

Oakland Magazine
CELEBRATING THE EAST BAY

Second Helpings The Art of Fries

By Wanda Hennig
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Photography by: Lori Eanes

On a recent visit to Sidebar, my friend and I ordered the smoked paprika fries (\$5) for a starter snack to go with her Pinot Gris and my Grenache.

And were they good fries.

The secret of their golden crispness, co-owner Anne Marie Adrian says, is that Sidebar uses Kennebec potatoes, twice fried “like Belgian fries,” in rice bran oil. They’re then tossed in mildly spicy smoked Spanish paprika. Adrian says chef-owner Mark Drazek handpicks produce, including the spuds and the garlic for the house-made aioli (which comes with the fries), from the Berkeley Bowl or local farmers markets.

In this age of designer sea salts, it was good to be reminded of paprika, a good alternative to salt. Paprika contains capsaicin, which reputedly has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects.

I got to thinking about the art of fries and what makes them good. When I was growing up, my dad, the chef of the house, made fries that were crisp and golden like the Sidebar ones, with never a hint of grease. To me then, they were bland and boring. But not those of the boy across the road. He’d sometimes invite me for lunch and make fries. His were soggy with oil and pale, and he served them between slices of white bread with butter and ketchup. In South Africa we called fries “chips,” and for a long time, these chips—an extreme version, really, of ballpark-style garlic fries—were heaven.



SIDEBAR PRESS

The thought of either now makes me queasy. So, does one's taste for fries develop as one's taste for wine? Are greasy fries, like sweet wine, the taste of a youthful palate? If so, let's celebrate with seconds at Sidebar.

Sidebar, 542 Grand Ave., (510) 452-9500,
www.sidebar-oakland.com. Serves lunch

11:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m. Mon.–Fri.; an “in-between menu” 3 p.m.–5 p.m. Mon.–Fri.; and dinner 5 p.m.–10 p.m. Mon.–Thu., 5 p.m.–10:30 p.m. Fri. and 4 p.m.–10:30 p.m. Sat. Serves drinks 11:30 a.m.–11 p.m. Mon.–Thu., 11:30 a.m.–11 p.m. Fri. and 4 p.m.–11:30 Sat.