



EXAMINER/KURT ROGERS

Delancey Street Foundation President Mimi Silbert likes to emphasize the restaurant's career-building aspects, but it holds its own for customers too.

Worthy cause, cooking

Delancey Street Restaurant serves up community, family spirit

By Jim Wood
EXAMINER FOOD AND WINE CRITIC

AS DELANCEY Street Restaurant was preparing to open a few months ago, Foundation President Mimi Silbert faced a problem of some delicacy. The self-help organization, acclaimed for helping people who have hit bottom, has a strict rule against residents' drinking. And Silbert lives by the rule.

On the other hand, to be competitive, and for the residents to acquire a thorough grounding in the restaurant business, the new enterprise needed a wine list. How to do it?

The answer, Delancey Street admirers say, was pure Silbert. First, she collected wine lists from some of San Francisco's finest restaurants. Then she held what she called an election. Each mention for a wine on one of her top-notch lists was worth one vote. At the end of the process she selected the wines with the most votes for her own wine list. Then she ran the list past one of Delancey

JIM WOOD RECOMMENDS

Street's many admirers, who, in this case, happened to be a sommelier at a nationally recognized San Francisco restaurant, the Zuni Cafe's Sylvie Darr. She found the list was fine, Silbert eliminated a few of the cheapest and a like number of the most expensive wines, and that was it. The result is one of the finest wine lists in town.

For the past 20 years, the Delancey Street Foundation has successfully been using similar brains and energy as a substitute for tax-supported subsidies. The strategy has earned it support even from people who would appear to be business rivals. Silbert praises Embarco, a smart, successful restaurant close by, for the help it extended in getting the Delancey Street Restaurant started.

In a sense, Silbert likes to emphasize the career-building aspects of the restaurant: the resident training, the financial help the restaurant is expected to give Delancey Street, the symbol the restaurant provides for confidence and the spirit of self-help.

The truth is, though, that the restau-

◆ *DELANCEY from C-1*

Delancey Street: Worthy cooking

rant definitely can hold its own as a professional operation. The food is good, the service is excellent, the ambience pleasing. Go there and expect it to be as good as at any other well-run restaurant.

Sometimes, as at most restaurants, the staff has to improvise. This is when you get an idea of the real caliber of a place. Imagine a customer waiting outside, expecting to eat in a few moments and something goes a little wrong. What do you do? Delancey Street's staff can hum a far bars with the best of them. For instance, I ordered black bread and sausages as an appetizer. When the plate came, I noticed first that the portion was enormous. I could have made an entire meal of it. Second, there was more sausage than bread. It didn't come out evenly. I asked Silbert about this and she candidly (truth-telling is another — perhaps disconcerting — Delancey Street practice) told me that the kitchen had run out of one of the three kinds of sausages normally served with the dish. To make up for it, the kitchen had piled on extra sausage. Stars couldn't have done it better.

The restaurant has a bar, a giant rotisserie over an open fire, an outdoor cafe with a stage-set-quality view of the underside of the Bay Bridge and the water beyond. Because Delancey Street regards itself as an extended family, the menu emphasizes family cooking that reflects the varied backgrounds of the residents, food like grandma used to make.

The previously mentioned black bread and grilled sausages, served with grainy mustard, make a fine start (\$3.95). I very much liked Granny Dena's chicken soup with matzoh balls and vegetables. My wife, who was born in New York, considers herself a world-class matzoh ball maker and she pronounced these to be very good indeed. Alejandrinos, a melted cheese appetizer that sells for \$4.25, is exception-

ally good, and a \$3.50 mixed green salad with crumbled Maytag blue cheese (50 cents extra) makes a healthful way to begin your meal. Don't miss the light, non-greasy onion rings.

If you like pot roast, you're in for a treat at Delancey Street. It's served with herbed dumplings (\$9.25) and is tender and has a warm sauce. Spit-roasted rosemary and garlic chicken is served with grilled vegetables on a skewer. The vegetables had a tomato sauce over them instead of beside them so that you lost a little of the spit-roasted flavor, but if you'll ask to have the sauce on the side so that you can decide how much you want, the kitchen will be glad to honor your request (\$8.50). The barbecued chicken was tasty, although the barbecue flavor is mild. This isn't one of those sit up and knock 'em dead barbecue sauces like you get at Blackburn's on Ocean Street.

Blackened meatloaf with mashed potatoes (\$8.75) was good but not great. The mashed potatoes were flavorful, but the meatloaf was a little drier than I like.

The desserts are from the well-known Just Desserts. Go to Delancey Street not because you'll be helping a very worthy cause, as you will be, but because it's a restaurant that's fun and moderately priced. How can you go wrong with that?



Chef John Ridley adds to Delancey's "good as grandma's" reputation.

DELANCEY STREET RESTAURANT

LOCATION: Embarcadero at Brannan Street

PHONE: 415-512-5179

HOURS: Open every day except Monday from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

CREDIT CARDS: Visa, MasterCard, American Express. No personal checks

RESERVATIONS: Yes

PARKING: Ample on Embarcadero

AMBIANCE: Pleasant, friendly, informal. There's a terrace with a magnificent Bay view. A winning place for a

casual meal or afternoon tea

SERVICE: Efficient, cordial, well trained

RECOMMENDED DISHES: Alejandrinos with dipping sauce, onion rings, pot roast. This is comfort food like your grandma used to make, so shut up and eat your cheese blintzes with sour cream and strawberry preserves

UPSIDE: Great atmosphere; fine view of the Bay and Bay Bridge, good food, moderate prices

DOWNSIDE: There ain't any; this place is fun

COST:\$\$

COMMENT: This is supposed to be a training facility for Delancey Street residents, but it's thoroughly professional and thoroughly enjoyable. Check it out.

The Examiner's price-rating system follows:

\$ Inexpensive (less than \$15 a person for dinner, exclusive of drinks, tax and tip)

\$\$ Moderate (\$15 to \$35 a person)

\$\$\$ Expensive (more than \$35 a person)