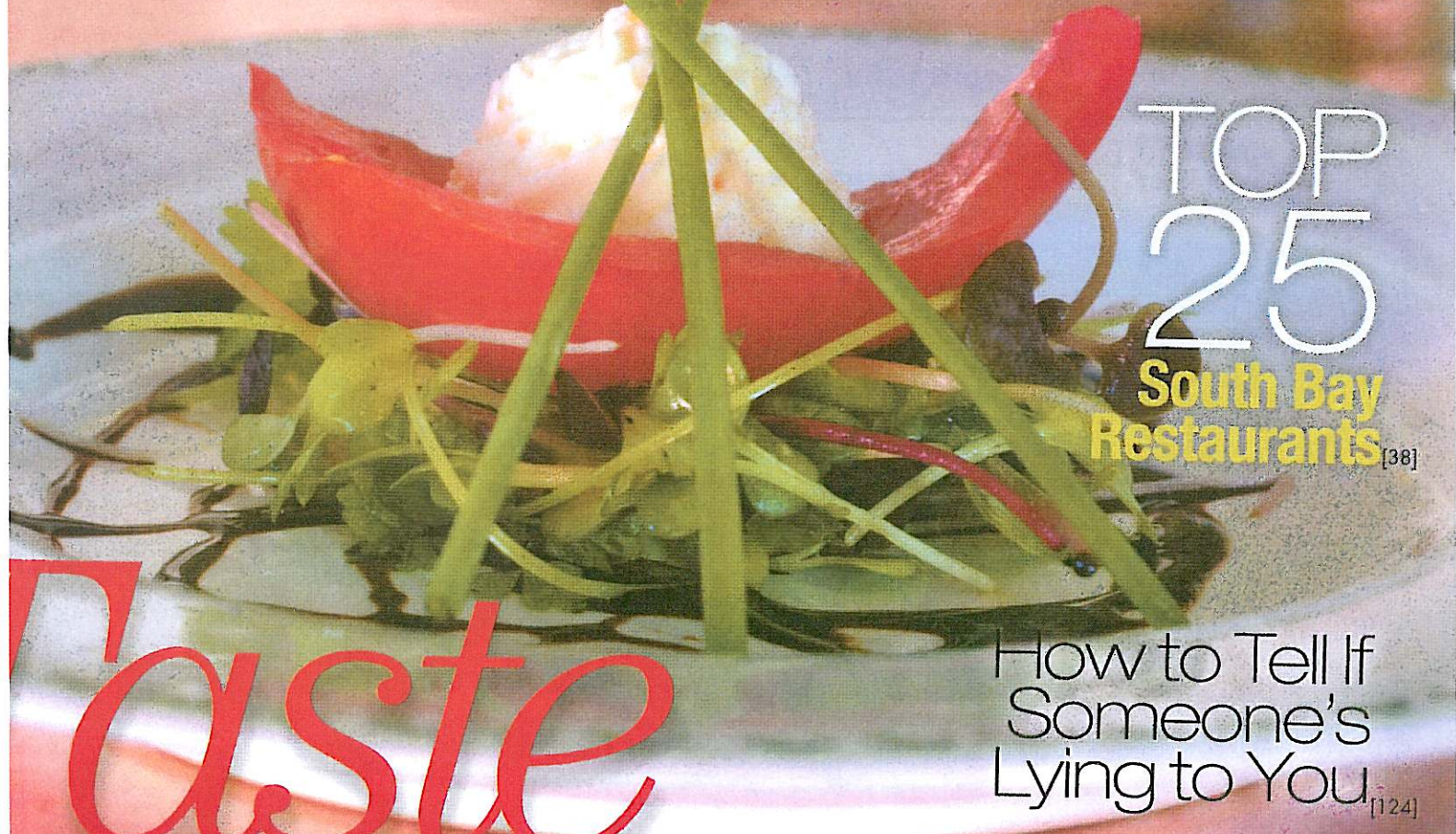


THE WAVE

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La Forêt \$\$\$

21747 Bertram Rd., San Jose (408) 997-3458
www.laforetrestaurant.com

Located in the foothills of New Almaden, next to the babbling Los Alamitos Creek, it's not hard to see why this consistently named one of the Best Places to Kiss in North America. The picturesque view and dining cocoon makes for a memorable first date or anniversary celebration, but it's the latter that takes center stage. From owner and chef John Davoudi's simple lobster tail to the succulent rack of lamb and grilled with rosemary and tarragon mustard, nothing you encounter will fail to thrill. The tasting menu is a good way to sample a bit of the best, but also check out La Forêt's famed boar, elk, reindeer, emu and caribou – said to be low in cholesterol and perfect fare for the hunter. The classic Grand Marnier soufflé makes the perfect finale to a splendid evening.

Low seats are on a first come, first served basis, so get there before 6pm to snag the best. If you want to bring a bit of La Forêt home, their sauces can be purchased separately for \$10 a cup.

Birk's Restaurant \$\$\$

San Jose (950) 980-6400
www.birkrestaurant.com

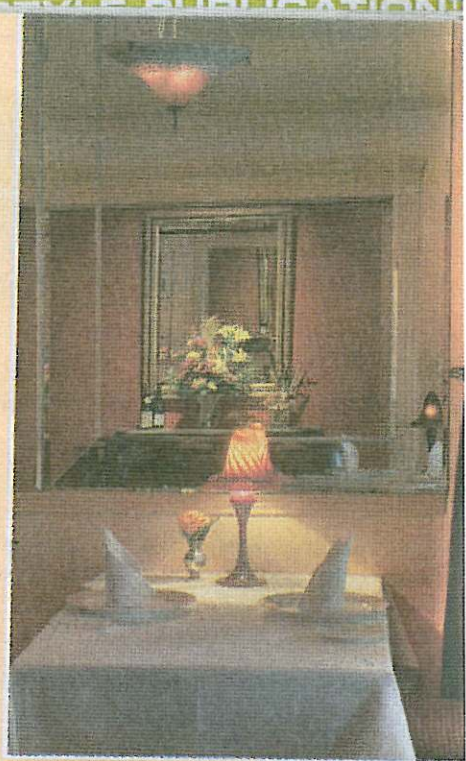


American, Seafood
Since 1989, this upscale dining room has been a go-to for the city's beef-eating businesspeople who love their steaks cut from tender, aged beef, cooked over an open flame. Sides like a satiny spinach and crispy onion rings. But if you're craving steaks and chops, the kitchen courts all the best dishes like a succulent chicken, grilled and broiled mixed grill of filet mignon, topped with mushrooms and a mustard Cognac sauce. Not to mention succulent steaks and a satisfying salad selection of local organic greens. If you can't decide what to order, the chef's no-brainer: Get a trio of Birk's classics for \$15.

Two rooms for large parties, Birk's boasts a well-stocked, swanky bar – great for people watching and martinis.

13 Chez TJ \$\$\$\$
938 Villa St., Mountain View
(650) 964-7466 www.chezjtj.com

Cuisine: French
The Deal: Chez TJ is the ultimate destination for special occasions; it's as common to see marriage proposals as it is black American Express cards at this quaint, classically French hot spot. But you don't need an anniversary or birthday to dine in this fully restored 19th-century mansion-turned-restaurant. TJ's \$75 and \$115 prix fixe menus cover a wide range of culinary tastes, temperatures, and textures from contemporary French cuisine. If Chef Christopher Kostov's five-course meal isn't enough for you, a tasting menu is available with between eight and 10 courses. Allow several hours for consumption; several days for recovery.
Insider Tip: In a hurry but still want a taste of TJ? Try the "theatre menu (offered Tuesday through Saturday for 5.30pm theater seats)," which is reduced to three courses and can get you out the door in about 90 minutes for only \$55.



14 A.P. Stump's \$\$\$
163 W. Santa Clara St., San Jose (408) 292-9928
www.apstumps.com

Cuisine: American, Steakhouse
The Deal: The "P" in A.P. Stump's may stand for primo porterhouse. Executive Chef Jim Stump's menu of updated classics features an iceberg wedge salad with buttermilk bleu cheese dressing, chicken and shrimp spring rolls, a Dungeness crab cake sandwich, and orange glazed salmon. Their 200-label wine list is equally impressive. The restaurant's richly paneled interior complements the food's classic feel (check out the pressed tin ceilings and hand-wrought fixtures). They've recently added a raw bar, and also changed the menu to offer a wider selection of fish, as well as specialty meat items like duck confit.
Insider Tip: The historic Paul Masson champagne cellars, once a gathering place for the city's politicians and financial heavy-hitters, have been converted into large private dining rooms – a perfect place for your next executive luncheon. Call (408) 292-3468 to reserve one.



15 Paragon Restaurant \$\$
211 S. First St., San Jose (408) 282-8888
www.paragonrestaurant.com

Cuisine: Modern American
The Deal: This chic lounge and restaurant is the paragon of art-deco-gone-high-tech décor, with cube lighting, polished-stone surfaces and low booths that appear ready for takeoff. In a restaurant so ultra-sleek and upscale, it's a relief to find some reasonably priced menu items that exceed the tough California culinary standards. This is mostly due to chef Philippe Breneman's inventive approach to his trade and reflected in dishes like the grilled ribeye steak with horseradish mashed potatoes and the Porcini-dusted halibut with fennel shellfish broth.
Insider Tip: Tables on the heated outdoor patio are charming and highly coveted, so make reservations in advance; same goes for bustling Friday and Saturday nights, when there's live jazz at the Paragon.

