



Esquire's Best New Restaurants 2011

Restaurant of the Year: Michael Mina

San Francisco



After three decades of compiling this list, most years I know which one will be the very *best* Best New Restaurant after fifteen minutes.

In the case of Michael Mina, I was delighted to be back in the airy space, lighted by the soft, foggy San Francisco sun, that had long been Aqua, which Mina, the chef, helped open in 1991. Since then he has built an empire of mostly high-end restaurants from Atlantic City to Vegas, a rampant expansionism that made me lose interest in him as a working chef. So Mina's return to his roots, at this stylish namesake where he swears he'll be cooking most of the time, was promising news.

Mina's [Web site](#) says his food has "his sensibilities with Japanese ingredients and a French influence," which tells you little — I pictured a high-mileage Citroën with cupholders. But Mina has learned from the global kitchen, and in this civilized dining room, he shows it. His Alaskan halibut is warmed in a ginger-carrot broth with steamed dumplings. He makes a *shabu shabu* of foie gras in a dashi broth with Asian mushrooms, and his Maine lobster pie comes with smoked potato, corn pudding, and roasted tomatoes — the best New England dish on the West Coast. If Mina is there the night you visit, you'll have one of the great meals of your life by an American master.