

Everybody knows something about the legacy of Berkeley from the 1960s—from the Free Speech Movement and People's Park to an uncompromising commitment to dark-roasted coffee and a mania for goat cheese. The peculiarly Berkeley brand of activism that moved seamlessly between civil liberties and the larder still thrives, and nowhere more robustly than on Shattuck Avenue, between Vine and Hearst.

It was on these streets that the Cheese Board and the very first Peet's Coffee opened their doors in the late '60s, becoming the cornerstone of what would soon be called "the Gourmet Ghetto." Within a few years, the area was home to Alice Waters's Chez Panisse; a charcuterie called Pig by the Tail, which would have astonished a Parisian with its authenticity; and Cocolat, a shop of handmade, jewellike chocolate fantasies whose proprietor, Alice Medrich, all but invented the chocolate truffle.

Although some of the original emporiums have moved on, the food-driven culture has flourished. Today, as you stroll the neighborhood, you can almost tell by the aromas wafting toward you which shop you're walking by. But chances are you won't be able to walk by.

As the doors open at the Cheese Board's current home on Shattuck, it's not just the soul-stirring lure of its several hundred

cheeses that pulls you in, it's the homemade breads crusting up irresistibly in the store's big, hearth ovens. A giant greenboard lists the types and prices of some four dozen goat cheeses and other artisanal varieties, from robiola to Selles-sur-Cher.

If you don't know where to begin,

Gourmet Ghetto



In one part of town, Berkeley's politics are pleasing to all palates. BY JEANNETTE FERRARY

nothing makes the staff happier. This collective, worker owned and operated, is run by people passionately devoted to their products, which they want you to learn about and love. They enjoy giving "tasting tours," watching you swoon when you savor something that pleases. You're liable to walk out with several little packages, plus a bag of just-baked Asiago-Swiss cheese rolls. The store's policy reflects its mission. It offers a 5 percent discount for those 60 years and over, 15 percent for 70 and on up. At age 100, the rule is "What

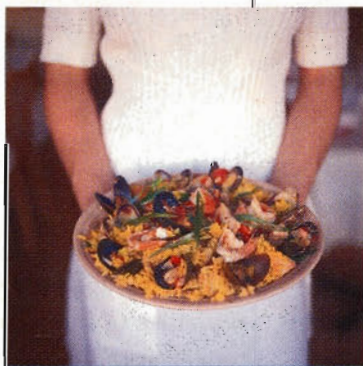
you see is what you get." It's obviously very inspiring. One of their loyal 90-year-old customers says, "The only reason I'm living is to make it to 100."

Next door, the Cheese Board Pizza fires up its pungent specialty in combinations such as molten Gruyère, roasted potatoes, and fresh herbs. A hand-

written notice on the window announces the pizza du jour, whole or by the slice. You can order a "light" bake to finish in your own oven. These vegetarian pizzas have been called the best in Berkeley, a bold statement considering that the world-famous wood-burning pizza ovens of Chez Panisse loom directly across the street.

Not enough frequent flier miles for Paris? You'll be happy to discover the cluster of café tables outside the French Hotel. Wend your way through the animated conversations and join the line in the lobby watching the caffeinated wizardry of Angel Maldonado, known hereabouts as the cappuccino artist. With croissants, pastries, and orange juice, freshly squeezed, the ambience may be Parisian, but the bulletin board is rooted firmly in Berkeley. Posters for Holotropic Breathwork and a KPFA community crafts fair share board space with announcements for a wide spectrum of support groups.

The scent of cloves and cinnamon trapped in butter means you've reached the Virginia Bakery, the grandma of the Gourmet Ghetto. Opened in 1934, this landmark storefront makes homey stuff that includes cupcakes, Boston cream pie, chocolate chip cookies, butter rolls, coffee cakes, and their best-seller, cinnamon-nut bread. Order a loaf of white sandwich bread and watch it get



Paella highlights a Latino menu at Café de la Paz.



Who needs Paris—with the French Hotel?

sliced in the kind of old-fashioned bread slicer that your parents—or was it your grandparents?—told you about.

Across Shattuck, the 20-year-old Poulet extends this “homey gourmet” style with food that really seems to come from somebody’s kitchen. Not for nothing is the place called Poulet. The delicious roasted chicken is prepared several ways, including teriyaki, marinated in lemon and garlic, and adobo (with chile, garlic, and vinegar); it can also be had stuffed with goat cheese or ricotta, in burritos, enchiladas, potpies, wrapped in phyllo, curried, and in salade niçoise. The many vegetarian dishes range from spicy eggplant or tofu in black bean sauce to roasted vegetables in salads, lasagnas, and ratatouille. You’re welcome to eat at one of the oil-cloth-covered tables in a cozy dining area festooned with chicken art, cookbooks, recipe collections, and volumes on Zen Buddhism.

Down the street, the sign in the window of Phoenix Pastificio may strike you as somewhat mysterious: MEYER LEMONS NEEDED. TRADE OR PURCHASE. Your mind fills with plots of black market machinations and international intrigue; titles like *The Maltese Lemon* and *Silence of the Lemons* dance in your head. Beyond the huge cauldron of carrot-ginger soup and the piles of luscious-looking pastries fragrant with chocolate and roasted hazelnuts, you spy the day’s listing of Phoenix fresh

Peace, love, and chow

All numbers are area code 510.

Café de la Paz 843-0662

César 883-0222

Cha Am 848-9664

Cheese Board Collective 549-3183

Chez Panisse 548-5525

French Hotel 843-8958

Grégoire 883-1893

Liaison 849-2155

Peet’s 841-0564

Phoenix Pastificio 883-0783

Poulet 845-5932

Virginia Bakery 848-6711

Zaika 849-2452



The Cheese Board gives customers taste tours.

organic pasta/ravioli: cilantro and key lime, rose petal, saffron ginger, chestnut, orange fennel, and—aha!—Meyer lemon with black pepper. Served in many area restaurants, these organic pastas made with eggs from free-range chickens bring new dimensions to a bowl of spaghetti. They come in sheets cut to order as fettuccine, linguine, or whatever suits your taste. Ravioli are filled with mouthwatering combinations such as sweet pea, sautéed leek, and smoked chicken.

Warm, just-baked breads at Phoenix, opened about eight years ago by Eric Sartenaer, one of the founders of Semifreddi’s Bakery, are also worthy of the neighborhood. Olive bread is a star attraction, as is the voluptuous handmade challah. With an array of mostly organic homemade sauces, you can get just about all you need here to make a meal.

If you’d rather make reservations, the Gourmet Ghetto lives up to its food-driven reputation. Next door, the Phoenix restaurant’s daily menu features specials such as swordfish with sweet corn, caramelized peppers, and chiles, plus many pasta dishes including Antoine’s Special, the namesake of the Sartenaer’s 9-year-old son. On some weekends, a guitar player strumming

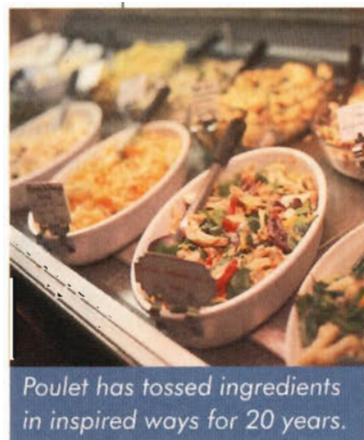
in the back sets the tone in this comfortable gem of a place.

Another find is Café de la Paz, its dazzling Nuevo Latino menu inspired by a wealth of Hispanic culinary influences. Among its delicious seafood dishes, including paella cubana and blackened sea cakes, a standout is sweet-fleshed halibut dredged in crushed pumpkin seeds on chipotle-mashed potatoes with plantains. The café’s rustically elegant ambience is usually enlivened by Latin music, from salsa to flamenco.

At the tiny Grégoire, a few footsteps up Cedar, everything from truffled potato gratin and Maine lobster to orange bread pudding is available to go, but

it’s really fun, in an incongruous sort of way, to enjoy this sophisticated fare at one of two tiny picnic tables in front. Also in the French mode is Liaison, a lively, inviting bistro specializing in escargot, soupe à l’oignon, and coq au vin at prices that are well below the haute-sounding level of the cuisine.

Other choices are César, a tapas bar with a few dozen smash-hit small dishes,



Poulet has tossed ingredients in inspired ways for 20 years.

es, which would be a destination restaurant if only for its famous fried potatoes with herbs and sea salt; the popular Cha Am, perched like a tree house on a hill above Shattuck, its extensive Thai menu and rave

reviews displayed in a glass case at street level; Zaika regional and classic cuisines of India, with its tapestry-covered walls and arm’s-length list of breads; and, of course, Chez Panisse to which the Gourmet Ghetto, the basic tenets of California cuisine, and maybe the whole Northern California lifestyle owe a bit of their birthright. ✨

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