

You'll also find a royal feast on the walls...

“Fountain of Delight” Uncovered in Civic Center

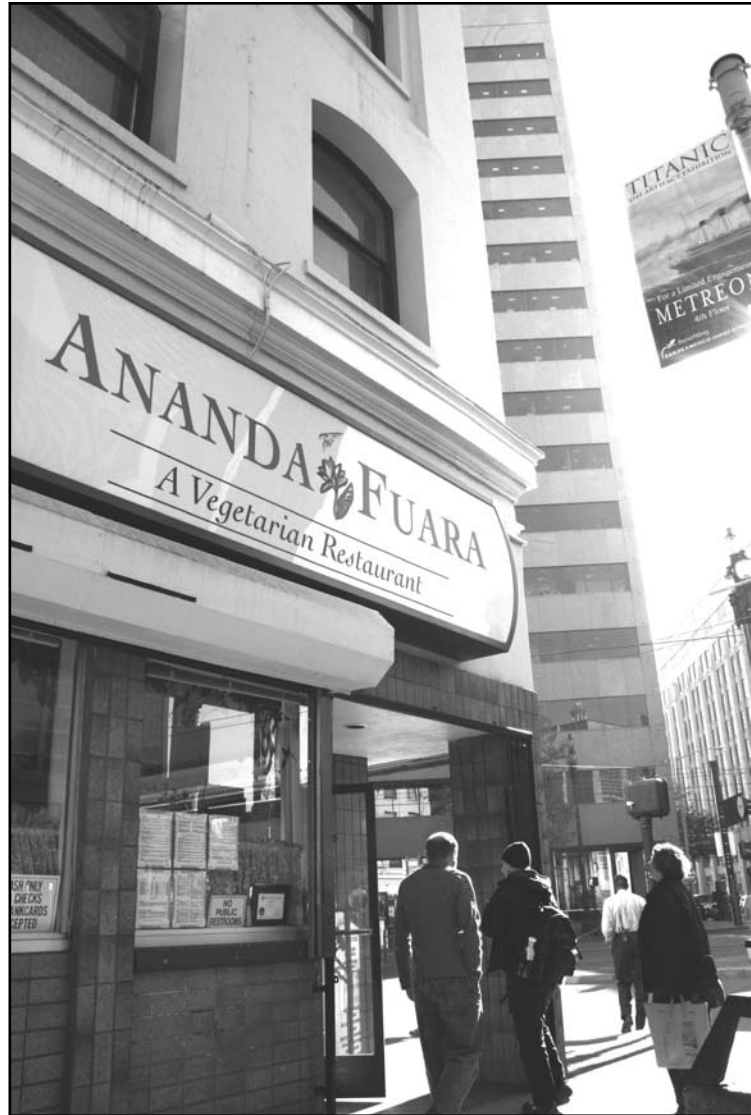
December 1, 2006

At first glance, Market Street appears to be a perfect spot for a restaurant. The central location, heavy foot traffic and all the public transit pouring in from everywhere makes this a no-brainer. Yet it's not the locale that leaps to mind on an empty stomach. Most of us equate Market Street with the nine-to-five grind and parades with floats, but not ice cream floats. It's where you go to line up for a shelter bed or a gig at the Warfield.

Still, many a thriving culinary establishment dots the long diagonal thoroughfare that cuts downtown in half. While the Church/Castro area of Market brims with delectably diverse cuisine, looking east from Church Street, an untrained eye might envision a wasteland beyond – that is, with the exception of Zuni's and a few neighboring bistros.

This is a misconception. For anyone who works around Civic Center, it doesn't take steak-sniffing dogs to uncover the good eats. And on the northeast corner of 9th and Market, there's one place that's doing a blossoming business.

That would be the vegetarian restaurant called Ananda Fuara – which means “Fountain of Delight”. The *San Francisco Chronicle* has reviewed the location three times in seven years. In 2002, its reviewer went so far as to exclaim, “The vittles at Ananda Fuara are of unearthly nirvana.”



Ananda Fuara draws big lunch crowds on most weekdays.

Of course, I thought I'd be the judge of that.

In terms of atmosphere and decor, Ananda Fuara certainly stimulates the curiosity. While the menu is diverse, the establishment has solid roots in India. As the same reviewer, Lord Martine, put it a few years back, “the waitresses of Ananda Fuara flutter about wrapped in sarongs printed pretty with springy flower buds

in grimace grape, earthy split pea green, turquoise and juicy rose.”

Much to my feminist chagrin, each of the waiters is allowed to negotiate his way around the busy tables in a more practical pair of white pants and a blue Polo shirt, which hardly mimics Indian attire. So why the waiver for them?

But getting back, followers of a guru named Sri Chinmoy oper-

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ate Ananda Fuara with friendliness and efficiency. And the guru's presence radiates in every direction – from the menu to the walls to the muted television at the front of the dining room - recounting the highlights of his spiritual career.

It was the large photographs of him posing with various international luminaries that really drew my attention. I didn't know gurus still had that kind of pull on the global stage. There he is smiling beside Nelson Mandela, or Mother Theresa, or the Pope. Most impressive of all is the picture of him standing next to Princess Diana.

To see the beloved one in so prim and alluring a pose will probably consume your mesmerized gaze for 5-10 minutes easy. (That's about the time it takes for your

food to come.) It's funny how this British version of Jackie Kennedy betrays the same hint of reticence about the stamp and rank of her high position. It's as if she knew that the clock would strike twelve one day and her transportation would suddenly disappear, leaving behind only some rocks and a pumpkin.

Anyway, so much for the art gallery aspect of Ananda Fuara. If you're here to eat, appetizers include nachos, hummus, and vegetarian buffalo wings. (I forgot to ask what the wings are made of.)

As for meal choices, you can boost your daily fiber intake substantially with the Enchanted Garden, Greek or Mexican salad. There's also a salad called Infi-

nite Bleu, incorporating a mix of sautéed zucchini, broccoli, mushrooms, red cabbage, onions and brown rice over a bed of lettuce.

There's a veggie burger, an eggplant dish, hummus wrap, vegetarian fish (details unknown), and a burrito that strays somewhat afield from the traditional Mexican specialty. It didn't look appetizing.

The most popular item on the menu, however, and the one that I ordered is the Neatloaf sandwich.

This hearty concoction com-



prises a square patty of condensed grains, egg, ricotta cheese, tofu and spices served with a tangy sauce on a whole-grain bread with lettuce. It comes with a side of tabouli or a green salad with shredded cabbage and carrots.

More substantial entrees include a traditional Indian curry dish, samosas, vegan ravioli and the Neatloaf dinner served with mash potatoes and gravy.

This last sells for \$10.75, but most of the meal selections cost well under that price.

If you're not that hungry and just want to pass a windy day indoors, there's an array of savory-looking baked goods behind the counter, as well as *a la carte* items on the menu to choose from, like garlic bread, rice, and yogurt.

In the way of beverages, you can order sodas, milk shakes (in the usual flavors), a healthier juice drink called the Marathoner, an Indian beverage called lassi, and loose teas with fabulous names like Mountain Jasmine Spring. For coffee addicts, there are espresso drinks, and they're priced a lot cheaper than Starbucks. Or you might live dangerously and try the herbal coffee.

If you're dining alone during the busy lunch hour, be prepared for company in the seat across from your own. On the day I went, a cheerful, elderly woman settled in opposite my Neatloaf sandwich, explaining she had just popped off BART from Daly City to attend a matinee performance of the San Francisco Symphony. "How did you find this place?" I asked.

She said she looked around after she got off the train one day and stumbled across it.

Now wasn't I just saying that Market Street is the perfect place to put a restaurant?

Rosemary Regello

Note: This restaurant only takes cash. Ananda Fuara is open Monday to Saturday 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. (except Wednesdays 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.). On one Sunday each month the restaurant hosts a brunch from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Please check their web-