

Here are three sample reviews for you to look at.

A Howlin' Good Time at Lune

Nestled amid the lofts and showrooms that pepper San Francisco's trendy SoMa district, Lune is the brainchild of Chefs Marcel Petain and James Pham, childhood friends who grew up on the French-Vietnamese fusion cuisine they're bringing to the bay.

The restaurant is located in a rather unassuming converted warehouse that's quite easy to miss. However, the interior will remind visitors of a minimalist, *Cast Away*-esque tropical paradise. The decor allows the simplistic beauty of the food to really shine, though beauty isn't the only thing bringing folks to Lune. The restaurant buzzed with excited energy and was comfortably full with seemingly satisfied patrons.

We started with Lune's famous deconstructed banh mi, which is essentially a salad of pickled vegetables, spicy mayo, french baguette croutons (which they make themselves), and truly remarkable, perfectly cooked pork served on ladle spoons. My wife and I shared one order, which consisted of six full spoons of banh mi goodness. We certainly could have shared a second order, though that is more a reflection on the otherworldly taste than the portion size. For the main course, I decided to go with Lune's nem vit, spring rolls filled with roast duck and exquisitely tart green mango. The flavor of the green mango balanced the richness of the sinfully tender duck very well. My wife ordered goi cuon, which consisted of marinated pork, grilled bacon, ripe mango, and greens wrapped in a rice paper roll. The dish was executed perfectly, and the bright colors of the ingredients peeking through the thin rice paper made it a feast for the eyes as well as the stomach. I did find it a bit too sweet for my liking, but I know a lot of people who would be willing to pay top dollar for a dish like that. The servings were big and a bit pricey, but it was well worth it. Though I would love to be selfish and keep Lune all to myself, the work of Chefs Petain and Pham is too good to stay hidden for long. There's no doubt a table Lune at will quickly become the hottest reservation in town.

The Zebra Diner in Need of New Stripes

The mark of a good restaurant is not necessarily its size, but the quality of its food and the generosity of its staff. Along that line, some of the finest dining experiences I've had throughout my career have been in the small diners and dives scattered throughout the suburbs of Cleveland. Regrettably, Zebra's Diner is not among these gems. The location of the diner makes it appear promising. The owners were at least wise in this regard, having selected a spot with a splendid view of a small man-made lake. Furthermore, because the building stands on its own instead of being wedged between other storefronts, patrons are granted full view of the scenery regardless of whether they choose to sit at one of the three outdoor tables or one of the two dozen tables set up indoors. This is fortunate, considering the fact that as I approached Zebra's Diner, fully intending to take a seat outside, I noticed layers of bird droppings and cigarette ash caked onto the tables and chairs. I suppose I should have taken that as an omen, but being drawn in by the concept of a "Zebra Burger" and curious as to what such a sandwich consisted of, I decided to press on.

The seats inside the restaurant were not much better than those outdoors, but dustings of crumbs and smears of ketchup stains are at least a little less appalling than bird droppings. I seated myself at the cleanest table I could find. Looking around, I only noticed two other customers. Since it was lunchtime on a Sunday afternoon, this should have been my second warning signal, but I still continued on in my culinary adventure.

Fifteen minutes after I sat down, a teenage boy with long, greasy hair finally arrived to take my order. I began with the diner's trademark "Zebra Burger" that had intrigued me enough to draw me to the restaurant in the first place. I also ordered side of onion rings, a side of fruit salad, a sweet tea, and a "Sahara Fudge Brownie," instructing my server to bring my dessert out last, after I finished my meal.

After another 25 minutes passed, my food arrived—including my dessert. I had already begun to expect as much, especially considering the fact that, in the 40 minutes I had been there thus far, the only other customers I had spotted were the original two patrons I saw when I first came. I decided to give the hasty waiter one final chance to redeem himself by asking him about what exactly made the Zebra Burger so special. The information on the menu had been sparse at best and provided me with no clues. My server simply shrugged his shoulders and replied, "It's just a burger," before shuffling back off to the kitchen.

At the very least, I should give him credit for his honesty. The Zebra Burger is, in fact, just a burger. A simple hamburger with ketchup, mustard, and pickle. No special "Zebra" sauce or other distinguishing features to be found. I will take the blame for my disappointment at its ordinariness, though, seeing as how I did not inquire about what the burger consisted of in the first place. What I will not take the blame for, however, is the fact that the burger was lukewarm and served on stale bread. The onion rings were hot, at least, but otherwise nothing special, and the fruit salad was cold but made of nothing but sour grapes and flavorless chunks of out-of-season melon. Humorously, the Sahara Fudge Brownie was, perhaps, the most honest and straightforward dish of the entire meal, having been about as dry as the Sahara Desert itself.

Visiting the Zebra Diner was certainly an experience to remember, but one that I never hope to repeat and would not wish upon anyone else. If you are tempted by the luscious landscape and the intriguing black-and-white-striped storefront, you would be better off bringing a camera to the restaurant than your appetite.

A Sweet Place to Be

The food at Darla's Snack Shoppe appears simple, but the flavors have remarkable depth. Darla's is known best for its range of fruit pies, including apple, blueberry, rhubarb, and peach, and the reputation is well deserved. The fruits are harvested from local organic farmers, and the pies are served warm with fresh homemade vanilla ice cream crafted with real vanilla beans. A host of other goodies, including brownies, cookies, and candies, line the shelves, offering something for the whole family. The shop is both clean and tidy—despite having limited space and more customers than can fit inside at one time—and all the staff members there greeted my companions and me with smiles as warm as the pies they serve there. I would thoroughly recommend Darla's Snack Shoppe to anyone with a sweet tooth. I know I'll certainly be returning soon.