

ROADSIDE REFRESH

Roadside Eateries By Land And Sea: Alice's Restaurant and Dad's Luncheonette.

BY STACY BRISCOE | MAY 30, 2018



Chef Scott Clark and family step out on the platform at Dad's Luncheonette

It's summertime and you're itching to jump in the car and find a peaceful respite from the congested streets of Silicon Valley. No fast-casual food for this outing, you're craving well-crafted locally sourced fare. But where to find the freshest and the best roadside eateries? Well, we went looking and we found 'em—one if by land, one if by sea.

Get off the beaten path of highways 101 and 280 and venture into the woods and toward the coast to experience one of the South Bay's most iconic mountaintop restaurants and Half Moon Bay's little hidden gem. (Hint: It's in an old red railroad car.)



Seaside Chew-Chew: Dad's Luncheonette

Just off the scenic Highway 92, with its twists and turns that drive right through Half Moon Bay's bucolic farms and toward the fresh sea air of the Pacific Ocean, find the caboose-turned-roadside-stand called Dad's Luncheonette. It has everything you'd expect from a glorified food truck: a petite menu with classic comfort foods including burgers, chips, mushroom and fried egg sammies, and canned wine. The twist? Grass-fed, local beef; chips homemade from fresh potatoes; locally foraged mushrooms and sustainably raised eggs. Even the canned wine is organic.

"I want to be as serious as possible when it comes to delivering good, wholesome food, but also want it to be fun and accessible," says Scott Clark, former chef for Saison in San Francisco who now prefers to be called "Dad" rather than "Chef." Looking for a way to balance his home and work life, he left the Michelin-three-starred restaurant to open this modest venue in February 2016, after the birth of his daughter. It seems he's found it.

"Work is like a vacation," Dad says. "My daily commute is down Highway 1, which is awesome." And with the roadside stand open just Thursday through Sunday, he has ample time for both his family and his other love: surfing.

When it came to creating his menu, Dad says he wanted to remain as transparent as possible, staying true to the roadside vibe but working with what's in his immediate San Mateo County surroundings. "I could hit a golf ball and hit the bakery where I raised just down the coast," he says. "The bones of this restaurant has everything to do with San Mateo County. It's a very rich, hardworking culture."

Despite the casual atmosphere, Dad maintains a Michelin-threestarred attitude when it comes to his food, saying the biggest priority is delivering on flavor. “Everything *has* to be delicious.” And with just himself and one other chef prepping and cooking, he’s able to provide that deliciousness to every guest who walks through the train doors, personally running food from the kitchen to the dining room, greeting regulars by name, and newcomers by nickname.

One can’t have a conversation with a man called “Dad” without asking for a little advice, or “dadism.” *This Dad’s* advice: “Slow the ‘eff’ down. Take the time to appreciate the things you have and enjoy life a little bit.” Looking around his caboose he adds, “That’s what this is. This for me is a lifestyle project.” For his patrons, it’s a one-of-a-kind food experience that lets them put on the brakes, and appreciate the local flavor in this colorful roadside dining experience.

Dad’s Luncheonette, 225 Cabrillo Highway South (at Kelly Ave.), Half Moon Bay;
DadsLuncheonette.com



Mountaintop Stop: Alice’s Restaurant

Where Highways 35 and 84 collide sits a rustic little diner with a storied past. The original 1940s building was erected long before the state highways paved the way for the scenic coastside drive, serving as a general store for the loggers who transported redwood lumber up and down the California Coast. It wasn’t until 1960 that Alice Taylor opened her self-named restaurant and the crossroads coffee shop became a hotspot for the ’60s counterculture—from artists to hippies to bikers to cowboys.

When brothers Andy and Jamie Kerr bought the restaurant in 2002, the location still maintained its funky reputation. Andy remembers friends asking, “Why would you buy a biker diner?” But the Kerrs had strong familial ties to the old dive, having grown up just a few miles down the road. After enjoying years traveling around the world during their “semi-retirement” phase, the brothers longed to come back home. The opportunity to purchase their childhood diner seemed like the best way to make a fresh start in their old neighborhood—so they went for it.

The Kerrs wanted to keep the rustic charm of the place, but felt the need to “clean it up” a bit—specifically when it came to the menu. Owning a restaurant made the brothers realize all the different chemicals and artificial ingredients that go into modern, diner-like cuisine. “We thought, ‘Let’s take a greasy spoon and make it healthier,’” says Andy. Indeed, today, Alice’s Restaurant proudly provides sustainable options throughout their menu, utilizing locally sourced produce, meat and cheeses—and adding in local and organic beer, wine and spirits whenever possible.

Andy recalls the farm-to-table transition as a slow but steady progression. “The first thing was to source locally grass-fed beef without hormones, then the chicken and then we introduced the mac and cheese made from quinoa,” says Andy. “We started with what we can do to make things healthier for kids, but then started aiming it toward adults as well.”

Today the menu includes fish straight out of Half Moon Bay, produce from local South Bay farms and cheeses from North Bay dairies. The rotating menu always features what’s in season and the Kerrs, along with their staff chefs, are constantly recipe testing to see what else they can change to improve the health benefits of the menu. Andy believes that this is a testament to the counterculture that’s

always surrounded the diner. He remembers as a kid all the “hippies” advocating for fresh, local and organic. “It’s only now, 30 years later, that this notion is being pushed into society,” he says. And he’s doing his part to push it further.

Their love for local culture expands outside of the food menu. “In this mountainous, rural environment you have to take care of each other,” says Andy. Under the Kerrs’ ownership, Alice’s Restaurant has been host to several community projects, fundraisers and private events. They employ local residents, often acting as a first job experience for high school and college students. Their parking lot boasts spaces for motorcycles and mountain bikes along with hitching posts for horses. And with its communal-style seating, neighborhood folks share table space and conversation with those just passing through. “It’s very much a community restaurant,” says Andy.

Alice’s Restaurant, 17288 Skyline Blvd., Woodside

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