

## Sommelier Raj Parr's favorite haunts

Carolyn Zinko

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As many food and wine lovers know, Raj Parr, wine director for the Mina group, oversees the wine lists at Michael Mina and RN74, two of its 16 restaurants and bars. The native of Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), India, was introduced to wine by an uncle in London and studied under famed sommelier Larry Stone at the long-gone Rubicon restaurant.

He has written two books, including the 2011 James Beard Foundation Beverage Book Award-winner "Secrets of the Sommeliers." He also started a winery in Santa Barbara County in 2009 with winemaker Sashi Moorman and Charles Banks, the former owner of Jonata Wines and Screaming Eagle.

But he doesn't necessarily want to be the world's best winemaker, possibly because he's too busy for that.

"I don't want to rule the world," he said with a laugh. "I want to be world's best nothing. I'm happy to just *be*."

The sommelier, who lives a single life (ladies, are you listening?) in San Francisco's Financial District, is learning that making wine is far different than serving wine. "It's an amazing experience to see how grapes become a finished product in the glass," he said.

His Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, bottled under the Sandhi label, were first released in April 2011. He describes his wines as "fresh, vibrant and high acid," something he has time to ponder on his drives to Lompoc (Santa Barbara County) in his BMW X3, a small sport utility vehicle that he said is "comfortable" up in the vineyard, and "if it gets dirty and scratched, it doesn't matter."

He listens to Pandora, not a specific radio station, because just as his palate is varied with wine, his ear is with music. He likes everything from jazz and hip-hop to alternative and indie rock. Where do his tastes lie when bouncing around town? We asked, and he told. Read on.

### Parr's favorite hangouts

**Zuni Cafe, 1658 Market St.** "I like Sunday brunch here with my wine team from RN74. They have the best roast chicken. I love the texture of the dish, and how simple it is with the bread salad with vinegar and greens. There are three things in the dish, and it's all about the oven, in roasting the chicken and toasting the bread for the salad. They work magic on it."

**Nopa, 560 Divisadero St.** "It's the best late-night spot to hang with my buddy and uber-winemaker Jamie Kutch (of Kutch Wines). The food is excellent - farm-to-table - but the service is awesome. Most laid-back places have a skeleton crew late at night; one bartender and most of the servers have gone home. But Nopa is always full, and they have a full-on staff. The bar is packed. You see the owners. They have energy."

**The Slanted Door, 1 Sausalito, Ferry Building No. 3.** "The best bar to eat at, with some of the best mixed drinks in town. Sitting at the bar, you can see the restaurant and the action and eat off a great menu. I love eating at bars instead of a table. Eating at a bar is noncommittal. It's quick. You can have just a couple plates, a glass of wine or a cocktail, and you're out. I personally don't like a long elaborate dinner somewhere."

**Bar Agricole restaurant, 355 11th St.** "My favorite cocktails in San Francisco. This restaurant was opened by bartenders, and the whole emphasis is on cocktails. They have a very good wine list also, but the technique and the idea of the cocktails they make are far out. My favorite drink? I usually just have one of the guys there make me whatever they want. It's the bartender's choice. And they have cool spirits I've never heard of. You always learn something new."

**Ferry Plaza Farmers Market, 1 Sausalito at the Embarcadero.** "When I travel anywhere in the world, I go to a farmers' market. The Ferry Building market is incredible. I live only two blocks away, so I go every week. In my refrigerator, I always have Andante Dairy cheese, Marin Sun Farms eggs, fruit from Hamada Farms, and vegetables from Dirty Girl Produce like tomatoes, strawberries, radishes and kale."

**Blue Bottle, Ferry Building, 1 Sausalito.** "It's the only coffee I drink. In summer, I have the iced coffee. For me, it's pretty soft and lush, not overly roasted, kind of a medium roast. I like a low to medium roast, and I like the suppleness of Blue Bottle."

**Bay Club, 150 Greenwich St.** "I grew up playing squash in Calcutta and continue to pursue the passion. It's a great club; it has a great gym, pools and five squash courts. With squash, your heart rate is always 150-160 beats per minute. It's nonstop, you're just

moving - amazing cardio. You have to be very agile; it's a very fast sport. And 40 minutes, I'm done. I find running super boring. I'd rather do a competitive sport."

**Cliff House restaurant, 1090 Point Lobos.** "Photography is one of my hobbies. The Cliff House is a rugged and pure place with unbeatable views, especially at sunset. Fifteen years ago, when I first moved here, I'd go out there. I like sunsets best, or early-morning skies. It's calming. I used film, and you have to be patient to take the right shot. I'd shoot five rolls in one day."

**Crissy Field, 1199 East Beach.** "It's a great place for a day with my dog. I have a pug because in San Francisco in an apartment, you can't really have a big dog. Most landlords don't allow big dogs. My dog is a girl. Her name? Musigny, like the appellation in Burgundy."

**Coi restaurant, 373 Broadway.** "My favorite chef in San Francisco is here - Daniel Patterson. He's a good friend of mine. He really cooks with a lot of vegetables. Meat is a small part of my diet. The food is pure, not too creamy and buttery, and flavorful. Nothing heavy, nothing sweet."

**La Ciccia, 291 30th St.** "Chef Massimo was a sommelier at Acquerello and then he left and opened a restaurant and is making killer Sardinian food. It's more sea urchin dishes, great tuna, sardines, coastal food. I've discovered wines there that were like, 'Whoa, this is crazy!' Interesting and delicious."

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