

fresh meat

new restaurant reviews

**Monk's Kettle**

3141 16th St.
Cross: Albion St.
(near Valencia St.)
San Francisco, CA 94103

415-865-9523

[website](#)

Mon–Fri 12pm–2am
Sat–Sun 11:30am–2am
Kitchen until 1am

Apps \$5–9.50
Entrées \$9.50–\$18
Desserts \$6.50

MARCH 25, 2008 | SAN FRANCISCO Suds are HOT. People are embracing beer right now like it's vodka circa 2001. But no, we're in 2008, and the West Coast has caught Belgian fever, or at least a gastropub gastrointestinal bug. Beer and bites joints are popping up all over the place, but I almost can't believe how the ~MONK'S KETTLE~ in the Mission has completely blown the hell up. Talk about a runaway hit. Hopefully when the outdoor seating gets approved, there will be a little more room for people to enjoy what's on tap at this charming tavern.

What makes this place so pop-star popular? Well, the location is primo Mission real estate; the list of beers is outstanding (I could read it and taste from it for days); the décor strikes a good balance between cool and cozy; the food is approachable, made with quality ingredients, and served until late (the main menu ends at 10pm, but there's an extensive late-night menu until 1am!); the eclectic music is spot-on good; and the staff is notably friendly, pretension-free, and knowledgeable.

Adding to the list of attractive qualities, I spotted some cute guys, plus some cute chicks too—but the crowd gets a little young as the evening wears on. Am I getting old? No, I'm 36, so while I'm certainly not in cougar or Mrs. Robinson territory just yet, I was feeling a bit of an age gap around 11pm on a Thursday night. Oh wait, most people my age should be home at that time on a school night, right. I didn't get that fax.

I've been by twice midweek, and both times the place is just packed. Sardines city. And loud. I can't even imagine the scene on a weekend, and I feel bad for the servers navigating the floor. After a little while people will eventually vacate a seat at the intimate bar, or you can put your name down on the list for a table (waits average 45 minutes to an hour). But I say if you score a seat at the bar, order up and cancel your table (a beer in the hand is worth two at the table). It's crazy busy like the SPQR of the 94103. And I'm not sure when it's a good time to come by. Maybe late lunch. Good luck.

Chef Kevin Kroger uses good ingredients, with Niman products and all kinds of local and organic purveyors, like Knoll Farms and County Line produce, and Marshall's Farm honey. The pub-style menu is huge considering how small the kitchen is—not quite sure how they're doing it, but I'm tempted to suggest trimming it down a little for tighter quality control.

Vegans can tuck into a bowl of Jude's chili (\$6.50), and vegetarians reportedly dig the black bean cakes (\$8.75) resting on roasted corn salsa (I thought it needed a hit of acid—the lime kind, not the Timothy Leary kind). Carnivores really should make a move for the pork chop (\$18), a cider-brined number with a dollop of stone ground mustard cream sauce, Brussels sprouts, and a crispy cheddar scallion potato cake (once too salty, once just right)—it's a beast of a dish for \$18, a total man pleaser. I've tried the chop twice, and both times it was juicy and savory.


Depending on your appetite, you can just nosh on a buttery giant pretzel (\$6.50) with a cheddar ale sauce (a little bland) and stone-ground mustard (better), and sporting a springy, juicy dough, or perhaps you'll be happy grazing a charcuterie plate (\$14.50). I tried the bruschetta (\$9.50)—two big slices of bread with cannellini bean puree, sautéed wild mushrooms, and white cheddar—a bit unwieldy to eat, but tasty, and beer friendly.

There's also an array of salads in the "ruffage" section (which makes me laugh), like four. The salads all read really well and interesting, but the vinaigrettes and dressings never quite hit the mark, even the simple side

salad—they need to be dialed in a bit more.

The Niman burger (\$10.50) is house ground, dense, and good—cooked just as we ordered it, and yay, it's served on a grilled bun! All I wanted was a pickle. Fries were okay, but on a second visit were hotter and crispy. Another time I tried the pulled pork sandwich (\$11.25), with a mess factor that was on par with a sloppy Joe, so I needed to fork and knife it. I only could eat half of it... I got full, but my palate also got a little bored. The side of jicama slaw was fine, but too mild to counteract the strong BBQ sauce flavor. I wanted more chunks of good porky pork, less sauce.

This is where a refreshing beer comes in. The menu has all kinds of suggested pairings, but the capable hands of the bartenders are where you want to be. They'll give you tastes in little leprechaun-sized mini steins, absolutely precious. There are Belgians, local brews, Lambics, Saisons, Sonoma beers, German beers... it's a melee (24 draughts, and over 100 in the bottle). There's even Hitachino White Ale from Japan. Check out a [PDF](#) of the list yourself. Everything comes in proper glassware too. But don't fret, it's not like it's ALL serious—there are even some "Grampa's Beers," including Oly in a can.

The style is clever, with a number of reclaimed and repurposed items—including the dramatic back bar which I think was originally from a fireplace (I was drinking, sorry, can't remember for sure) and a fun use of formerly vintage overhead lighting. The lighting here is flattering and comfortable, I love all the wood, I say thanks for the hooks under the bar, and it's fun watching people draw and play hangman on the blackboard in the back while waiting for a table, or just kickin' it over a beer—actually, what is probably a mighty delicious beer. Cheers to owners Christian Albertson and Nat Cutler for doing such a commendable job on their first effort. 



O Izakaya Lounge

Hotel Kabuki
1625 Post St.
Cross: Laguna St.
San Francisco, CA 94115

415-614-5431

[website](#)

Dinner
Daily 5pm–10pm
Bar
5pm–12am

Apps \$3–\$12
Larger plates \$12–\$19
Desserts \$7

MARCH 25, 2008 | SAN FRANCISCO I am thrilled that izakaya is becoming a household word. Well, it's not quite "mac 'n' cheese" or "taqueria" yet, but based on all the recent openings in the City, it's well on its way. ~O IZAKAYA LOUNGE~ opened in the Hotel Kabuki, taking over the former Dot Bar and Lounge space. I must admit I never quite made it to the previous business, "Lord of Balls"—I wasn't very clear on the concept, and wasn't quite sure I wanted to be (I will refrain from making any vulgar comments). Anyway, since I've been happily catching more flicks lately at the awesome Sundance Kabuki, I've been exploring Japantown and the dining options around there a bit more than usual.

Normally, I wouldn't even consider dining at a "sports lounge," and as far as I'm concerned, the seven flat screen TVs playing live sports might as well be Kryptonite, an East Coast snowstorm, and the scary banjo player from Deliverance all rolled into one. (Read: not appealing.) In the future, I'm going to have to make sure there isn't a game being broadcast that night if I'm going to want some of chef Nicolaus Balla's vittles—fellow non-sports fans, you might want to follow suit. Sports fans, however, you'll be one happy camper.

The space is comfortable and not very big, with folks hanging around the round bar, and diners either parked in the spacious booths, or the smaller tables flanking the room. It's not rowdy like my fave, [Oyajii](#) but it's partly because there are more couples dining here, or solo diners/drinkers at the bar, and not as many of the larger groups like what you'll see at other izakayas around town. The wallpaper made of a print of vintage Japanese baseball cards is super clever, but the bizarre iPod mix of pop music and other random tracks needs a little reining in.

Since it's a bar, you can order a cocktail (I don't recommend the Joie de Veev—I love açai, but in this drink's case, you might as well just drink the Veev straight), or a Sapporo (on tap, hello!), or shochu or sake—there are some good ones to choose from, but I'd like to see a couple