

GRAND TOUR

Traveling Gourmet

A GOURMET GETAWAY TO SAN FRANCISCO

By Diana von Welanetz Wentworth

SOME PEOPLE ARE BORN with thousands more taste buds than others, according to recent medical research. This news came as confirmation for what I've suspected since childhood, when I would shiver in revulsion after being forced to eat something I loathed. Having such a sensitive palate became a great blessing and led to my 25-year career as a cookbook author and television cooking show host with my late husband Paul von Welanetz.

My current husband Ted (he claims to be my late husband, saying Paul was my early husband) loves food too, and we often say we travel on our tummies. Our favorite gourmet getaway is a weekend trip to San Francisco, where we stay in a corner room at the fabulously remodeled Mark Hopkins Intercontinental.

We like to leave early on a Friday morning so we arrive before two, in time for our favorite dim sum (literally *to touch the heart*) at Yank Sing at 49 Stevenson Street between 1st and 2nd. Another, much larger location is at One Rincon Plaza, but we prefer the intimacy of the smaller restaurant.

The moment we are seated, a glass pot of steaming jasmine tea is set before us to sip while we choose small plates from an unending parade of passing carts. There are steamed dumplings of shrimp, scallops, lobster, chicken and vegetables, spinach, and snow pea shoot with ginger, garlic, and sesame oil; fried tidbits like stuffed crab claws, shrimp toasts and egg rolls; or steamed white buns to fill with crisp Peking duck, scalions and tangy hoisin sauce.

After eating our fill of this succulent light fare, we share a



dessert of sesame balls and mango pudding, and emerge energized for a walk and shopping in nearby Union Square.

Our first choice for a romantic dinner is the elegant but not stuffy four-star La Folie at 2316 Polk Street (between Green and Union), where we can savor exquisite food and flawless service from a warm and attentive staff in an environment that allows for quiet conversation. The front room, newly redecorated in shades of copper and amber, is gorgeous.

Chef Roland Passot, a protégé of Jean Banchet—owner of what is considered the best French restaurant in the United States, Le Francais near Chicago—and a favorite of Julia Child for his innovative take on French cuisine,

offers 3- to 5-course *prix-fixe* meals ranging from \$65 to \$85 (three courses are ample, as servings are generous). *Goat Cheese Tatin*—stacked rounds of artichokes hearts, Portobello mushrooms and tomato confit in a pool of creamy olive oil and tomato Sauce Vierge, and specked with bright green pearls of basil pesto, was the star of our recent visit. Chef Roland will probably emerge from the kitchen to greet you at your table. To see more of him, go to www.lafolie.com, a sophisticated website with streaming videos showing behind-the-scenes activity in the busy kitchen, and even a recipe demonstration by the chef, whisking an olive oil, sherry vinegar and shallot dressing for wedges of heirloom tomatoes from the local farmer's market.

Speaking of which, Saturday morning the Ferry Building Marketplace is the place to be. That's when stalls of local ven-