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## Bar Tartine lowers prices, takes big step up

Michael Bauer

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Bar Tartine has always been a great destination, even though it fell just short of its potential. In its first few years of business, four chefs headed the kitchen. Prices got higher, and it felt as if the restaurant was pricing itself out of the neighborhood.

Fortunately, owners Elisabeth Prueitt and Chad Robertson, who also own the nearby Tartine bakery, realized the problem and have made adjustments. On a recent visit, prices were lower and there was a familiar face in the kitchen: Chris Kronner.

Just 26, Kronner, who was the chef of Slow Club and had once worked at Tartine, has a cooking maturity beyond his years, and it shows on the compact menu. The dishes are familiar, but Kronner brings something extra to each one, keeping a few favorites and adding homey American combinations.

He's polished two favorites - the chicken liver pate (\$11) that spreads like softened cream cheese on grilled bread, accompanied by cherry-sized candied crab apples and pickled shallots; and the bone marrow (\$11), with its breadcrumb topping, licorice-scented herb salad and grilled bread.

Kronner's three-bean salad (\$9) features shelling beans and haricots vert dotted with halves of cherry tomatoes in an intense vinaigrette spiked with fresh herbs and drizzled with creamy aioli; each element is perfectly cooked and seasoned and comes together like kismet.

Main courses that used to hover near \$30 are more reasonably priced. Cast-iron skillet half chicken (\$20) is pure eye candy with its bronzed exterior and grilled romaine moistened with a brown gibleet gravy that few cooks can perfect. Savory bread pudding (\$6), one of Kronner's signature dishes, rises like a souffle above the dish, punctuated with herbs and cherry tomatoes.

Black cod from Bolinas (\$25) comes with chile-spiked brown butter and a knob of purslane, another simple, rustic combination given vitality under Kronner. Other main courses include a French omelet with nettles, cheddar cheese and La Quercia ham (\$15); burger and fries with cheddar aioli (\$16); and rib-eye for two (\$54) with beet tops, turnips and potato gratin.

Maybe I was too full, or maybe what came before was too good, but for the first time desserts weren't the highlight of the meal. After the subtle pitch-perfect play of seasonings in the main courses, I was jarred by the intense sweetness of the blackberry apple tart (\$7.50). It was recommended by our waiter, and he was so good through the rest of the meal there was no need to question. Other options included a creme fraiche panna cotta and a roasted banana parfait (both \$7.50).

The place conjures up visions of New York's SoHo, with the tight 50-seat interior and a decor that incorporates chic flea-market finds, a marble bar, scarred dark floor and polished walnut tables. It

feels right for the food and locale.

After four years, it feels as if Bar Tartine has found its way, thanks to Kronner's fresh, enthusiastic execution of the homey American menu.

### Bar tartine

561 Valencia St. (between 16th and 17th streets), San Francisco

(415) 487-1600 or bartartine.com

Breakfast 8-11 a.m. Wed.-Fri.; brunch 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Sat.-Sun.; dinner 6-10 p.m. Sun. and Tues.-Thurs.; until 11 p.m. Fri.-Sat. Beer and wine. Reservations and credit cards accepted. Difficult street parking. Some nearby lots.

<b>Overall</b>	Rating: THREE STARS
Food	Rating: THREE STARS
Service	Rating: TWO AND A HALF STARS
Atmosphere	Rating: TWO AND A HALF STARS
Prices	\$\$\$
Noise Rating	Noise Rating: BOMB

### Ratings key

FOUR STARS = Extraordinary; THREE STARS = Excellent; TWO STARS = Good; ONE STAR = Fair; NO STARS = Poor

\$ = Inexpensive: entrees \$10 and under; \$\$ = Moderate: \$11-\$17; \$\$\$ = Expensive: \$18-\$24; \$\$\$\$ = Very Expensive: more than \$25

ONE BELL = Pleasantly quiet (less than 65 decibels); TWO BELLS = Can talk easily (65-70); THREE BELLS = Talking normally gets difficult (70-75); FOUR BELLS = Can talk only in raised voices (75-80); BOMB = Too noisy for normal conversation (80+)

Prices are based on main courses. When entrees fall between these categories, the prices of appetizers help determine the dollar ratings. Chronicle critics make every attempt to remain anonymous. All meals are paid for by The Chronicle. Star ratings are based on a minimum of three visits. Ratings are updated continually based on at least one revisit.

Reviewers: Michael Bauer (M.B.), Tara Duggan (T.D.), Mandy Erickson (M.E.), Amanda Gold (A.G.), Miriam Morgan (M.M.), Carol Ness (C.N.), Karola Saekel (K.M.S.) and Carey Sweet (C.S.)

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