

Beverly Dubrin's

Vol. 26/ No. 1 • \$7.00

# Where-To-Guide

January – February 2007 Tells You Where To Go For Restaurants, Shopping, Services, Travel And Why!

## In This Issue

### **EPICURIOS GARDEN**

Berkeley's newest food attraction

### **TRAVELS WITH LOUIE**

Louie returns to dog-friendly Carmel and makes his first trip to Reno

### **RESTAURANT ROUNDUP**

Old favorites are a good way to start the New Year:  
Ajanta  
Back Forty Barbecue

### **DISCOVERIES & NOTES**

- Las Vegas, fun any time of year
- Last Call at the Great Mall



**BEVERLY DUBRIN'S WHERE-TO-GUIDE** (ISSN#1053-2005) is published six times a year. Annual subscription rate is \$40; Canada:\$45, Foreign:\$50. U.S. funds only. Back issues available at \$7 each. Imprinted three-ring binders, \$15 each. Make checks payable to BEVERLY DUBRIN'S WHERE-TO-GUIDE, P.O. Box 4274, Walnut Creek, CA 94596.

©2007 by Beverly Dubrin. All rights reserved. Reproduction and/or the use of any portion of the WHERE-TO-GUIDE is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher. No advertising accepted. Content reflects opinions and research of the WHERE-TO-GUIDE staff. Inquiries: Voice:925/WHERE-TO (925/943-7386) e-mail: editor@where-to-guide.com

**Publisher**  
Beverly Dubrin

www.where-to-guide.com

User ID: good □ Password: luck

## *Epicurious Garden, Another Berkeley Food Attraction*

I made my first visit to **EPICURIOS GARDEN** in December, anticipating that this newest addition to Berkeley's "Gourmet Ghetto" would be a wonderful source for specialty food for my Holiday entertaining. Since its opening in March, 2006, I have been tempted by the many rave reviews about the culinary offerings for sale in **EPICURIOS GARDEN**.

What I envisioned at **EPICURIOS GARDEN** was a smaller version of San Francisco's **FERRY BUILDING MARKETPLACE**. As soon as I walked in the door, I realized that my vision was all wrong. Instead of my expected array of bakers, produce vendors, fish markets, cooking tools, and lively restaurants in a beautifully-restored historic building, I found, a handful of takeout food booths and minimal seating. To me, the interior of the building, which most of us remember as the Dale Sanford TV Store, is dingy and unattractive. **EPICURIOS GARDEN** does have a pleasant outdoor patio garden area, with fountain, behind the building, but, all told, this was not at all what I expected. I was disappointed.

Other than the lovely chocolate products at **ALEGIO CHOCOLATE**, there were no foods that were even tempting to carry home to serve at a special meal or occasion. What **EPICURIOS GARDEN** is about is good takeout food at reasonable prices. It also has two restaurants with their own dining rooms.

Since **EPICURIOS GARDEN** opened last Spring, some of its original businesses have already closed. I advise calling ahead if you are making a special trip to a particular business. What I describe here are the businesses that caught my attention in December.

**EPICURIOS GARDEN**'s main building is basically a food court. At this writing, there are three quick food restaurants and a few places for snacks. The two sit-down restaurants are in surrounding buildings. There is a cooking school, **KITCHEN ON FIRE**, upstairs above the main building.

Each week, **SOOP** (510/548-7667; www.sooptogo.com) features a changing selection of six or more soups, stews, chowders, and chilis, all freshly prepared each day. The selection includes at least one vegan and one vegetarian item. They offer a variety of toppings and garnishes. Extras, to accompany their soups, include handmade croutons, skillet cornbread, and fresh salad. The soup is available in pints and quarts. Most pints are priced at about \$6; quarts are about \$11. **SOOP** always sells some of its popular favorites, including their Beef and Beer Chili, Chicken Stock, and Beef Stock, in frozen quarts. **SOOP**'s soups are excellent. If you are in the neighborhood, I suggest buying a quart to take home for a comforting meal at a later time.

The fare at **PICOSO TAQUERIA** (510/540-4811) is Mexican...Burritos, Tacos, Quesadillas, Nachos, and Tostadas. Their tortillas are homemade from organic flour/meal. Their steak and pork are from Niman Ranch. Many items on the menu are priced under \$4. The day's fresh fruit drink, the *agua fresca*, is my choice of beverage to accompany as Mexican meal from **PICOSO TAQUERIA**.

## Epicurius Garden...continued

**KIRALA**<sup>2</sup> (510/649-1384; www.kiralaberkeley.com) is the most expensive of the quick food restaurants. It is the takeout branch of the highly-regarded **KIRALA** (2100 Ward St., Berkeley; 510/549-3486), a popular Japanese restaurant that has been a Berkeley favorite for over 15 years. Sushi, Rolls, Sashimi, Nigiri, Donburi, and Bento boxes are freshly prepared throughout the day. I walked through **EPICURIUS GARDEN** several times on the day that I visited and **KIRALA**<sup>2</sup> was always the busiest food booth. A meal at **KIRALA**<sup>2</sup> will cost between \$12 and \$20 for the Sushi or Roll Combos or a Bento Box. The Donburi rice bowls are more modestly priced at around \$8.

**CIAO BELLA GELATERIA** (510/548-2425; www.ciaobellagelato.com) scoops cups and cones of **CIAO BELLA** gelato and sorbet (pints and quarts are also available). My current favorite flavors are Green Tea & White Chocolate Chunks gelato and Blood Orange sorbet. The **GELATERIA** also serves Smoothies, Latte Shakes, and warm coffee and chocolate drinks.

The one place in **EPICURIUS GARDEN** to which I would make a special trip is **ALEGIO CHOCOLATE** (510/548-2466; www.alegio.com). While sampling their Chocolate-Covered Pepper (they always greet you with the offer of a sample), I admired their own line of individual chocolates by co-owner, Joann Coukos, and the attractive packaged boxes of chocolates from Enric Rovira of Barcelona, Spain. Coukos's chocolates are distinctive pieces of "art chocolate" with such unusual fillings as chili pepper or corn.

The two restaurants with their own dining rooms are **IMPERIAL TEA COURT** and **TASTE**.

**IMPERIAL TEA COURT** (510/540-8888; www.imperialtea.com) is in the building behind the main food court building. It is a peaceful, relaxing teahouse overlooking the garden. The original **IMPERIAL TEA COURT** in San Francisco (1411 Powell St.; 415/788-6080) was the first traditional teahouse in America. Their Ferry Building location is one of my favorite places for a relaxing lunch, when I am in that part of town. As at the Ferry Building, this **EPICURIUS GARDEN** location pairs a wide variety of teas with handmade organic food, including noodles, dim sum, and dumplings. They use hormone-free organic meats in their preparations.

**TASTE** (510/540-7800; www.tastefinewines.com) is a lively sit-down restaurant and wine bar that opens out to Shattuck Avenue. It has some outside sidewalk patio seating in addition to its spacious indoor space. It is also a wine shop.

**TASTE** features the newest in wine-tasting technology, the push button temperature-controlled delivery system that pours a measured one-ounce taste of your wine selection (out of 36 wines), at a touch of the appropriate button. The tasting stations are at multi-bottled pods. Tasting is self-service, once you've purchased a prepaid tasting card, which you insert at the tasting station. You can also order many of **TASTE**'s 200 wines by the

glass or bottle. The food menu offers numerous small plates, perfect to accompany a wine tasting...think Crab Cakes, Bruschetta, a Cheese Plate, or Duck Confit Salad. Larger dishes include **TASTE**'s signature Rotisserie Chicken, Grilled Pork Chops, a Truffled Lamb Burger, and fresh fish. In the evening, **TASTE** can be very noisy; this is a popular place for wine tasting and socializing. Come here for lunch, if you want a quieter dining experience.

Possibly the most "fun" business in **EPICURIUS GARDEN** is **KITCHEN ON FIRE** (upstairs, above the food court; 510/548-COOK; www.kitchenonfire.com), a hands-on cooking school. Most classes take place on weeknight evenings. Weekend classes often include a culinary walking tour to procure ingredients for the dishes that the class prepares. **KITCHEN ON FIRE** also offers classes to private groups of 4 to 40 people.

**EPICURIUS GARDEN** may be a hit with those who live or work nearby, offering well-prepared takeout food for a quick lunch or dinner. But, my take on **EPICURIUS GARDEN** is that I do not consider it worthy of a special trip.

I find the other food offerings in the immediate neighborhood to be far more interesting and appealing than those at **EPICURIUS GARDEN**.

I much prefer stopping in at **SAUL'S DELI** (1475 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley; 510/848-DELI; www.saulsdeli.com), where I am seated at a table or booth and can enjoy an almost-as-good-as-New York City pastrami or corned beef sandwich on rye bread or, perhaps, a chopped liver and caramelized onion sandwich, a tuna melt, or a bagel with whitefish salad, among the many Jewish-style offerings. And, if I didn't want one of **SAUL'S** Black and White Cookies or Chocolate Macaroons for dessert (I usually take a few of each home), I can pop next door to the cozy **MASSE'S PASTRIES** (1469 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley; 510/649-1004) for a latte and one of their heavenly European-style pastries or cookies; **MASSE'S** has indoor and outdoor seating.

Across Shattuck from **EPICURIUS GARDEN**, both **CHEESEBOARD PIZZA** (1512 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley; 510/549-3055; http://cheeseboardcollective.coop) and the **FRENCH HOTEL** (1538 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley; 510/548-9930) offer excellent alternatives for an inexpensive satisfying lunch. **CHEESEBOARD PIZZA**, an offshoot of the cheese collective next door, makes one specialty combination pizza each day, Tuesday through Friday, at lunch time, and, later in the day, from 4:30 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. There has been many a warm Berkeley afternoon when I have stopped at **CHEESEBOARD PIZZA** for a slice, carried it over to the grassy median strip in the middle of Shattuck Avenue, sat down on the grass, and joined the many local regular customers who consider this the ultimate in Berkeley *al fresco* dining. While on this side of Shattuck, a visit to the **CHEESEBOARD** cheese shop is a must. It has one of the largest selections of cheese in one place in the Bay Area. They

## Epicurius Garden...continued

bake wonderful breads too. If you are looking for a hard-to-find cheese or just want some knowledgeable suggestions of what cheese to serve for a particular occasion, **CHEESEBOARD** is your place. Between 7 a.m. and 10 a.m., **CHEESEBOARD** features freshly-baked breakfast pastries and coffee drinks. Each day, they bake different specialty breads and pastries in addition to their everyday offerings.

The café at the **FRENCH HOTEL** has the ambiance of a Parisian café. Sip on a Cappuccino and enjoy a light bite to eat at one of their sidewalk or indoor tables.

On the same block as **EPICURIUS GARDEN**, other restaurant choices include **CHEZ PANISSE** (1517 Shattuck Ave.; 510/548-5525; www.chezpanisse.com; dinner only; reservations required) and its less formal upstairs restaurant, **CHEZ PANISSE CAFE** (510/548-5049; lunch and dinner; reservations accepted but not required) and **BAR CESAR** (1515 Shattuck Ave., 510/883-0222; www.barcesar.com). **CESAR** is

right next door to **EPICURIUS GARDEN** and remains one of my favorite spots for Spanish-style Tapas, cocktails, and wine, everyday from noon until midnight. My personal choice for takeout meals in this neighborhood is **GREGOIRE** (2109 Cedar St.; 510/883-1893; www.gregoirerestaurant.com), which features a monthly menu of seasonal, prepared-to-your-order, dishes that I consider far superior to the selection at **EPICURIUS GARDEN**. Sandwiches and salads make up most of the lunch offerings (most under \$7); recent dinner choices (many under \$15) included Poached Maine Lobster, Beef Delmonico, and Jerk Chicken Wings. **GREGOIRE** has limited seated for customers who wish to eat here, but, per customer, far more seating than what you'll find at **EPICURIUS GARDEN**.

### EPICURIUS GARDEN

1509 – 1513 Shattuck Ave., Berkeley  
www.epicuriusgarden.com

Daily 11 a.m. – 9 p.m. (until 7 p.m. on Sunday)

## Dog-Friendly Travels with Louie

Hello once again! It's Poodle Louie back to report on my recent travels with my family. At the end of 2005, my Mom, the one who publishes the Where-To-Guide, invited me to write an article about our trip to Carmel, a city that advertises itself as being dog friendly. We got such a positive response to my article that Mom has asked me to write another one about a return visit to Carmel and about some other travels we have done together. As many of you already know, I accompany Mom for much of her research (sometimes we even take Dad along) and, when she is in her office writing, I hang around by her computer.

I'm a Miniature Poodle and will be 5 years old in April. When we go on the road, I sit in the back seat in my own special car seat, the **LOOKOUT**, a special booster seat for dogs which attaches to the seat belt and which has a tether that attaches to my harness. Most pet stores sell the **LOOKOUT** and it is available online as well. It is a safe way for me to go for rides in the car and its plush lining is so comfortable that I often take a nap.

### A RETURN TO CARMEL

We had such a wonderful time in Carmel last year that we made a return visit in the Fall. Last year we had a comfortable stay at **SUNSET HOUSE**, a small (four rooms) bed & breakfast where we had a room with a private entrance and from where we could walk everywhere in town.

This year, I followed up on my wish to stay at the **CYPRESS INN**, a dog-friendly hotel of which singer/actress Doris Day is one of the owners. Last year, I had so enjoyed a cocktail hour in the **INN's** Library Bar, that I felt I needed to spend more time here. **CYPRESS INN** is right in town, so, once we parked the car in its nearby parking lot, we could walk to all our destinations. In the last Where-To-Guide, Mom mentioned the special winter

rates at the **CYPRESS INN** and also mentioned some of the shops we visited. I won't repeat this information, but I will add my perspective on our Carmel trip.

I loved staying at the **CYPRESS INN** and already look forward to a return visit. Our room was small but there was plenty of room for the food and water bowls that they brought me. They even provided us with a big cover to go over the bed, in the event I decided to hop up on it. Since I am not allowed on furniture, the folks just folded the cover up into a comfortable mat for me to snuggle up on on the floor. In the evening, the maids left chocolates for the folks and a special packet of tasty **HENRY & SONS** Vegetarian Dog Cookies for me.

I could go into any of the public areas in the **CYPRESS INN**, except in the main dining area of the cocktail lounge. I certainly enjoyed my cocktail hour in the Library Bar, where I met many other dogs who were either staying here or who live locally and drop in at the end of the day with their owners for cocktails and a light bite to eat. Breakfast for the humans is included in the price of a room. It is served buffet style in the cocktail lounge, which is just on the other side of the Bar. Again, I was a happy camper keeping the folks company in the Library Bar, while they enjoyed their pastries, bagels, cereal, fresh fruit and coffee. The music of Doris Day playing in the background in the hotel's public areas, adds to the ambiance. After breakfast, while Mom spent time in the hotel's fitness center, Dad and I read the paper in the main lounge and then took a long walk. I should note that there is a dispenser of "pickup" bags on the outdoor patio, so guests don't have to worry about packing their own.

My one thought on the **CYPRESS INN** is that the next time I stay here, I will ask for a room that is a bit larger. Since our family usually travels on a budget, we booked one of the smaller

## Dog-Friendly Travels with Louie *continued*

rooms which was located facing an outside walkway. The room was a bit cramped and we were woken a few times by the voices of people who were walking by our windows.

Our visit was just an overnight one. For meals, we returned to two places we had particularly enjoyed last year, **THE FORGE IN THE FOREST** and **VILLAGE CORNER**. Both have heated outdoor areas. **THE FORGE** has a special patio just for dogs and their people. This is the place that has a special doggie menu. I ordered my “usual,” the Hen House Chicken Strips (\$4.95), a five-ounce grilled chicken breast sliced into strips. I would gladly have eaten the whole thing, but Mom insisted it was too much to eat at once and got us a doggie bag so I could save the rest for later meals. Dad had a Cobb Salad and Mom indulged in a Grilled Eggplant Sandwich (each about \$9). Last year we had breakfast at **VILLAGE CORNER**. This year, we went for lunch on our second day. Their outdoor patio is enclosed and has a cozy fire pit in the center. We managed to get a table right by the fire pit. Dad ordered the Hot Skillet dish made with eggs, cheese, chiles, green onion, salsa, and avocado. Mom had a Sand Dab sandwich. Both their lunches cost about \$9 each; I was content with a bowl of water and leftover chicken.

Later in the afternoon, we stopped for coffee and a pastry at **BUON GIORNO BAKERY & CAFE**. We sat outside on their sunny patio. Their grilled-to-order Panini sandwiches looked so tempting that we plan to come back for lunch on our next visit. **BUON GIORNO** serves breakfast, lunch, and snacks all day long; Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings are “Supper Club” nights when **BUON GIORNO** serves a single dinner entrée (menu changes each night).

For our one dinner, we enjoyed a lovely meal on the back patio at **GRASING’S**. The restaurant caught our eye while we were strolling around town. The folks decided to reserve at table here after reading, on the information outside the restaurant, that chef Kurt Grasing’s experience includes having been chef at Narsai’s in Berkeley and being the opening chef at 231 Ellsworth in San Mateo. He’s had this Carmel restaurant since 1998. Chef Grasing’s cuisine emphasizes ingredients from California’s Coast and Central Valley. Dad ordered Herb Crusted Sea Bass and Mom went vegetarian with Artichoke Lasagne. While their meal was excellent, what was distracting was that we and another family with a dog were the only customers there during the prime dining hour...from about 7 p.m. until 9 p.m. There were no customers in the indoor dining room. We know that **GRASING’S** has a good reputation and has been in town for several years, but we don’t like being the only people in a restaurant and probably won’t return for awhile. There are too many other choices for dog-friendly dining in Carmel.

We spent most of our first day in Carmel wandering around town, stopping at shops and art galleries that caught our attention. In addition to visiting my favorite pet shops...there are two really nice ones in town (**MACKIE’S PARLOUR** and

**DIGGIDY DOG**), we spent quite a bit of time in the shops in the recently-revitalized **CARMEL PLAZA**. I was warmly greeted in every shop that we stopped at and many had bowls of water outside. All shops in **CARMEL PLAZA** welcome dogs who are accompanying shoppers. One local dog and his owner told us that **TIFFANY’S** in the **PLAZA** serves Evian Water to its doggie visitors. Mom and Dad both liked the new **WILKES BASHFORD** store and Mom thought the jewelry and clothing in **THE DUTCHES** was special. We found an amazing selection of cheeses and wines at **THE CHEESE SHOP**. Had the day been a bit warmer, we would have considered buying some to take with us for a picnic on the beach.

While Dad took me for a late afternoon walk to the beach, Mom did a bit more shopping at the **CARMEL BAY COMPANY**. In Carmel for over 35 years, **CARMEL BAY COMPANY** is filled with unique furnishings and decorative items for the home and garden. Mom found a box of long matches with a dragonfly decoration on the top which she gave as a gift to her friend who lives in Port Townsend, Washington, where the dragonfly is the “logo” of the town.

We spent most of our second day walking on the beach. This year I was not so afraid of the sand and we walked for miles both on the sand and on the paved sidewalk that follows the beach. Dogs are allowed to run off leash on part of Carmel Beach. I had a wonderful time being there and meeting other dogs. The sand on Carmel Beach is so white that many people who received our Holiday card with a picture of us sitting on the beach thought we were sitting in snow.

Before heading for home, we made one last stop at the **CARMEL BAKERY** for some pastries to take home. The **BAKERY** is something of a Carmel legend. Established in 1906, it is the oldest shop in Carmel Village. There is no outdoor seating at the bakery, so Dad and I waited in front while Mom purchased several Danish pastries, some shortbread cookies, and one of their famous large soft Pretzels (I got a piece of pretzel as a treat). Starbucks fans should take note that the **BAKERY** is one of the few places in town to get your Starbucks “fix” (there are no Starbucks shops in town).

### CARMEL DETAILS

**CYPRESS INN**, corner of Lincoln & Seventh; 831/624-3871 or 800/443-7443; [www.cypress-inn.com](http://www.cypress-inn.com); Room rates: \$145 – \$575; \$30 per night for one pet, additional pets (maximum of 3): \$20 per pet per night.

**SUNSET HOUSE**, Camino Real, between Ocean & Seventh; 831/624-4884 or 877/966-9100; [www.sunsethousecarmel.com](http://www.sunsethousecarmel.com); Room Rates: \$175 – \$215; Pet fee: \$30 per stay.

□□□□□□□□

**BUON GIORNO**, Junipero betw. Fifth & Sixth; 831/624-0221.

**CARMEL BAKERY**, Ocean, betw. Dolores & Lincoln; 831/626-8885; [www.carmelbakery.com](http://www.carmelbakery.com).

**THE FORGE IN THE FOREST**, SW corner of Fifth & Junipero; 831/624-2233; [www.forgeintheforest.com](http://www.forgeintheforest.com).

**GRASING’S**, Sixth & Mission (across from the Fire Station on Sixth); 831/624-6562; [www.grasings.com](http://www.grasings.com).

## Dog-Friendly Travels with Louie *continued*

**VILLAGE CORNER**, NE corner of Dolores & Sixth; 831/624-3588;  
www.carmelsbest.com/villagecorner.

□□□□□□□□

**CARMEL BAY COMPANY**, Ocean & Lincoln; 831/624-3868;  
www.carmelbaycompany.com.

**CARMEL PLAZA**, Ocean & Mission; www.carmelplaza.com; our  
favorites: **WILKES BASHFORD, THE DUTCHES,**  
**ANTHROPOLOGIE, THE CHEESE SHOP.**

**DIGGIDY DOG**, Mission & Ocean (Southwest corner); 831/625-1585;  
www.diggidydogcarmel.com.

**MACKIE'S PARLOUR**, Ocean & Mission (Carmel Plaza); 831/626-  
0600; www.mackiesparlour.com.

---

### OUR FIRST TRIP TO RENO

---

People find it hard to believe that my Mom and Dad, who do a lot of traveling, have never been to Reno, Nevada, a place they can drive to from home in about four hours.

Last year, my dear friends Frank and Phyllis moved to Reno. For all my life they have lived a few doors away from my house and it was at their house that I stayed whenever the folks traveled without me; their house was like my second home.

Of course, I miss them very much and was anxious to see what Reno was all about. In the Fall, while the weather was still warm, I convinced the folks that we should make an overnight trip to Reno.

We did not need to find a dog-friendly hotel because we were staying at Frank and Phyllis's house, but Mom still consulted www.dogfriendly.com for some ideas of where to stop along the way for a snack and to see if there were any hotels where we might stay on future visits to Reno.

Reno is about 200 miles from our house in Walnut Creek. We decided to stop for coffee in Auburn, which is about halfway to Reno. We took the Highway 49 exit from Highway 80 to get into Auburn, following a sign to Lincoln Way and Old Town. On the way to the central part of historic Old Town, which looks much as it did in the Gold Rush days, we passed the Placer County Courthouse and, across the street from it, noticed a cute little restaurant in an old house, **COURTHOUSE COFFEE**. It was **COURTHOUSE COFFEE's** flower-filled outdoor deck that inspired Mom to make a U-turn mid-block, park in front, and go in to ask if dogs are welcome. The owner told her that not only were dogs welcome on the deck, but also, that there was a bowl of fresh water out there just waiting for some doggie customers. This turned out to be a perfect place to stop. Lots of locals patronize the **COURTHOUSE COFFEE**. Its friendly atmosphere is just the kind of place we enjoy. Dad had a cup of brewed-to-his-order organic fair trade coffee and Mom had a big cup of tea. The house-baked pastries were so tempting that Mom had a scone and Dad had a warm cinnamon bun and, before we left, Mom bought several scones to take home. The **COURTHOUSE COFFEE** is an informal place that serves breakfast and lunch daily and dinner on Friday and Saturday. The breakfast fare is mostly pastries, plus one bagel sandwich with egg, cheese,

and ham. Lunch is sandwiches, salads, and soups. An interesting detail about the metal tables on the deck at **COURTHOUSE COFFEE** is that their tops are etched with a stylized drawing of the Courthouse. We really liked this friendly spot and will return on our next trip to Reno.

While Mom was buying pastries to take home, Dad and I took a short walk on the grounds of the magnificent Placer County Courthouse. This Courthouse is one of four surviving historic California courthouses that retain most of their architectural ornamentation and magnificent domes. It dates back to 1898. A county museum, with a large exhibit of gold nuggets found in Placer County, is housed in the Courthouse. We were so fascinated by Old Town Auburn, that we plan to come back to spend more time exploring the town. On Saturday mornings, from May through October, Placer County Museum docents conduct walking tours of Old Town Auburn. Auburn is a town to enjoy and visit year 'round. If snow does not bother you like it does my parents, consider a winter visit to Auburn.

Once in Reno, we took a quick tour of Frank and Phyllis's neighborhood and, then, headed downtown for lunch at the **SILVER PEAK GRILL & TAP ROOM**. Frank had spoken to the management before our visit and was promised that they will always set a table outside on their covered deck, no matter what the weather, for those who arrive with a dog. We were there on a warm sunny day when the deck was *the* place to sit; I was served a bowl of water and happily enjoyed the people watching. Mom says that her Grilled Ahi Tuna Sandwich, with pickled ginger, tomatoes and wasabi aioli on an onion bun, was the best such sandwich she has ever eaten...Mom is a "nut" about tuna sandwiches, so you can take her opinion seriously. Phyllis's Chinese Chicken Salad looked scrumptious. Dad was happy with his Cobb Sandwich and Frank finished a good portion of the biggest serving of Black Bean Nachos with Chicken that I have ever seen...we all took little tastes of his Nachos.

After this satisfying lunch, we were ready for a walk. Just a few blocks from **SILVER PEAK** is the Truckee River with its paved **RIVER WALK**, with walkways on both sides of the river. The **RIVER WALK** covers a little over a mile of downtown Reno, between the **NATIONAL AUTOMOBILE MUSEUM** and the Booth Street Bridge; other paths follow the river for about seven more miles. We watched kayakers and fishermen in the river and got to see the hotels, shops, apartment houses, mansions, and parks that overlook the River. Taking a walk on the **RIVER WALK** is as peaceful as taking a walk in the country and, yet, you are just a block or two from downtown Reno.

One of Frank and Phyllis's favorite places to hang out is a small shopping center called **MAYBERRY LANDING**. It is here that they go for coffee each morning, alternating between **WALDEN'S COFFEE HOUSE** and the **BACKSTUBE AUSTRIAN CAFE**. Both places have outdoor seating, so I got to spend time at each of them. **WALDEN'S** attracts a younger

## Dog-Friendly Travels with Louie *continued*

crowd, has free WiFi, and is known far and wide for its Open Mic nights on Fridays and live Musician Showcase on Saturday nights. **BACKSTUBE** features incredible Austrian pastries, all baked here, and, for lunch, offers sandwiches, salads, and even Austrian Goulash. Dad adores Linzer Torte and thought **BACKSTUBE**'s to be one of the best he's tasted.

Another highlight of **MAYBERRY LANDING** is the two **HEALTHY TAILS** shops, one for dogs and one for cats. The folks were impressed that **HEALTHY TAILS** carries the Evangers brand dog food that is hard to find closer to home. All the food and treats sold at **HEALTHY TAILS** are natural and safe; their beds, clothing, and toys are Earth-friendly and durable. Mom bought me a special leash, called the *WACKYwalk'r*, that makes it hard for me to pull on her; I got a purple one and we both like using it. At the **HEALTHY TAILS** for cats, Mom found some catnip toys that I gave to my cat friends a Christmas gifts.

Part of our sightseeing included a drive to the **UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO** campus, which is a short distance from downtown. Frank wanted us to see the Equatorial Sundial which stands outside of the **FLEISCHMANN PLANETARIUM AND SCIENCE CENTER**. The metal Sundial is in a grassy area and is said to tell time that is correct to the minute. Mom took a look inside and discovered interesting hands-on exhibits and a nice gift shop. The **PLANETARIUM**'s 60-seat theatre has regular shows that are projected on a dome ceiling. The **PLANETARIUM** building itself is in the shape of a hyperbolic paraboloid. It was designed by Reno architect Ray Hellman, built in 1964, and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings. There are a few picnic tables outside, should you want to picnic here.

Because Frank and Phyllis had planned so many dog-friendly activities for me, the only time I had to stay home was for a few hours in the evening, when they went to the all-you-can eat Maine Lobster Buffet dinner at the **BOOMTOWN CASINO & HOTEL**.

I did manage to go into one casino, although I have since found out that I was not supposed to be there. Mom had seen the **ATLANTIS HOTEL** listed on [www.dogfriendly.com](http://www.dogfriendly.com) and she wanted to check the place out. We walked into the main lobby and casino where Mom gambled a bit, while I observed. Then Frank treated us to homemade gelato at the hotel's **CAFE ALFRESCO**. We took our cups of gelato to a quiet part of the lobby that has comfy leather couches and chairs. No officials from the hotel spoke to me, although several guests came to say "hello," but, Frank said that hotel people were keeping an eye on us. Mom called the hotel after our visit to inquire about the facilities for dogs and was told that dogs must stay in the motorlodge building on the **ATLANTIS** property. Truth be known, while the main hotel looks lovely, the motorlodge looked unappealing from the outside. Guess I will not be staying at or returning to the **ATLANTIS**.

While we were touring Downtown Reno, Mom noticed bright yellow **RTC SIERRA SPIRIT** busses just about everywhere we went. We soon discovered that the **SIERRA SPIRIT** is a *free* bus service to the downtown area, making 32 stops between the University of Nevada and the Nevada Museum of Art. It stops at most of the downtown hotels, public buildings, and sports and cultural venues. The **SIERRA SPIRIT** runs every day, every 10 minutes, from 7 a.m. until 9 p.m. And, there is free WiFi on the busses too! Unless I was a seeing-eye dog, I could not take advantage of the **SIERRA SPIRIT**, but Reno visitors and locals, as well, should take advantage of this wonderful service, whether they arrive here with their own car or come by bus or train...no worry about parking and traffic and you get dropped off right in front of your destination.

### RENO TRIP DETAILS

**COURTHOUSE COFFEE**, 1425 Lincoln Way, Auburn CA; 530/889-1373. Free WiFi.

**OLD TOWN AUBURN**, Highway 49 exit from Highway 80, Auburn CA; [www.oldtownauburnca.com](http://www.oldtownauburnca.com).

**PLACER COUNTY COURTHOUSE & MUSEUM**, 101 Maple St. at Lincoln Way, Auburn CA; 530/889-6500.

□□□□□□□□

**ATLANTIS CASINO RESORT & SPA**, 3800 S. Virginia St. Reno NV; 775/825-4700 or 800/723-6500; [www.atlantiscasino.com/reno](http://www.atlantiscasino.com/reno); accommodations for dogs in the motorlodge building only; dogs not permitted in main lobby and casino; \$25 fee per stay for dogs.

**BACKSTUBE AUSTRIAN BAKERY & CAFE**, 3882 Mayberry Dr. (corner of West McCarran), Reno NV; 775/624-2921.

**BOOMTOWN CASINO & HOTEL**, Interstate 80 Exit 4, Reno NV; 775/345-6000 or 800/648-3790; [www.boomtownreno.com](http://www.boomtownreno.com); Whole Maine Lobster, Steak, & Seafood Buffet Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings: \$25.99 per person, less to Boomtown Rewards Club members (free membership; sign up in casino).

**FLEISCHMANN PLANETARIUM & SCIENCE CENTER**, University of Nevada, Reno, 16th St. entrance off N. Virginia St., 1.5 miles north of the downtown Reno arch; 775/784-4812; <http://planetarium.unr.nevada.edu>; free parking in West Stadium Parking Complex (get free parking pass in the Planetarium Gift Shop).

**HEALTHY TAILS**, 3890 & 3892 Mayberry Dr., Reno NV; 775/787-3647; [www.healthytails.com](http://www.healthytails.com).

**MAYBERRY LANDING**, corner Mayberry Dr. & West McCarran; Reno NV.

**NATIONAL AUTOMOBILE MUSEUM** (the Harrah Collection), 10 S. Lake St. at Mill), Reno NV; 775/333-9300; [www.automuseum.org](http://www.automuseum.org).

**RIVER WALK** downtown Reno for about 1.3 miles, along the Truckee River.

**RTC SIERRA SPIRIT**, *free* Regional Transportation Commission bus service daily in Downtown Reno, between University of Nevada and the Nevada Museum of Art; every 10 minutes 7 a.m. – 9 p.m. daily; special service to events; free WiFi; 775/348-7433; [www.rtcwashoe.com](http://www.rtcwashoe.com).

**SILVER PEAK GRILL & TAP ROOM**, 135 N. Sierra St., Reno NV; 775 284 3300; [www.silverpeakbrewery.com](http://www.silverpeakbrewery.com).

**WALDEN'S COFFEE HOUSE**, 3940 Mayberry Dr. (corner of West McCarran), Reno NV; 775/787-3370; [www.waldenscoffeehouse.com](http://www.waldenscoffeehouse.com); free WiFi; open mic Friday nights and live music Saturday nights. □

## Restaurant Roundup

After all the rich food and festive meals that go along with December holiday celebrations, come the New Year, I find comfort in dining at some of my old-favorite restaurants. These are two casual restaurants where I never tire of dining.

### AJANTA

1888 Solano Ave., Berkeley; 510/526-4373; [www.ajantarestaurant.com](http://www.ajantarestaurant.com)  
Open Daily for Lunch & Dinner

Each month I receive **AJANTA's** monthly newsletter and am always tempted by the descriptions of that month's featured regional Indian dishes.

The restaurant is a comfortable neighborhood place, with Indian artwork, inspired by the caves of Ajanta, decorating the wall.

Three new dishes are featured on the menu and three other dishes are discontinued, each month, from the regular menu. The January special dishes are Chicken Biryani, Pork Vindaloo, and Smbhar with Vegetables. The monthly newsletter describes each dish in great detail and includes chef/owner Lachu Moorjani's comments on his reason for including it on the menu. I was intrigued to read that only one Biryani is featured on **AJANTA's** menu at a time because of its long and elaborate preparation.

I always discover a new taste when I dine at **AJANTA**. I recommend **AJANTA** to those unfamiliar with the cuisine of India. The staff is so helpful in describing the menu items, that you feel like you are dining in the home of Indian friends.

Unlike many Indian restaurants, **AJANTA** has an outstanding wine list with selections that compliment the food perfectly.

□□□□□□□□

### BACK FORTY BARBEQUE

In Pleasant Hill, Roseville, San Ramon, and Shingle Springs  
[www.backfortytexasbbq.com](http://www.backfortytexasbbq.com)

I am always in the mood for a barbecue meal. **BACK FORTY's** style is Texas barbecue, with a menu that includes ribs, chicken, turkey, pork and sausage, along with more than half a dozen side dishes (fixin's). Lunch and dinner platters include your choice of barbecue along with two fixin's and your choice of cornbread, banana nut bread, or a mini loaf of white bread. BBQ sandwiches, salads, appetizers and desserts round out the menu at this family-friendly restaurant.

Prices are moderate; servings are generous. Their Carry Out menu offers the perfect meal for a big football weekend. We've even had them cater one of Louie's birthday parties. □

## Discoveries & Notes

*Las Vegas is fun, whenever you visit*

### LAS VEGAS

Most of the luxury hotels in Las Vegas offer some very tempting winter rates. The weather at this time of year is much like the weather in Northern California...you won't be spending much time at the outdoor pool, but there is always plenty to do and see.

The **MIRAGE** is offering rooms from as low as \$79 a night, through March 21, 2007. Looking on the **MGM GRAND's** web site, we found rates starting at \$90 for bookings in February. The **BELLAGIO** and the **VENETIAN** also have bargain rates on selected nights. If you can be flexible about the dates of your visit, you can often book a room at a rate that is significantly lower than the rack rate. Call the hotel of your choice directly, look at hotel web sites, contact your favorite airline for Las Vegas packages, and check the Sunday newspaper Travel Section.

When Jim and I visited Las Vegas last summer (my choice for a special birthday celebration), some of the highlights of our visit included **M & M's WORLD**, a **GONDOLA RIDE** at the Venetian Hotel, and seeing **ELTON JOHN'S THE RED PIANO** show at Caesar's Palace.

**M & M's WORLD** (3785 Las Vegas Blvd., next to the MGM Grand; 702/736-7611) is a four-story entertainment complex dedicated to all things M & M's. Jim and I spent over two hours at **M & M's WORLD**, just having fun. Admission to **M & M's**

**WORLD** is free. We arrived shortly after the 9 a.m. opening time and first headed to the top floor to the M & M's Racing Team exhibit which centers around a replica of car #38, the M & M's sponsored NASCAR racing car. There are M & M's logo items for sale on each floor; on this floor much of the attire had an auto racing theme. One floor down is the 3-D movie theatre where we viewed an animation about the adventures of characters *Red* and *Yellow*. The main attraction on the second floor is a wall of M & M's dispensers where you can serve yourself to create bags of your favorite colors of M & M's. You are charged by the pound. I filled several bags with my personal color mixes. And, I got to sample and purchase pastel-colored White Chocolate M & M's, a product that has not yet gone into wide distribution. The first floor is more of a gift shop for shoppers who want to make a quick stop to buy souvenirs. I must admit that I found things to buy on each level, including a pillow in the shape of the *Green* character,

### March/April Previews

What's happening at the San Francisco Presidio?

□□□

Notes from Seattle & Phoenix area getaways

## Discoveries & Notes *continued*

a dog tag with my name on it, and several pounds of personally-selected M & M's candies. I knew I was going to have fun at **M & M's WORLD**, but was pleasantly surprised that Jim had even more fun...he wanted to stay even longer.

The last time I was in Las Vegas, I did not have time for the long wait to take the **GONDOLA RIDE** on the Venetian Hotel's own version of the Grand Canal. This time, I was prepared to wait for a ride, regardless of the amount of time. We bought our tickets (\$15 per person plus \$20 for an optional photo) first thing, for a ride a few hours later. Then, we used the wait time to wander through the Venetian's shops and to view some of the free performances in "St. Marks Square." The **GONDOLA RIDE** was as authentic as one in Venice, including our singing gondolier, who kept us entertained. It does not take my being in Las Vegas very before the lines between fantasy and reality start to blur. As long as I stayed inside the Venetian, I was in Venice.

Jim told me I could splurge on one big show during our stay. I had decided on Celine Dion, but, it turned out that we were there during one of her vacations. Elton John takes over her theatre when she is gone with his **THE RED PIANO** show. The show was a perfect alternative and was delightfully entertaining but, I must advise family groups that the video imagery that serves as a backdrop to the show can be a bit risqué and surprising.

We left Las Vegas for a day to take a **SCENIC AIRLINES** tour of the **GRAND CANYON**. Neither Jim nor I had ever been to the Grand Canyon and we were a bit disappointed that we spent more time waiting in the airport and in flight than we did in the **GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK**. As is the case with many tours, there were crowds and we had limited time at each stop. This day trip did give us our first look at the **GRAND CANYON** and provided us with ideas on what to do for future visits. We plan to return on our own and stay in the Park for at least one night, allowing us to enjoy it at our leisure.

Our meals were fun and memorable. Our most elegant dinners were both in the Paris Hotel. My birthday dinner was at the **EIFFEL TOWER RESTAURANT** (702/948-6937; www.eiffeltowerrestaurant.com) where we drank Champagne and feasted on "Le Menu," the fixed-price (\$89 per person) multiple-course meal. Our meal included an Amuse Bouche of three tiny hors d'oeuvres, Lobster Salad, Cream of Asparagus Soup, Halibut with Fennel and Artichokes, Rack of Lamb, Petit Fours, and our choice of dessert: a Raspberry Napoleon for me and a Chocolate Soufflé for Jim. We had a view of the dancing waters at the Bellagio Hotel across the street from our window table. Having eaten at the real Eiffel Tower restaurant in Paris a few years ago, I decided that I prefer the Las Vegas version for its updated classic French cuisine.

Our other Paris Hotel meal was at **MON AMI GABI** (702/944-4224; www.monamigabi.com), a lively bistro on the first level of the hotel; it has indoor and outdoor seating. We dined here after our day at the Grand Canyon and were able to be seated without reservations. I ordered Skate, Jim chose Halibut and we

shared an order of perfect French Fries. For dessert, we shared Profiteroles. We were here on the eve of Bastille Day and the dining room was already decorated for the next day's festivities. When we walked out into the hotel lobby, we came upon Cancan dancers, performing on the casino floor; I thought I was in Paris.

Our less formal meals included a lively lunch of Conch Fritters and Boiled Spicy Shrimp at **MARGARITAVILLE** (702/733-3302) in the Flamingo Hotel and the most elegant and tasty of hamburgers at **BURGER BAR** (702/632-9364), San Francisco Chef Hubert Keller's burger diner in the Mandalay Bay Hotel. At **BURGERBAR**, choices range from humble beef, lamb, turkey or veggie burgers (about \$6) to a Kobe beef burger with truffles and foie gras (about \$60). The place is fun, far from ordinary, and a good value no matter what your choice. □

*The Great Mall gets an important "boost"*

### LAST CALL IN THE GREAT MALL

Just as we are going to press, we've learned that the Neiman Marcus clearance store, **LAST CALL**, has opened a branch in the **GREAT MALL** in Milpitas. **LAST CALL** is where the left over merchandise from the full price Neiman Marcus stores goes after their in-store "Last Call" sales. This is the place to find those 7 jeans, that Kate Spade purse, or that Dolce & Gabbana jacket, at a fraction of its retail price. Most merchandise is priced at about 25% of its full retail price. And, there is much more than clothing and gift items at **LAST CALL**. You'll also find furniture and home furnishings from the Horchow (catalog and online) collection.

Of course shopping at **LAST CALL** is nothing like shopping in a Neiman Marcus retail store (Bay Area stores are in San Francisco at the corner of Stockton and Geary Streets and in Palo Alto in the Stanford Shopping Center). At **LAST CALL** you have to work for your bargains, going through rounder after rounder of clothing or shelves of randomly stacked gift items. The later in the day that you get to the store, the messier the store will be. But, for the bargain hunter, this can be a rewarding pursuit.

The only other California **LAST CALL** is located in **THE SHOPS AT LAS AMERICAS** outlet center in San Diego.

My only experience, to date, with **LAST CALL** has been in South Florida, where, whenever I am there, I make a visit to the **LAST CALL** in the **SAWGRASS MILLS** outlet mall in Sunrise, Florida. Even if I cannot find clothing for myself or Jim, I usually find some special gift item or packaged gourmet food that makes my trip worthwhile.

#### LAST CALL IN THE GREAT MALL

1230 Great Mall Dr., Milpitas; 408/941-1623

Mon. – Sat. 10 a.m. – 9 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m. – 8 p.m.

Entrance Two from the parking lot is the closest entrance to the store.