



COLE'S CHOP HOUSE

For Special Occasions ... or Any Occasion

by Michelle J. Baker

Where can you find the Zagat Survey's number-one rated steakhouse in the entire San Francisco Bay area? You'd probably guess one of the big cities – San Francisco or Oakland – but it's actually in the charming downtown area of Napa. It's Cole's Chop House, now in its eighth year, that has laid claim to the Zagat's honor of Best San Francisco Bay Area steak house five of the past six years.

Cole's is the second restaurant for Greg Cole, a chef trained at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York who opened his first Napa restaurant, the new California cuisine-inspired Celadon, in 1996. Greg says that in those days he always wondered why there was no great steak house in the city of Napa or even in all of Napa Valley. Finally, after years of wondering, he decided, "if no one else is going to do it, I might as well."

And so, after some cross-country steak house research, Greg came up with the concept of Cole's Chop House – a real steak house where you choose your cut of meat or fish and choose your sides to construct your own meal. He wanted this to be a place where you could celebrate a birthday, anniversary, graduation or other special occasion. In fact, Greg aimed to make it a "dress up place," although as is customary in this part of Wine Country, "Napa casual" attire is just fine, too.

Cole's Chop House is in a historic building that was used as the exhibit hall during the Napa and Solano fairs in the late 1800s. Inside, it's a spacious two-story restaurant, with exposed native stone walls and original wood floors. There's ample seating here, including a mezzanine overlooking the bustling main floor of the restaurant. A small bar with seating for ten is the perfect place to start your evening



with a Million Dollar Margarita, or the casual way to dine here. There's also plenty of room for larger groups on the first floor or in the mezzanine.

While Cole's is certainly about the chop and the steak (including a selection of beautiful cuts of pork, lamb and aged beef), there is plenty to choose from for those who prefer fish, including salmon on the regular menu and a daily seafood special (for example, a delicious grilled swordfish atop a bed of mashed potatoes with lobster mushrooms, sweet corn, red wine reduction and a drizzle of truffle oil). The a la carte sides include all you might expect from a steak house: creamed spinach, baked or mashed potatoes, and onion rings, as well as a surprise twist Greg borrowed from his favorite breakfast: hash browns.

Cole's also boasts a very long wine list with plenty of choices, and a clear leaning towards Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. In fact, the Cabernet Sauvignon section of the wine list has grown so long that the wine staff has separated it into the valley's distinct sub-appellations, along with concise descriptions at the front of each sub-appellation section of the area's Cabernet Sauvignon characteristics.

For dessert at Cole's, choose among all the classics: whiskey bread pudding, cheesecake, brownie sundae and crême brûlée. There's also the very popular Bananas Foster, a recipe Greg adapted from the signature dessert at Commander's Palace in New Orleans, brought flaming to the table.

Cole's Chop House, located at 1122 Main Street in Napa, is open for dinner from 5 p.m. till 9 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, and 5 p.m. till 10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Reservations are recommended, especially on the weekends, and can be made online at www.coleschophouse.com or by calling (707) 224-6328.