OUT & ABOUT from the Resident and Fellow Affairs Committee
Where members of the Resident and Fellow Affairs Committee recommend their favorite scenes outside UCSF.

Mixologist’s Map of SF

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By now you’ve probably noticed that at every restaurant you go to there seems to be a cocktail list with ever-changing concoctions of never-heard-of spirits and house-made infusions, bitters, and shrubs. Some are classics, the Negroni, the Aviation, some are new, the Dolores Park Swizzle, the Ginger Rogers. All are worth a sip - or two, or three.

The truth is that we are terribly spoiled in this city. San Francisco is full of wonderful places to saddle up to a bar with a friend or two, order some great food, and experience the taste of a resurrected classic or a novel creation crafted by one of the many “mixologists” masquerading as bartenders around the city.

My first taste of a true “cocktail” – in the form of the Old Fashioned - came at The Alembic when I was a resident and living in the Haight. Opened in 2006 by the guys behind Magnolia Pub down the street, it has achieved a reputation that has garnered a bartender exchange program with Death and Co. in NYC and more press coverage than any regular would ever desire. The food is great and the drinks are better. A must for anyone who is a whiskey fan – they are known for versatility and host a “you-name-it” night where patrons can choose any drink from The Savoy Cocktail Book – the bible of the cocktail world according to some. It fills up fast, but it’s a refreshing change from the average place in the Upper Haight.

Any discussion of cocktails in San Francisco would be incomplete without a nod to the Tenderloin speakeasy that is Bourbon and Branch. Dark, hushed, and candlelit, this is not a place to swill beer and watch a game. Cocktails are served as haute cuisine – complete with an amuse bouche. The place is a legend for classics in addition to their own creations. The staff get very into the speakeasy concept – expect to see lots of period attire behind the bar. Get a reservation online to get the password for the door (seriously), although you can drop in without a reservation and grab a drink in the Library. A little taste of what San Francisco might have been like in the 1920s...

If you find yourself hungry and thirsty in the Mission, there’s no better place to quench both than at Beretta. Wood-fired pizza and Italian fare, including a nice variety of seafood, great wines, and, of course, cocktails! Known for citrus-driven drinks that pair well with their food, a host of mixological-celebrities can be seen making cameos behind the bar. The good news: they are open late. The bad news: the word is out. Don’t miss the squid ink risotto or the osso bucco.

My all-time favorite place for a late-night meal with a well-made drink is the restaurant that named the neighborhood: NOPA. Known for some amazing organic/local/sustainable food prepared over their wood-burning grill, the somewhat modest cocktail list belies the talent behind the bar. Often serving drinks made with house-made bitters and other ingredients, they pair well with an amazing menu that’s served late seven nights a week. Their pork chop sets a new standard to which others should aspire.

Finally, the longest-lived member of this short and, admittedly, incomplete list of cocktail destinations: Absinthe in Hayes Valley. With a large poster of the green fairy himself on the wall (and bottles of the real stuff behind the bar), this place has been serving great food and drinks since it was cool to work at a dot-com. A popular destination with the opera/symphony/ballet crowd before and after performances, the best time to visit is around 8pm on performance nights as the well-dressed head down the street to find their seats. Scott Beattie (cocktail guru behind Cyrus in Healdsburg) credits Absinthe’s “Ginger Rogers” with launching his interest and career in cocktails – a must-sip. The snacks here are worth checking out as well. From salads to charcuterie, they also have what I consider to be a contender for the best burger in the city.

Obviously, these aren’t your everyday destinations, but for a late-night treat after a hard week at work, San Francisco has a great selection of places to unwind. Don’t miss out!