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## Tell Us, Chef: Why Is Frances So Good? (Bacon Beignets!)

Feb 24th 2011 4:00PM / by Tami Yu

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Nabbing a table at Melissa Perello's popular restaurant [Frances](#) is like striking gold. One of the hottest reservations in San Francisco, this neighborhood gem is booked out nearly two months in advance. Named after her grandmother, Perello's relaxed, modern American cuisine showcases the gorgeous bounty of local purveyors and Northern California farmers. Here we discuss her seasonal menu, the man who inspired her cuisine and what's it like to be nominated for a James Beard Award.

### Who do you consider your biggest mentor and why?

Working under chef Ron Siegel at Charles Nob Hill had one of the most significant impacts on my culinary style and on the way I approach cooking in general. Ron taught me how to foster direct relationships with purveyors, helping understand where my ingredients come from. He shared his passion for shopping at the local markets and ultimately taught me the lesson of simplicity in cooking, which I think comes across on my plates at Frances.

### What's it like being nominated for the James Beard Award and other accolades? Did it change the restaurant's vision?

The nominations and awards were all unexpected and completely surreal. It's very gratifying and makes me proud of my team's hard work. I'm fortunate to work with such a talented group of people, all of whom have helped Frances reach such success. The accolades have not changed my vision -- Frances will still offer the same menu format, price point and service as we did on day one.

### How often do you change the Frances menu?

The entire menu changes about every six weeks and on a rolling basis, since individual menu items are changed almost daily, depending on what's available at the market. We offer about three or four items, like the bacon beignets, which are signature and will always be on the menu. Specials are offered on occasion (the chicken liver mousse, for example, is an off-the-menu favorite, when it's available) and prix fixe menus are available on special occasions like Valentine's Day.

### Do you plan to keep the same casual style, or make it more upscale in the future?

Frances will stay exactly the same -- seasonally driven and locally sourced food in a casual neighborhood atmosphere with polished service.

### Your bacon beignets are so popular. Do you plan to switch things up with a new flavor variation?

I've played around with the beignets in the past with ingredients like salt cod, but the bacon beignets are so popular that I don't see taking them off the menu anytime soon. Everyone orders them!

### Are you still thinking about starting a new restaurant? When might that happen and where would it be -- S.F. maybe?

Opening a new restaurant is always on my radar, but it's not something I'm actively pursuing. I leave myself open to the possibility -- if an amazing space that I fall in love with is presented to me, for example, I'll certainly consider it. I'm not tied down to San Francisco and will consider almost anywhere a possibility, but only time will tell what the future holds.



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### Name a few of your favorite places in and around S.F.

I love the **Steep Ravine Campground** in Stinson Beach for a weekend getaway. It's about 30 minutes outside of San Francisco and offers great campsites and cabins on the cliffs with incredible views of the ocean. **Bi-Rite Market** in the Mission is stocked with great products and friendly staff who are very knowledgeable. It's close to Frances, so these guys have helped me out on many occasions when I've needed ingredients in a pinch! **Nopa** is one of my favorite restaurants right now. It has a wonderful atmosphere and great staff, serving killer cocktails and excellent food. I especially love that it's open late and that you'll find the same quality at 1am as you would at 5pm.

Frances, 3870 17th St.; 415-621-3870

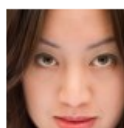
#### Quick Guide to Melissa Perello's Faves:

[Bi-Rite Market](#), 3639 18th St.; 415-241-9760

[Nopa](#), 560 Divisadero St.; 415-864-8643

[Steep Ravine Campground](#), Highway 1, Stinson Beach; 800-444-7275

*Photo Courtesy of Jennifer Yin*



Tami Yu - Writer

[feteafete.com](http://feteafete.com) | [@feteafete](https://twitter.com/feteafete)

A San Francisco native, Tami loves to write about dining, fashion, beauty and travel. She has also written for AOL Digital City, Caviar Affair magazine and AOL's When.com.

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