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MARISA ROBERTSON-TEXTOR EIGHT GREAT ICE CREAM PARLORS IN AND AROUND SAN FRANCISCO

08.12.09

The Bay Area is brimming with artisanal ice cream shops, which feature everything from classic gelato to unusual tropical fruits to Adrià-worthy flavor pairings. Here are eight of our favorite places to enjoy the quintessential summer treat.



1. ICI

This white-tiled shop in the heart of Berkeley is less an ice cream parlor than a rotating museum display of jewel-like *objets d'art* that just happen to be edible, from macaroons to bombes to ice cream sandwiches. (No wonder the tour buses are lining up outside.) As befits a Chez Panisse alum, former pastry chef Mary Canales specializes in seasonal bounty (current selections include basil and blackberry), but don't overlook a classic root beer float made with *Abita* and two scoops of what may just be the perfect vanilla. 2948 College Ave., Berkeley (510-665-6054; ici-icecream.com)

2. FENTONS CREAMERY & RESTAURANT

Stand in line long enough (as you undoubtedly will) and you're bound to overhear a regular reminiscing about the 60-cent caramel sundae she enjoyed as a child 40 years ago. That's just par for the course at this family-owned Oakland institution, which, at 115 years and counting, has likely witnessed more childhood birthday parties and first dates than any other venue in the state. And while the original dairy may be long gone, the creamy, handcrafted ice cream still satisfies; try the mocha almond fudge. 4226 Piedmont Ave., Oakland (510-658-7000; fentonscreamery.com)

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- See our favorite [ice cream recipes](#)
- Check out other delicious specialties in our series "Eight Great"
- Read more by [Marisa Robertson-Textor on gourmet.com](#)

3. LUSH GELATO

It takes a fair amount of bravado to open a gelato shop just down the road from Fenton's, but that's what Argentinean owner Federico Murtagh did a mere four months ago, and the results are impressive. The strong Italian influence in Murtagh's hometown of Buenos Aires has long made it the hands-down gelato capital of South America, and this pedigree shines through in an impeccable lemon-mint, as well as California-friendly green tea, ginger, and cardamom. 4184 Piedmont Ave., Oakland (510-547-1299; lushgelato.com)

4. POLLY ANN ICE CREAM

Tucked away on a residential stretch of San Francisco's Sunset district, just a few blocks from the ocean, this sunny yellow ice cream parlor is home to one of the largest and best selections of Asian flavors in the country, down to a predictably stinky but utterly delicious durian (don't worry, it's kept in the back room). You can't go wrong with a scoop of sesame or jasmine green tea, but if the choice proves too overwhelming, just ask the staff to spin the flavor wheel behind the counter; when it stops, the decision will have been made for you. 3138 Noriega St. (415-664-2472)

5. MITCHELL'S ICE CREAM

Located on an unprepossessing strip in Noe Valley, this doyenne of San Francisco ice cream remains so popular that locals fantasize about installing a Web cam to monitor the lines. Its old-school, high-butterfat ice cream stands the test of time well, especially the tropical fruit flavors, many of which have been on the menu for decades and might at first glance seem more suited to sorbet. But lush cantaloupe, robust avocado, nutty purple yam, and achingly fresh young coconut hit all the right, creamy notes. 688 San Jose Ave. (415-648-2300; mitchellsicecream.com)

6. BI-RITE CREAMERY & BAKESHOP

This is the place that did for San Francisco ice cream what Magnolia Bakery did for the New York cupcake: sent it streaking like a comet into "foodie" territory, complete with requisite block-long lines and hipster cachet. The homey, hole-in-the-wall location—just across the street from Dolores Park in the Mission, the city's sunniest neighborhood—couldn't have hurt, but the real draw is the playful, perfectly executed flavors. The salted caramel remains justifiably famous, but don't overlook the subtly spicy honey lavender and nuanced balsamic strawberry. 3692 18th St. (415-626-5600; biritecreamery.com)

7. HUMPHRY SLOCOMBE

From the exposed light bulbs to the Warhol-inspired paintings to the dancing ice cream tattoos on the owner's forearm, this hipper-than-thou establishment (located in the Mission, natch) is the latest jewel in the [ice-cream-goes-upscale](#) crown. If foie gras and salt-and-pepper are more your idea of *amuse-bouches* than dessert, try the understated Blue Bottle Vietnamese coffee flavor, or the olive oil, with its fresh hit of citrus. 2790 Harrison St. (415-550-6971; humphryslocombe.com)

8. LA COPA LOCA

Nestled between colorful taquerias and *pupuserías* in the gritty heart of the Mission, this small corner gelateria is easy to overlook—but that would be a grave *errore*. Italian owner Mauro Pislor's classic flavors (*stracciatella*, *gianduia*) bring the dense, silky delights of gelato to the New World. Don't forget to top it all off with a swirl of unsweetened whipped cream for the perfect Tuscan treat. 3150 22nd St. (415-401-7424; lacopalocagelato.com)

PHOTOGRAPH BY TOMOKO KANAMITSU

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Humphry Slocombe is amazing ice cream unusual flavors it beats Bi-rite only because they don't have a crazy line a mile long. (however you can get Bi-rite ice cream in the grocery store across the street with out the hour long wait).

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Posted 9/6/2009, 12:12:22am by [raffinedine](#)

Wow! I cannot wait to get back to San Francisco to try some of these sophisticated flavors!

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Posted 8/26/2009, 11:29:00pm by [santiagozuckerbrot](#)

Lush really is the little engine that could -- it's not as elegant as Ici, or as storied as Fenton's -- they just make really good gelato, which is a lot harder than it looks.

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Posted 8/26/2009, 2:34:50pm by [andrewrosenblum2009](#)

Oh my goodness, this makes me want to go to San Francisco and try all of these! I'm not so sure about the foie gras flavor at Humphry Slocombe, though (yuk!). But the gelatos at La Copa Loca and Lush sound divine.

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Posted 8/26/2009, 2:05:29pm by [Sabrina2](#)

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