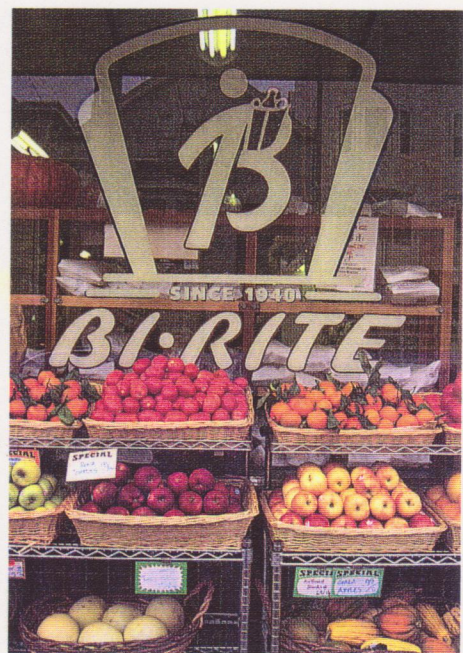


Mom 'n' Pops

BOUTIQUE GROCERIES WHERE EVERYBODY KNOWS YOUR NAME. by Danielle Svetcov

AS THE CHECKOUT LINES GET LONGER AT THE GOURMET SUPERSTORES, let us not forget the little guys: bodegas as homey as a cottage, cordial as Mom and Pop, quality-conscious as Alice Waters, and no pricier than Whole Foods. Shops with baskets instead of carts and clerks (often the owners) who have the time to help you figure out what to do with that bulb of fennel.



At the boutique Harvest Ranch Market in the Castro, owner Gilles Desaulniers says many of his customers shop three times a day: fresh-squeezed OJ in the morning, sushi from the extensive salad bar for lunch, yam soup for dinner. And in addition to breads from 15 artisanal bakeries, bulk goods, organic produce, cheeses, and imported wines, he offers a computer kiosk where you can surf the Internet for recipes and nutrition information.

Just off Dolores Street, Bi-Rite is the next closest stop. The Mission grocery has been in the Mogannam family for nearly four decades. In 1997, sons Sam and Raphael remodeled and restocked. In this Art Deco-meets-the-country store, the deli is the linchpin. Its chefs hail from Cypress Club, Stars, and the old Rendezvous du Monde, which the Mogannams also owned; behind

the glass counter, you'll see them curing salmon, smoking chicken sausage, and pressing black truffle and porcini ravioli.

Seven-year-old Village Market on California Street in the Richmond District concentrates on grade-A organic produce, much of it from the local company Veritable Vegetable, one of the state's oldest organic purveyors. The head of the San Francisco Ferry Plaza Farmers' Market drives here from across town for the romaine lettuce, and each item is noted with a handwritten sign as charming as the wicker baskets that customers sling over their arms like Little Red Riding Hood. Owner Kamron Beikzadeh knows his regulars' gustatory proclivities. In the morning, he's the barista—David, a regular, gets the double tall latte, no foam—in the evening, he plays sommelier when Henry, a new neighbor, stops by for a mixed case of California, French, and Spanish wines.

Then there are the descendants of the grocery cooperatives of the 1960s, now adapted for 2000: The Good Life Grocery on Potrero Hill and Bernal Heights and Other Avenues Food Store in the Sunset maintain their bohemian aesthetic. In addition to the expected unfettered foodstuffs, herbs, and vitamins, Good Life now sells fresh fish, while Other Avenues makes organic salsas and chutneys.

If you're lucky, one of these shops is just around the corner. If not, go out of your way—the simplest reward is being addressed by your first name.

- BI-RITE
(415) 241-9760
- THE GOOD LIFE GROCERY
(415) 282-9204, 648-3221
- HARVEST RANCH MARKET
(415) 626-0805
- OTHER AVENUES FOOD STORE
(415) 661-7475
- VILLAGE MARKET
(415) 221-0445

