



One Market Restaurant in San Francisco

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On a whirlwind weekend, with so many things to do in San Francisco, travel writer Sandy Bornstein and her husband had the chance to have a very memorable meal at an innovative farm-to-table restaurant in San Francisco’s Financial District. Here, Sandy gives RealFoodTraveler.com readers a taste of what can be experienced there.

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Chocolate Mousse dessert at One Market.

San Francisco is known for its world-class attractions and its spectacular food choices. With only a weekend in town at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square, my husband and I had to choose our San Francisco restaurant experiences wisely. We were looking for a well-established restaurant that offered a farm-to-table cuisine. In an era of trendy eateries that come and go, it's a pleasure to find a place that has lasted for decades. When an opportunity to dine at One Market was extended, Ira and I gladly accepted.

Meet Chef Dommen of One Market restaurant in One Market



One Market's Chef Dommen and his chefs in the kitchen.



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Upon arrival, the host escorted us to a long counter at the rear of the restaurant. The open kitchen was on the other side of the counter. We were just steps away from Chef Mark Dommen, his chefs, and the kitchen staff.

Prior to leading the culinary staff at One Market in 2004, Chef Dommen had learned from some of the best chefs in the world. I asked Chef Dommen about some of his mentors and he shared the following about Chef Hubert Keller.

“I was very young and focusing on the basics so his impact on my actual cooking style was less than others. However, he did teach me the attention to details and the basics, which became my foundation and allowed me to develop a style later on.”

He went on to say, “Gray Kunz taught me techniques I had never seen before. For example—how to cook fish properly and how to make amazing sauces. Techniques I still use today. Jean Louis taught me more about whole animals and great local products. Again, something I still seek out today.”

Chef Dommen had never met or worked with Julia Child prior to his position as Executive Chef of Julia’s Kitchen. This was the first and only time that Julia Child allowed her name to be used on a restaurant of any type. Chef Dommen cooked for her about half a dozen times. One memorable event was for her 90th birthday celebration at Copia: American Center for Wine, Food and the Arts (2001 to 2008). Chef Dommen chuckled when he said, “the day after her birthday celebration, Julia came into the restaurant and wanted a hamburger for lunch.”

A few years after Chef Dommen took over at One Market, he earned One Market’s first Michelin star. In 2018, the restaurant celebrates its 25th anniversary.

An Open Kitchen That Resembles a World Class Orchestra

I kept glancing at the chefs diligently working together to prepare the night’s menu items. Chef Dommen oversaw the entire production. It was like a fine orchestra that followed the rhythm and motion of the conductor’s baton. Each person had a designated place and part to play in the production.



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Chefs in the kitchen at One Market, hard at work preparing food for a busy restaurant.

All worked in harmony as the restaurant's patrons came and went and the sky darkened over the streets of San Francisco. Some individuals prepared foods for cooking. Other chefs seared and sautéed food over a blazing fire as beads of sweat formed on their foreheads. Occasionally, foods were slipped into a lower oven. Nothing appeared to be done in haste. Each heated plate was put together like a piece of artwork.

Chef Dommen scrutinized each dish that was put before him. A pinch or two of salt or some type of spice or liquid was sprinkled on the food and then the plate was handed off to the wait staff. I only saw one piece of meat that was rejected. Chef Dommen politely asked the preparer to remake the entrée. The request was addressed quickly and without reservation.

Having a bird's-eye view of the kitchen provided a preview of many of the night's dishes. We simultaneously absorbed the delectable combination of food aromas that emanated from the sizzling pans and the steam from the hot oven. By the time our food was placed on the counter, our senses were in overdrive.

Starters

A bit tired from our earlier drive from Sonoma County and our self-guided tour of

a San Francisco museum, I hesitated when selecting items from the seasonal, farm fresh menu. There were simply too many French and American inspired selections that offered a unique twist in preparation. As we dilly-dallied, Chef Dommen treated us to something that didn't appear on the menu.



A little bit of this and that was a treat for Sandy and her husband, from Chef Dommen.

Our long rectangular plate presented a sampling of four appetizers.

- Snapper ceviche with jalapeno peppers sat on a mini tortilla.
- Mushroom filled with risotto
- Twice baked mini potato
- Strawberry gazpacho soup that had hints of jicama, red bell pepper, lemon, and sage.

In the meantime, my husband ordered a soft shell crab starter with crushed carrots, harissa, and a salsa verde. I chose a halibut appetizer that was modified to accommodate my dietary request.



Softshell crab at One Market.

During our dining experience, Chef Dommen took a short break from his routine and strolled over to chat several times. It turned out we are kindred spirits who shared our mutual love of mountain sports and our desire to spend quality time with our families. While conversing, he insisted that we both try his signature grilled Spanish Octopus dish with avocado and a red pepper puree. I politely declined his suggestion. Ira was a bit more adventuresome and quickly acquiesced.



Grilled octopus at One Market.

Chef Dommen's second choice was the pan-seared scallops with morel mushrooms, a roasted spring onion, and a tarragon herb emulsion. Even though we were eating far more than we initially anticipated, we were happy to taste a few more of the chef's delicious favorites.



A scallop dish with morels at One Market.

The Crescendo — Our Entrees

Ira and I tend to order different entrees so we can taste a bit of the other's choice. This time, we both ended up ordering the same dish—an olive oil poached Alaskan Halibut with carolina, blue lake and yellow wax beans and an anchovy-caper vinaigrette. We were not disappointed.



The Alaskan Halibut entree at One Market.

Finishing Touch

The dessert prep area was a short distance away. As the wait staff strolled by with trays filled with sweetness, I couldn't help but admire the stunning presentations. When it was time to order dessert, Ira and I were close to being satiated. If I didn't order dessert, I instinctively knew that I would regret the decision. During my earlier previews of the dessert trays, I had eyed a chocolate dessert. The chocolate passion fruit mousse ended up being my top choice. Ira selected a Coconut Tres Leches. Our One Market dinner ended on a high note.

Memorable restaurants have three things in common: fresh ingredients combined into delicious food items, amazing presentations, and exceptional service. After 25 years of serving San Franciscans, One Market continues to master all of these criteria.



Tres Leches dessert from One Market.


Building on decades of culinary experience, Chef Dommen added his innovative touch to his menu by infusing multiple layers of flavor and texture into every dish. That evening, Ira and I witnessed the creative artistry behind the placement of each ingredient and the desire by Chef Dommen to confirm that each plate was perfect before it left the kitchen. Even though we were far removed from the other customers, we never felt forgotten. — *Story by Sandy Bornstein. Photos courtesy The Traveling Bornsteins.*

Learn more about One Market, [here](#).

Hungry for more? Get tips for things to do in San Francisco on a whirlwind weekend with Sandy’s article, [here](#).

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Sandy Bornstein



Sandy has visited more than 40 countries and lived as an international teacher in Bangalore, India. Sandy’s award-winning book, *May This Be the Best Year of Your Life*, is a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. Sandy writes about food, family, intergenerational, and active midlife adventures highlighting land and water experiences, historical sites, and Jewish culture and history. You can follow Sandy on Facebook and Instagram.

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