

# The Examiner

## Looking for crab? Try Nettie's

By Patricia Unterman

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Traditional crab: Nettie's Crab Shack specializes in top-quality live crab, but chef Brian Leitner also offers sophisticated West Coast favorites. Bret Putnam/Special to The Examiner **SAN FRANCISCO** – One of the ironies of living in San Francisco — the Dungeness crab capital of the world — is that top-quality live crab, simply steamed, is not easy to find. But that was before Nettie's Crab Shack came along. This ebullient local version of an East Coast lobster shack applies San Francisco standards of ingredient provenance to both beloved American classics and sophisticated West Coast favorites.

Partners Annette Yang and Brian Leitner, the chef, are both consummate San Francisco professionals, and have transformed the former Union Street location of Palmetto, Home and, for the longest time, L'Entrecote, into a polished, modern invocation of a New England fish shack, with butcher-paper-covered wood tables (crayons come out for kids) and painted wooden chairs. Light pours in through side windows and skylights. Sports fans and singles covet the commodious, wide wooden bar with a big flat-screen television. An outdoor patio right on Union Street, warmed by heat lamps, is always full, no matter what the temperature. The space strikes a smart balance between fun and utility, as do the cleverly designed menus.

Nothing beats Nettie's crab feed Sundays, when the kitchen delivers a whole 2-pound steamed, uncracked crab, accompanied with a generous green salad in bright vinaigrette, two of the sweetest boiled potatoes I've ever tasted, a pile of steamed romano beans, a mini-pail of melted butter, squares of dense skillet corn bread, and a small ramekin of delectably runny butterscotch pudding with two warm cookies, all for \$38. If you've never eaten a crab that has been cooked just to the point when its flesh changes from translucent to white, you're in for a thrill. The meat becomes dreamily sweet and succulent. If you're inexperienced at taking apart and cracking a crab, bring someone to show you how. Nettie's provides the protective plastic bib and two layers of newspaper on the table. Then, off to the ladies' room for a sponge bath.

Those who want their crab picked for them can have the warm meat piled into a soft, toasted white bun drenched with butter (\$25).

Housemade potato chips, as well as bread and butter pickles, provide a counterpoint. This ultimate crab roll and a grilled half crab (\$24) can be found on a small menu titled Shore Things, along with a selection of West Coast oysters at a good price — most are \$10.50 for six.

Nettie's multiple menus offer lots of dishes for lazier eaters, too, starting with perfect fish and chips (\$16) made with pristine local ling cod, flaky and moist, in a light, crisp batter, accompanied with crusty roasted potato wedges with soft interiors, cidery cole slaw and tartar sauce based on housemade mayonnaise. Clam chowder is made to order, an unthickened, satiny broth full of fresh clam flavor, deepened with bacon and chunkied with potato (\$7).

San Franciscans will appreciate a salad of green and yellow beans, lettuces, roasted almonds and mint (\$6); and a saucy ragout of shell beans topped with grilled squid and a vibrant salsa verde that brings it all together (\$19).

Though I find it difficult to pass up soft-serve vanilla ice cream (\$5), Nettie's two tiny, juicy, crisp lady apples on sticks dipped into buttery caramel (\$3) are the taste of childhood Midwestern autumns. I've never had them as sparkly as these.

That's what I love about Nettie's: They do everything better than I remember.

## Nettie's Crab Shack

**Location:** 2032 Union St., San Francisco

**Contact:** (415) 409-0300; [www.nettiescrabshack.com](http://www.nettiescrabshack.com)

**Hours:** Lunch is 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday through Friday; dinner is 5 to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, 5 to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday; brunch is 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

**Price range:** \$7 to \$25

**Recommended dishes:** Steamed whole crab on Sundays, clam chowder, oysters on the half shell, fish and chips, crab roll, soft-serve ice cream, caramel lady apples

**Credit cards:** MasterCard, Visa, American Express

**Reservations:** For six or more