

THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

Delancey Street fills both body and soul

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Visions of simmering garlic, luscious pastas and sinful desserts danced through staffers' heads this week as they wrote about their favorite restaurants in San Francisco's North Beach

I have similar visions when I think about my favorite San Francisco restaurant. But my favorite place isn't in North Beach. It's in San Francisco's South Beach.

The Delancey Street Restaurant, at 600 Embarcadero, draws San Francisco's political elite and glitterati. Regulars include San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, Pres. of the State Senate John Burton, U.S. Rep. Nancy Pelosi, U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, and from across the bay, Oakland Mayor and ex-Gov. Jerry Brown Actress Sharon Stone and her husband, Phil Bronstein, executive editor of the *San Francisco Examiner*, are frequent diners—as are The Gap President and CEO Millard "Mickey" Drexler and W. Howard Lester Chairman and CEO of Williams-Sonoma.

The other regulars are the ex-convicts and former junkies who run the place. Delancey Street Restaurant, which opened in 1991, is a project of the 28-year-old Delancey Street Foundation that resurrects hard-core criminals and addicts by teaching them work habits, values and skills.

Delancey Street isn't a conventional residential drug treatment program. It doesn't get a dime of government funding. Residents don't pay to come here; they apply. If administrators, all former addicts themselves, are convinced applicants are serious about turning their lives around, they're accepted. The minimum commitment is two years; the average stay is four years.

Delancey Street is self-supporting, so hard work is our cornerstone; 18-hour days are routine. Residents built the Mediterranean-style residential complex that has become their Embarcadero-front home. They operate a moving company, a print shop, an auto-repair business, a limousine service, a catering company—and the wonderful Delancey Street Restaurant.

Chefs such as Wolfgang Puck and Jerimiah Tower, Alejandro Espinosa from Alejandro's in the Mission District and Cindy Pawlycn from Fog City Diner trained the residents who labor at the rotisseries and grills, who whip up the sauces for pastas and occasionally provide cherished family recipes for special dishes. (Try "Sonny's Mothers Sweet Potato Pie.") The restaurant's menu is all-American—reflecting the diversity of the nation and Delancey Street residents. Appetizers include crispy potato cakes served with smoked salmon and chive schmear, but the house favorite is Alejandrinos—jalapenos, cilantro and jack cheese wrapped in a wonton and served with a spicy dressing. When I'm famished, I order a pasta entree of linguine with smoked chicken and shiitake

mushrooms in a creamy white garlic sauce or a heaping bowl of Creole Gumbo with crab, prawns, chicken and sausage served over rice. If I'm being good, I order from the City Lites menu: crab cakes with cold cucumber dill sauce or seared sea scallops served with papaya/mango salsa and cold Szechwan noodles. Meals are always a bargain. The priciest items on the Delancey Street menu run \$12.50—for grilled halibut or a New York steak.

Waiters, waitresses, the maitre d', wine steward and even valet parking attendants, all Delancey Street residents, are meticulously groomed and attired in tailored black pants and smart, white, long-sleeved shirts with bow ties. They are unfailingly polite. It's easy to forget where you are, until someone refills a water glass and you catch a glimpse of a jailhouse tattoo edging out from under a shirt cuff.

The restaurant's reputation is widespread. In "The Best of San Francisco," the French food critics of Gault Millau describe the



restaurant as "a fine dining experience...and a dramatic affirmation of what the human spirit can accomplish." *The Gazette* in Montreal calls it "a fabulous restaurant that might be the greatest culinary find in San Francisco." Michael Bauer at *The San Francisco Chronicle* writes: "Diners get double pleasure while eating at Delancey Street: the warmth of knowing they have helped people and honest food served up in such big portions that there's enough left over for another meal."

"People talk about restaurants in this city very seriously—and the Delancey Street Restaurant gets talked about a lot in a very positive way," says Laurie Armstrong, vice president of the San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau. "The truth is, if it wasn't good it would have closed long ago. Bad restaurants don't survive in this city."

When I think about Delancey Street Restaurant, I envision myself sitting outdoors on the patio at night, with the twinkling lights of the Oakland Bay Bridge just over my dinner companion's shoulder. I hear the soft murmur of conversation from other tables. I inhale the scent of garlic and conjure up the rich wonder of a Herbie's Sundae, made with the best hot fudge I've had anywhere in the world. (The recipe came from Herbert Halper, the father of Delancey Street Founder Mimi Silbert. She was a soda jerk at her dad's drug store, President Pharmacy in Quincy, Mass.)

The Delancey Street Restaurant at 600 Embarcadero is open Tuesdays through Sundays. Hours are 11:00 am to 11:00pm Tuesday through Friday and 10:00am to 11:00pm Saturday and Sunday. For reservations please call (415) 512-5179.