

55-plus!

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Dining Out

Delancey Street Restaurant

600 Embarcadero Street (at Brannan)

by Claire van Zant

Prices: Reasonable

415/957-9800

While this is a restaurant review, is it more than just a restaurant review. Most people have heard of The Delancey Street Foundation and its good works. The Delancey Street Restaurant is part of the foundation, the country's largest and most successful self-help residential organization. For 20 years, Delancey Street has provided a home and all services to thousands of residents who had hit bottom, who entered the program with no hope, no job skills, no social skills, a bad attitude and an even worse history, and helped them turn their lives around. This they've done at no cost to either client or taxpayer. The foundation's income is from such enterprises as this restaurant. Tips are considered donations, and all restaurant proceeds go directly to house, feed and clothe the residents, and to teach skills, values and attitudes necessary for a successful drug-free and crime-free life in society's mainstream. Before they "graduate" each resident will be thoroughly trained in three different marketable skills.

We all applaud and uphold the works of Delancey Street, and when we support an organization such as this one we feel ever-so virtuous and altruistic.

Virtue and altruism aside, however, you'll want to eat at the Delancey Street Restaurant for very selfish reasons. It's a place to dine in upscale elegance, with fine cuisine and exemplary service. Its commitment to quality and excellence is evidenced in fresh flowers on every table and in every corner of the restaurant (including the restrooms), its aesthetic architecture with windows offering a grand view of the Bay Bridge, the tasteful, pleasant ambience many restaurants strive for but few achieve, and last, but not least, very attractive prices, even for those on a fixed income.

The extensive menu changes daily, reflecting the resident's ethnic and regional backgrounds, and includes traditional American cuisine, as well. Many of the recipes are from the residents' grandmothers. It's also my understanding that many of the fine chefs-about-town share their recipes as well as their techniques with the Delancey Street crew.

In an extraordinary spirit of community service, the owners, chefs and wait-staffs of many of the city's finest restaurants have helped train Delancey Street residents in the culinary arts, restaurant management, and service protocol and decorum. They have done a splendid job. The food preparation, presentation and service are fastidious, elegant and professional. The well-trained wait-staff are attentive, attractive, courteous, pleasant and efficient. Everyone at Delancey Street Restaurant is the perfect host(ess): eager to please and happy to share their 'home' with their customers.

Every mouth-watering dish is a sensual feast: colorful and artful, a visual delight, tempting aromas, and, of course, distinctive delectable flavors to please the palate.

Many items are sufficiently substantial to be shared (for two patrons with less-than-gargantuan appetites). The sandwiches, for instance, are sizable - too much for some (like me) to comfortably polish off alone. My sister (visiting from out of town) and I lunched there and split a Grilled Ahi sandwich (\$7.95), which was served with a large fresh salad and French bread - plenty for the two of us. When ordering, we told our waiter we planned to share it. He graciously provided an extra plate and put us at ease, making us feel that this was a very acceptable practice.

Our inch-thick Ahi was grilled to perfection, seared surfaces/rare middle, served on a crispy toasted sesame bun. Fantastic! On another occasion at Delancey Street, I ordered a roast lamb sandwich with Onion Marmalade. It's too die for!

Delancey Street Restaurant also boasts an excellent wine list to complete your dining adventure.

My sister took notes on all aspects of the place so she could tell all her friends about it, for when they venture into 'The City'. It's the kind of establishment you can't wait to share with your friends, knowing they'll thank you for it.

So get down to Delancey Street soon for whichever reason, altruistic or selfish. You can rationalize it either way. Just go and enjoy!