

Here's another sample from San Diego Magazine (Aug. 2002)

Eats Down the Street

Neighborhood eateries, nearby or not, offer more than the comforts of home

*By Robin Kleven Dishon
Photographs by Skip O'Donnell*

What makes a great "neighborhood restaurant?" And what makes a neighborhood restaurant great?

For some diners, it's simply an eatery that's close to home—a five-minute drive, a 10-minute walk. It's a matter of convenience over commute. But sheer proximity means Domino's and In-N-Out qualify for the term—and that's not what we had in mind.

A neighborhood restaurant is something more ineffable. It might be a Cheers-style establishment, where regulars abound and everybody knows your name. Could be a comfortable all-ages eatery, owned and frequented by generations of families. It's often a place with a comfy bar, where good conversation comes easily and you can eat right there.



3rd Corner

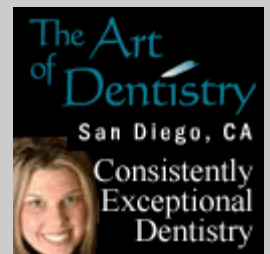
One thing is sure: A neighborhood restaurant is a place to meet old friends, to make new ones and, above all, to feel at home.

3rd Corner
2265 Bacon Street, Ocean Beach, 619-223-2700

Moving into the former site of the much-loved Belgian Lion, 3rd Corner practically inherited a devoted neighborhood clientele. That means owner Ed Moore (who also runs Thee Bungalow across the street) is working hard to keep those fans and gain new ones.

Point Loma resident Joe Wambaugh, the best-selling author, admits he misses former owner/chef Don Coulon's cooking, but he gives the new restaurant rave reviews for its stylish décor, hard-working staff and winning ways with fish and seafood. "I always send the bartender back to the kitchen to tell me which is the freshest fish they have today, and order that," says Wambaugh.

Despite the spacious dining room and alfresco patio, Wambaugh and other habitués invariably socialize at the bar. "It's as comfortable a bar as I know of, just a terrific place to eat," he says. The menu, a modish blend of French and Mediterranean influences, offers plenty of opportunity for grazing with ahi carpaccio, steamed mussels, chicken liver pâté and lots of salads, plus dinner entrées and desserts.



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Kensington Grill

4055 Adams Avenue, Kensington, 619-281-4014

Warm staff, frosty martinis, cool contemporary art and red-hot linguine with rock shrimp—these are a few of our favorite things about Kensington Grill. So are the funky old pool table, the serene, candlelit dining room and the bustling bar, where customers are welcome to chow down as they drink up. Plenty of regulars simply walk in from the surrounding neighborhood, ready to catch up on local news and gossip. But the place also attracts fans from throughout the city, who cite the imaginative drinks, extensive wine list and amiable bartenders and servers as big draws.

“The level of service offers just the right attention to detail,” says longtime patron Caren Folbré. “They know their food and wine, and they’re happy to introduce you to something you aren’t familiar with. You just feel very comfortable here. You feel like you belong.”

So many of us feel that we belong here, in fact, that at press time the restaurant was planning an expansion into an adjacent office area, with plans to double the size of the dining room and create space for private parties. But don’t worry, regulars—this is one place that will never outgrow its unpretentious, neighborly vibe.

Fifth & Hawthorn

515 Hawthorn Street, downtown, 619-544-0940

When it comes to beloved neighborhood eateries, Fifth & Hawthorn just may be in a class by itself. Not only is the cuisine consistently good, regulars say, the staff is outstanding. Fans rave about “the friendliest service in town.” These folks know their customers—and genuinely enjoy their customers.

Longtime regulars Doug and Lauren Wilson have dined here several times monthly for more than a dozen years. “We call this place a club,” says Doug, adding that the restaurant draws a vibrant clientele of actors, writers and other creative types. “We always say to our friends, ‘Are you going to the club tonight?’ It’s just a breeding ground for fun.”

Camaraderie isn’t the only attraction; quality fare and low prices also take center stage. The nightly wine dinner for two—with a choice of several entrées, plus an appetizer, soup or salad, dessert and a bottle of wine, is just \$46.95 a couple.

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The Venetian

3663 Voltaire Street, Point Loma, 619-223-8197

The Venetian isn’t just popular with the young families and older couples who make it a regular destination. Drop in here any night and you’re also likely to see local restaurateurs and chefs, TV personalities and the occasional restaurant critic—all attracted by the mix of hospitality, well-prepared Italian food and relaxed setting. The small bar generally has a handful of folks watching a ballgame, catching up with friends or waiting for takeout pizza over a Margarita or draft beer. Nearby, couples cuddle in booths while large parties (everyone from Little League teams to rehearsal dinner parties) take over the tables in the patio.

Standout dishes include chicken or veal marsala, chicken piccata and a special baked halibut—followed by one of the top tiramisus in town. The place gets noisy at times, but that just adds to the festive, homey feel of this Point Loma institution, which has been operated by the Giacalone family since 1965.

Turf Supper Club

1116 25th Street, Golden Hill, 619-234-6363

The name conjures posh images of the Del Mar racetrack, but this dimly lit bar and do-it-yourself grill is actually a part of Golden Hill history. Originally opened in 1950, it was reborn in 1998 with savvy new management and a self-assured sense of retro style. Racing photos paper the walls, while funky hanging lamps and glowing fuchsia ceiling lights create an irresistible noir atmosphere.

Although customers rate the potent cosmopolitans, rock-bottom prices and eclectic jukebox selection equally highly, it's the cook-your-own-steak shtick that really sets the Supper Club apart. Order your meat from the server, then spend some time jockeying for a vacant spot on the community grill while cocktail-ing, conversing with strangers and swaying to the music. You'll get the real flavor of this neighborhood treasure, where a terrific surf 'n' turf combo (a seafood skewer and steak) sells for just \$8.75. The ambience? Priceless.

Adams Avenue Grill

2201 Adams Avenue, University Heights, 619-298-8440

Adams Avenue Grill is really two eateries in one: a sunny, informal lunch spot by day and a gently sophisticated dinner destination by night. Whatever the time of day, contented conversation and bursts of laughter fill the sociable dining room, where nearly every table offers a view of the front door and the passing sidewalk scene. The room is a popular gathering spot for birthday meals and other momentous occasions but is just as well suited to a quick dinner before heading off to a show.

The young staff has a knack for remembering faces and catering to special tastes; in fact, one regular here says the kitchen is happy to cater to children, with custom-made servings of plain pasta or omelets. Guests of all ages rave about the desserts (think chocolate-chip cheesecake). The bar here is compact—just a counter with about eight high stools—so it's best to wait for a table if you're having an entire meal. Hang out and nosh on the signature red-onion rings while you wait.

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