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Dishing on the East Bay

Two big new restaurants land in Jack London Square

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There's never a dull moment at Jack London Square these days. Last time we checked, the Oakland spot boasted seven full-fledged restaurants — Daniel Patterson's [Haven](#), [Bocanova](#), Hahn's Hibachi, Il Pescatore, Kincaid's Bay House, Scott's Seafood Restaurant and jazz hot spot Yoshi's — as well as pretty as a picture [Miette Patisserie and Confiserie](#) with its showcase bakery open to the street, Ben & Jerry's, Heinold's First and Last Chance Saloon — even a good old Subway.

But the foodie destinations keep coming. This week saw the opening of [Forge](#), a 4,100 sq ft, 150-seat pizzeria on Franklin St., and, on Thursday next week, [Lungomare](#) will make its debut in the former Miss Pearl's Jam House space — just one of many spots planned by restaurant impresario extraordinaire Chris Pastena.



The Forge has already garnered some good early reviews, including from avid food watcher [Ethan Fletcher at Diablo Dish](#).

Lungomare is billed as bringing “coastal Italian cuisine” to Oakland’s waterfront (Lungomare means “waterfront” in Italian), and it’s a large-scale venture, with a 120-seat restaurant with lounge and bar, a trellised 80-seat outdoor patio, as well as an adjacent café open for morning coffee and pastries.

Lungomare’s executive chef is Craig DiFonzo, formerly of Cantinetta Piero in Yountville. Chris Pastena is behind the project, along with partner Tom Henderson and Temoor Noor of Oakland’s Grand Tavern.

What does that mean in terms of the menu? Expect seafood and shellfish, grilled whole fish, crudo, cured meats, pizzas and handmade pastas, all inspired by rustic flavors from Liguria and Tuscany. There will be a dedicated pasta room, wood-fired pizza and bread ovens, and a rotisserie.



The wine trove at Lungomare, opening Feb 7 in Jack London Square

Pastena and his team are in the throes of a fast-paced restaurant roll-out in Oakland which started with Chop Bar in 2009. Pastena told Nosh there are two more eateries in the works — the 150-seat Tribune Tavern, a pub-like place in the Tribune Tower with former SPQR chef Huw Thornton at the helm, and a Mexican eatery, likely to be called Labna, in Uptown Oakland’s Broadway Grand project, slated for early 2014. As if that were not enough, Pastena said there were a couple more projects brewing.

Pastena and his team can afford such an ambitious strategy because they are exploiting a government program — the USCIS’s EB5 initiative — which allows one to tap foreign investment on the condition jobs are created in areas whose unemployment rate is lower than the national average.

Pastena, who has lived in Jack London Square for the past seven years, says to date he estimates he has created 100 jobs in Oakland — and there will be 50 more once Tribune opens — but that he would have

chosen Oakland in spite of the financial set-up.

“I love Oakland’s vibe and eclectic nature,” he says. Speaking of the city’s exploding restaurant scene, he says it reminds him of San Francisco in the mid-90s.

And then there’s the weather. “We’re going to have a lot of space for outdoor dining at Lungomare — Oakland has more days of sun than almost anywhere else in the country,” he says. He adds: “Of course we’ll provide heaters too.”

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