



Valentine's Day dinner and drinks in style

By Patricia Unterman

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Decadent: Bar Tartine's pumpkin agnolotti with duck broth makes a fine Valentine's Day meal.

SAN FRANCISCO – Now that you've held off on your Valentine's Day reservations, are you having doubts about the aphrodisiac effect of the love note you plan to text? When Saturday night rolls around, do you honestly think that those tulips will light the fires of romance?

It's not too late to make a night of it. You just have to be flexible. Here's what I would do. Tell your sweetheart to wear flats.

Start off at Pisco Latin Lounge for a pisco punch (\$9). Peruvian brandy infused with fresh pineapple powers a sublimely balanced tart-sweet drink. The Destino/Pisco Latin Lounge version comes close to love itself.

Then walk up Valencia Street to Bar Tartine for dinner. I can't guarantee that you'll get two seats at the wide marble bar or a table reserved for walk-ins, but if you come early-ish, your chances will be better.

→ Chef Jason Fox cooks sexy. His dishes deliver exciting and unexpected flavors that always achieve harmony. He understands the power of restraint and just when to let it all go.

On Valentine's Day, Fox is preparing an \$80 prix fixe menu with two choices in each round. For those who cannot imagine what pumpkin agnolotti, black chanterelles, slow-cooked egg, duck brodo, black truffle or Dungeness crab risotto, sea urchin, young garlic, bergamot cream, chervil might taste like, trust me. They will be sensual explorations and the dilemma of which to order can be solved by good-natured sharing of each — a test of compatibility.

If you can't get in, stroll over to Foreign Cinema where four long wooden communal tables for 10 will be available for walk-ins.

Chefs Gayle Pirie and John Clark made an old mattress factory completely hidden from the street into the coolest dinner spot in town with their insouciant cooking. Yes, there will only be an \$85 prix fixe starting with an "Amuse Booze" and then an "Amuse Bouche," but choices will include aged prime New York steak, true cod in lobster broth and the nightly \$10, three-course kids' menu, so you can bring the family for your special night out. Foreign Cinema is big, happening and fun. I bet you'll get a seat.

If your love is bigger than your wallet, shift gears and head for Little Vietnam, otherwise known as the Tenderloin, and start the evening with an exotic cocktail (\$10) at Bambuddha Lounge.

Then cross the street to Bodega Bistro for some of Jimmy Kwok's soulful Hanoi and French cooking.

Start with a dozen pristine Kumamoto oysters on the half shell (\$20) or Kwok's incomparable deep-fried squab (\$16). Have juicy green papaya salad (\$6), the best in The City. Then take apart a whole salt and pepper crab (\$35) with some garlic noodles. All dishes serve two. Accompany with French wines at truly affordable prices and you will have an unforgettable Valentine's meal.

If the two of you like adventure, head to the bare bones Lers Ros, the great Thai restaurant, for dreamy grilled duck salad (\$7.25), the spectacular pork with crispy rind and basil leaves (\$7.95) and cooling shaved ice in coconut milk with crystallized chestnuts and bright red bits of tapioca (\$3.50). The cost belies the exhilarating cooking. If your Valentine is in the mood for fireworks, this is the place to head.

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Hot spots

Cocktails

Pisco Latin Lounge, 1817 Market St., San Francisco; (415) 874-9951 www.piscosf.com

Bambuddha Lounge, 601 Eddy St., San Francisco; (415) 885-5088

www.bambuddhalounge.com

Dinner

Bar Tartine, 561 Valencia St., San Francisco; (415) 487-1600 www.bartartine.com

Foreign Cinema, 2534 Mission St., San Francisco; (415) 648-7600 www.foreigncinema.com

Bodega Bistro, 607 Larkin St., San Francisco; (415) 921-1218 www.bodegabistrosf.com

Lers Ros, 730 Larkin St., San Francisco; (415) 931-6917