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# The renewal of Balboa Street in San Francisco's Outer Richmond

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Butter Love Bake Shop  
*Beverly Mann*

In the past three to five years, a new life has revitalized the quiet neighborhood along Balboa Street in San Francisco's Outer Richmond District. Two 12-foot monuments, decorated in brightly colored tiles, act as the gateway to Balboa Street from 34th to 39th Avenues. Nestled within is a diversity of established businesses undergoing changes, along with some new modern, artsy [cafes](#), bakeries, and restaurants.

Kudos also go to the Department of Public Works and a renewal plan back in 2006, involving the work of landscape architects Martha Ketteren, John Dennis, and Nick Ancel, to improve and enhance the sidewalks, along with such changes as decorative planters with cobblestone walls and energy efficient light fixtures.

Marjan Philhour, a contender for Richmond District supervisor, has been working with several merchants to help create a merchants association in this area. She sees the recent Halloween First Annual Balboa Fright Fest was one way of getting merchants together as they provided treats to neighborhood children as part of an organized scavenger hunt.

The 96-year-old veteran on the block, the **Balboa Theater**, has undergone some recent changes. The addition of a digital projector four years ago was a big step forward, though the 35 mm projector was kept to show some of the older classics. The theater will soon be having a remodeling of its lobby and will be serving beer, wine, and hot food. The upcoming hosted



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Balboa Oscar Party continues to be a draw with many guests dressing up as their favorite movie characters, while enjoying the presentation of awards on an immense screen, which beats the television.

In the past few years, several restaurants and cafes have emerged with flavorful, fresh menus, baked goods, espresso drinks, and upcoming winemaking dinners. All this adds a new feel, color, and rhythm to Balboa Street.

Owner Chet Tong of the three-year-old **La Promenade Café** has used his artistic abilities to paint a trompe l'oeil Parisian café scene in the main entrance of his spacious establishment directly opposite the movie theater. Originally from Cambodia, Tong and his wife and co-owner Early lived and met in Bordeaux, France. They wanted to bring a French feel to the café which is emphasized also by the large hanging Impressionist-style painting and décor. The reasonable menu features ample, tasty sandwiches and salads, and the roomy back area has a library feel, with used books for sale at only \$5.00. Some occasional evening events have been added, from poetry readings to jazz and bluegrass music.

Just a few blocks away sits the modern **Cassava** serving a savory menu of breakfast, brunch, lunch, and dinner, with winemaking dinners forthcoming for the new year. Presently, they serve a four-course tasting menu with wine pairing. Such exotic fare included on the menus are starters of smoked sweet potato and celery root chowder, fennel crusted pork loin, a randwich (not sandwich) consisting of herb turkey, avocado and a poached egg with basil walnut pesto. Owner Yuka Iroi and owner/chef Kris Toliao also bring their cultural experiences to the table with a Japanese breakfast served daily. Desserts of chocolate mousse and almond pot de crème add a piece de resistance to the diverse menu.

Speaking of desserts, **Butter Love Bake Shop** has drawn an impressive following after opening just a month ago. The café and bakery lures its customer through their popular crusty pies and croissants, and savory apple and pear galettes. You can be assured that everything is made from pure butter by the masterful hands of Josh Perez and Esa Yonn-Brown.

**Marla Bakery & Restaurant** is yet another new addition to the neighborhood with a comfy outdoor patio. Less than two years at this location, originally on Mission Street, Marla is best known for creating fresh breads and baked goods piping hot from a wood firing oven. Wednesday dinners are served with wine and sherry.

If you need to work off the calories, **Purusha Yoga Studio** nearby may be the solution. This holistic and integrative school offers a wide range of classes and yearly teacher training courses, including specialized certifications in Thai Yoga Body Work and Yoga Therapy. Yoga is also a great way to start or end any day and to add a sense of centering and revitalization

for one's personal renewal.

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