

TRAVEL

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Photographs by **JESSE FRIEDMAN** BeerAndNosh.com

SCREEN GEMS: Foreign Cinema in San Francisco marries a meal with a different film each month. The ambience is Northern California's laid-back meets Tinseltown's trendy.

SAN FRANCISCO

Adventures in distinctive dining

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REPORTING FROM SAN FRANCISCO

"So what are you having for breakfast this evening?" asked the waiter, while pouring Sauvignon Blanc into tiny white ceramic cups typically used for hot tea.

As I reviewed the menu, I could feel the stranger next to me at the communal table leaning over my left shoulder.

"You should really try the Burmese fish stew," said the woman with bright bleached blond and pink hair. "It's absolutely to die for."

Welcome to one of the latest quirky restaurants to hit the dining scene in San Francisco, a city known for its culinary excellence and a style all its own. Of course, you can always visit the usual spots such as the Slanted Door. But why not try something beyond shaking beef? Might we suggest a renegade restaurant that serves gourmet street food, a high-end romantic eatery that plays foreign films or dining in pitch darkness and served by a blind wait staff?

Foreign Cinema: dinner and a movie

Foreign Cinema isn't the typical romantic restaurant. With its blend of Northern California's laid-back style and Tinseltown's trendy atmosphere, it will impress a special date or an indie film buff.

Each month, the restaurant shows a different film, as diverse as the Academy Award-

winning documentary "Man on Wire" and Roman Polanski's classic film noir "Chinatown." At the recommendation of a native San Franciscan, I decided to bring a date here.

"I bet you're glad you made reservations," the host said as we walked by patrons waiting to be seated. "It's been crazy tonight."

As the sun began to set, a troupe of modish waiters dashed through the open-air courtyard lighting the overhead heat lamps. Suddenly, the white brick wall flickered overhead with the opening of Krzysztof Kieslowski's "Red," a seductive story of forbidden love.

Beside each table stood a pair of old-fashioned drive-in speakers with volume controls that could be turned down, if you wanted to talk, or cranked up, if you wanted to drown out nearby diners. As I turned down the soundtrack, the waiter arrived with the menus and reviewed the specials.

The entrees are reasonably priced (\$20 to \$27) with variations on traditional dishes such as Alaskan halibut in Champagne sauce and Madras curry roast chicken.

As we shared the rich chocolate *pot de crème* for dessert, I realized we hadn't paid attention to the film since we ar-

rived. Was it the food? Or better yet, the sign of a good date? Whatever the reason, the setting was only part of what made the experience unique.

A little fun with your food

Mission Street Food: 2234 Mission St. Open 6 p.m. to midnight Thursdays and Saturdays. No reservations; cash only. Small plates \$5 to \$10 each. Menu is posted weekly at blog.missionstreetfood.com/ and at www.twitter.com/MissionStFood.

Foreign Cinema: 2534 Mission St.; (415) 648-7600, www.foreigncinema.com. Reservations recommended. Entrees \$20 to \$27.

Opaque: 689 McAllister St.; (800) 710-1270, www.sf.darkdining.com. Open 6 p.m. to midnight Thursdays though Saturdays. Three-course *prix fixe* menu is \$99 a person.

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