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Diners enjoy lunch at Delancey Street Restaurant on the Embarcadero, where recovering addicts working on second chances, are servers and cooks. They also designed and built the restaurant

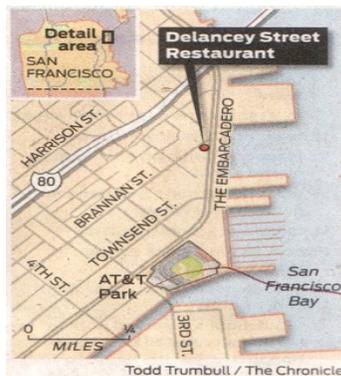
PORT RESTAURANTS

A comforting approach

This is part of a series exploring the Port of San Francisco restaurants. These waterfront spots embrace and reflect the city's oldest, and newest, culinary traditions and they have plenty of stories to tell. Previous articles are at www.sfgate.com/food and www.sfchronicle.com/food.

By Meredith May

With a postcard view of the dancing lights on the new span of the Bay Bridge, and entrees under \$20, Delancey Street Restaurant has plenty going for it. But when you consider all the servers and cooks are recovering addicts earning their second chance, a good deal never felt so good. Named after the street in New York where her parents fled to escape the Nazi takeover of Eastern Europe, Mimi Silbert opened the restaurant in 1991 as the centerpiece of her live-in drug rehabilitation center. Today, more than 400 residents live in a villa-style campus at the Embarcadero and Brannan Street, each spending an average four years on site learning a trade or skill. Silbert's program is the largest self-help organization in the country, completely self-funded, and run by former residents.



Delancey Street Restaurant

600 Embarcadero
(at Brannan Street),
(415) 512-5179.
www.delanceystreetfoundation.org

Open continuously for lunch and dinner Tuesday-Sunday.

Main courses: \$5.95-\$18.95



All proceeds from the restaurant, about \$2 million a year, go to house, feed and clothe residents as they transition back to mainstream society. Tips are considered donations.

The menu changes daily, but its base is basic American comfort food, with many recipes coming from residents' families. Crab cakes and Dugald's grilled ahi tuna sandwich are two mainstays, supplemented by daily specials featuring seasonal oysters and salads such as orange, avocado and jicama. The "heart healthy" section offers dishes under 500 calories, and on the other end of the scale, an entire grilled rack of lamb. The menu is currently getting a makeover, Silbert says, to reflect the changing population she serves, both in her program and in the restaurant.

"I'm adding more Moroccan dishes, and things from El Salvador and Guatemala," she says. "I call it a bistro menu of people

who live around the world because that's what Delancey Street is."

The meals, and mission, draw a steady stream of local politicians and visiting law enforcement experts who come to find out the secrets to Silbert's successful foundation.

Delancey residents designed and built the restaurant, and although the décor, with brass light fixtures and worn wooden chairs, looks somewhat dated, the service is dependably earnest and friendly.

Delancey restaurant graduates often move on to restaurant jobs throughout the city. "The latest one now works at Slanted Door," Silbert says.

"They come in as people who not only never cooked, they'd never heard of a cappuccino."