

Zax: San Francisco's loss is the East Bay's gain, with Zax hopping from North Beach to Berkeley. Zax Tavern opened in the space formerly occupied by Mazzini's. It's much like the original Zax, which was a Chronicle Top 100 restaurant for most of its eight years until it closed in July. Calling it a tavern is intended to convey casual good eating. Chef-owners Mark Drazek and Barbara Mulas, a couple with East Bay roots at Baywolf, Cafe Fanny and Citron, have softened the decor with a coat of buttery yellow paint, tablecloths and carpeting to muffle noise in the two dining rooms. They've brought along their menu of simple, seasonal dishes -- each with its own special spin. Diners in love with Zax's twice-baked goat cheese souffle or warm apple galette should fear not. Both made the transbay trek with every luscious flavor intact. But there are some changes. Prices are lower -- entrees on the opening menu top out at \$17 (for a Niman Ranch steak, pork chop or Alaskan halibut). And the couple has added other bargain features -- a burger and three warm pressed sandwiches, all under \$9. Starters, aside from the goat cheese souffle, include three large Gulf shrimp, grilled and perched on a cool romaine and red onion chop; steamed mussels; warm duck liver salad; and pork ribs. Entrees range from wild salmon with dill mashed potatoes to lamb stew with fall vegetables to risotto with artichokes. The chicken is crisp, with the chile-whiskey sauce cooked right into the skin. **2826 Telegraph Ave. (near Oregon), Berkeley;** (510) 848-9299. Dinner Tuesday-Sunday. Full bar. Starters, \$5-\$8; entrees, \$13-\$17; desserts, \$6. **Ample street parking** -*SF Chronicle*

Reservation for 20 @ 6:00

