

San Francisco Chronicle Magazine

Dining Out

2007 WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR — WE PICK THE TOP 10 DINING SPOTS

Sometimes we get so caught up in our daily lives that we don't stop to take stock, but this year-end column on the year's best restaurants forces me to do just that. I didn't think 2007 was a particularly great year — until I looked at the list of places I've reviewed and realized that in fact it was one of the best in a long time.

While there's always a spate of new restaurants serving Italian-Mediterranean-California in noisy loftlike surroundings, this year's best openings added new options to the dining scene. One of them, Ubuntu, may just be the top vegetarian restaurant in the country. I haven't been to all of them, naturally, but I'd be surprised to find one that's as focused and innovative. The reincarnation of Cafe Majestic is a restaurant where you can actually have a conversation in relative peace and quiet, and diners at Nick's Cove can have exceptional food *and* a view.

This year, I gave 14 places three stars overall. Am I getting soft?

I wondered that myself, but after looking at the list and revisiting some places, I realized that the dining scene broadened considerably this past year. Great restaurants seemed to pop up all over the Bay Area — half of my Top 10 are outside San Francisco.

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NICK'S COVE

It's hard to believe that this remote, rustic restaurant is in the 415 area code; it could be hundreds of miles away. It's also hard to fathom that Pat Kuleto spent more than \$10 million to create the illusion that he merely cleaned up this venerable spot and opened the door. It has a great fireplace for winter, amazing views of Tomales Bay year-round, and a San Francisco sensibility about food. There are outstanding fish tacos, excellent barbecued oysters — a must in this region — exceptional clam chowder and fresh local seafood such as petrale sole. You can also get a very good burger. Nick's is the kind of place that pleases a wide range of palates.