hearty, straightforward food with lots of flavor. The kitchen doesn't muck up good ingredients. What more could anyone ask from a neighborhood icon?

Unterman on Food is a printed, bi-monthly newsletter. Inquiries at pattiu@concentric.net.

MAGNOLIA PUB AND BREWERY

Location: 1938 Haight St. (at Masonic), San Francisco

Contact: Call (415) 864-7468 or visit www.magnoliapub.com

Hours: Lunch Monday through Friday noon to 5 p.m., brunch and lunch Saturday and Sunday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., dinner nightly 5 to 10:30 p.m.

Price range: Small plates and salads \$4-\$12, main courses and sandwiches \$9-\$18

Recommended dishes: Spiced pork chop; jerk chicken; Caesar salad; gumbo, white bean and summer vegetable pistou

Credit cards: All major • **Reservations:** No