

We thought we knew S.F.'s best croissant. Then we blind tasted 14 of them

[Tara Duggan](#)

Golden flakes covered chairs, shirtfronts and the long table where a panel gathered to compare croissants from premier San Francisco bakeries in a blind taste test last month.

Members of the Chronicle's Food & Wine team ranked 14 plain croissants, comparing the gloss and crunch of their outer shells, the loft of their inner structure and the nuances of their flavor. The bar is high in [one of the country's best baking scenes](#), with standard-bearer institutions competing against a proliferation of new San Francisco bakeries that specialize in croissants and other types of laminated pastries, also called viennoiserie.

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“There are so many good croissants in San Francisco,” said French native Clément Goyffon, executive pastry chef at ONE65 in Union Square, a multistory compound with a patisserie, bar and two restaurants. Goyffon said that San Francisco croissants are “very close in quality” to those in Paris, where he previously was pastry chef at Michelin-starred restaurant L'Ambroisie. “The bakers (here) have their own style and very nice products.”

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The panelists scrutinized croissants from bakeries with a wide range of experience, from the 24-year-old Tartine to Tano, a hit pop-up, [best known for its buttery salt bread](#), that just started baking them in May. Their color ranged from light blond to coppery brown, with a few that were pale with dark stripes, and their shapes ran from irregular crescents to perfect diamonds. The interior of the croissants, which with proper lamination should have an even honeycomb appearance, also varied from having large air pockets to more uniform patterns.

Butter isn't cheap — especially imported French varieties with a high butterfat content preferred by bakers for flavor and because it's easier to work with — and neither is the labor that goes into making croissants, which traditionally take at least three days to prepare. Some croissants in the tasting cost as much as \$6.50, while the least expensive was \$3.95.

We picked up all 14 croissants on the same morning, around the same time, before tasting them. Given travel and time limitations, we focused only on San Francisco bakeries and weeded them down to a manageable number based on previous samplings. To maintain consistency, panelists were assigned a specific part of the croissant to taste, such as the end or the middle. Panelists gave each croissant up to 10 points for flavor and up to another 10 points for texture, up to 5 points for overall appearance and up to another 10 points for overall quality, with a possible total score of 35.

The final rankings were based on a tally of the total scores for each croissant from seven panelists, with a highest possible score of 245.

Before the session began, tasters noted obvious differences in style among the croissants and debated whether they should judge them based on specific standards, such as a level of burnishing on the shell. Instead, we decided to judge each one based on what each particular bakery's intention seemed to be and how well it was executed.

Some interesting trends emerged: The top two bakeries swept every category, while the next three were very close to each other in score. And two venerated San Francisco bakeries shocked panelists by ranking among the bottom five. But the starkest differences only became apparent in side-by-side tastings, and in a pastry scene with sky-high standards, many tasters said they would likely enjoy even the lower-scoring croissants sitting at a café with a latte.

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Counting down from No. 14 to No. 1, here are the best croissants in San Francisco.



The plain croissant from Neighbor Bakehouse in San Francisco.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

14. Neighbor Bakehouse (\$4.25)

This Dogpatch bakery's croissant was [the top scorer in a 2015 Chronicle croissant](#) ranking. Its

position flipped in this tasting, when the panel found its texture dense. Deputy editor Elena Kadvany also noted a “weird aftertaste” and some compared it to brioche. “It smells like bread,” said Chronicle restaurant critic Cesar Hernandez.

Saltwater Bakeshop recently opened its first bakery in SoMa.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

13. Saltwater Bakeshop (\$5.25)

The croissant from Saltwater Bakeshop, a farmers market favorite that opened a South of Market storefront in May, had an appealing appearance, glossy and light in color with dark striping. Yet many panelists found its flavor sour and its texture similar to bread. “It’s very uneven,” said Chronicle restaurant critic MacKenzie Chung Fegan, referring to how it was baked.

Arsicault croissants have drawn lines and acclaim since Bon Appetit named it one of the country's best bakeries in 2016.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

12. Arsicault (\$5)

Panelists were stunned when they found out this pastry came from the nationally acclaimed Arsicault, which makes the preferred croissant for many on the team (including Hernandez, who [ranked it No. 1 after trying more than 50 croissants across the Bay Area in 2024](#)). Many panelists noted the croissant was dry and seemed stale, with a lack of contrast between the shell and the interior of the pastry. “Dry fluff mouthfeel,” wrote Fegan. Arsicault, which was born in the Inner Richmond in 2015, has been growing at a notable clip, with new outposts in Civic Center and [Mission Bay](#) and two more planned for [San Francisco](#) and [Palo Alto](#).

The judging was based on a croissant from the Civic Center location. Because of Arsicault’s immense popularity, Food & Wine staffers later conducted a cross-tasting of croissants from its Richmond and Civic Center bakeries to compare quality, and did not find significant differences between the two locations.

Maison Nico in San Francisco is known for its French specialties.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

11. Maison Nico (\$4.50)

This Jackson Square café and bakery, which has a [new location inside the Transamerica Pyramid](#) and is also [expanding to Marin County](#), is known for French specialties like croissants and pâté en croûte. Panelists called its croissant “a looker” for its tiger-like stripes, but it scored poorly on flavor

and texture, with Kadvany calling it “bland, not flaky.”

While Tartine's overall ranking was low, some panelists gave it high marks for texture and flavor.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

10. Tartine (\$6.25)

Panelists immediately noticed a surprising flavor in the croissant from this esteemed bakery, which [now has four Bay Area locations](#) as well as seven branches in Los Angeles and six in Seoul: It both smelled and tasted distinctly of ham, as if it had been baked on the same tray as ham-and-cheese croissants. Despite that, Tartine’s overall results were mixed, with a few tasters giving the croissant higher scores for texture and flavor.

Some panelists liked the buttery flavor of Le Carousel's croissant.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

9. Le Carousel Patisserie (\$5)

Located in a downtown hotel, this French-owned patisserie [won for “best original creation”](#) in the 2025 Best Croissant in San Francisco Competition, which is organized by the magazine Frenchly and the French-American Hospitality & Gastronomy Association. Some Chronicle panelists gave its plain croissant extra points for buttery flavor, which helped its overall score, while docking its texture and its appearance. The croissant had large air pockets inside, which can be a sign of overproofing. “There’s an echo coming out of that,” food reporter Mario Cortez said.

Though one panelist called Parachute's croissant “gorgeous” and “precise,” others were divided on its texture and flavor.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

8. Parachute (\$6.50)

Parachute in the Ferry Building is operated by the owners of next-door restaurant Arquet and the Michelin-starred Sorrel in San Francisco. After just one year, the bakery has shot to acclaim: It won grand prize at the [2026 Best Croissant Competition](#), and landed the No. 1 spot in a recent ranking of the [best places to eat at the Ferry Building](#) by Chronicle restaurant critics, who deemed it “possibly the best bakery in San Francisco.” That made its ranking in the middle of this tasting a surprise to panelists. Though Kadvany deemed its exterior “gorgeous” and “precise,” panelists were divided on its texture, and some were disappointed by the flavor, which Food & Wine editor Matt Buchanan described as “dense/bready.”

Breadbelly's croissant had an audibly crispy shell.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

7. Breadbelly (\$5.25)

Breadbelly, [No. 7 on the Chronicle's Top 100 Restaurants list](#), is best known for its pastries and breads with Asian American flavors. Its plain croissant, meanwhile, inspired a robust discussion among panelists. Most found it salty, but its relatively high scores for texture, including a flaky shell, helped boost its ranking. "It sounds crispy," Cortez said as panelists tasted it. Breadbelly branched out from its original Richmond District location last year with a [larger Dogpatch bakery and café](#) and recently began providing pastries to Mess Hall, a [new food hall in the Presidio](#).

Critic MacKenzie Chung Fegan lauded the "even, open crumb" and overall appearance of Tano's croissant.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

6. Tano (\$6.50)

Beating out Breadbelly by just a half point, this pop-up inside Paper Son Coffee in SoMa attracts long lines for its salt bread and only recently began making croissants (though laminated pastries have long been a goal for owner Isaac Taitano). "It's a looker," said Fegan of Tano's croissant, noting its "even, open crumb." Some found its flavor reminiscent of buttered popcorn, not necessarily in a bad way, but others described its texture as greasy.

Butter & Crumble's burnished croissant got high points for texture.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

5. Butter & Crumble (\$5.50)

Since late 2023, this fan favorite bakery has attracted the longest lines in San Francisco for owner Sophie Smith's creative takes on filled croissants, typically requiring a wait of at least an hour. Fegan described its butter croissant as the "most burnished of the bunch," with a crispness she said induced ASMR. Many panelists gave it high marks for texture, though the darker bake also made it "slightly bitter," Hernandez said.

Sol Bakery, which opened in April, is one of the newest bakeries included in the tasting.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

4. Sol Bakery (\$5.50)

After two years as a pop-up, Sol Bakery also attracted lines when pastry chef Marisa Williams [opened a storefront in the Nopa neighborhood in April](#), especially for its lush guava tart and pastries filled with seasonal fruit. Panelists found its plain croissant achieved the right contrast in texture between the interior and shell. “This one feels nice in the chompers,” said Hernandez, who also rated it high for its buttery flavor with a slight tang from fermentation.

B. Patisserie has been known for croissants and other pastries since 2012.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

3. B. Patisserie (\$3.95)

Chronicle panelists were blown away by the sweet cream flavor of the croissant from this Pacific Heights bakery, which James Beard Award-winning pastry chefs Belinda Leong and Michel Suas opened in 2012. “It’s an expensive butter flavor,” Buchanan said. Panelists had some mixed feelings, however, about its appearance and its texture, which some found dry and others appealingly light. “There’s still a moist stretchiness to the inside,” said Janelle Bitker, deputy director of content strategy and utility journalism.

The flavor and airy interior texture of ONE65's croissant impressed panelists.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

2. ONE65 Patisserie (\$5)

The entry from this Union Square patisserie, which [opened in 2019](#) as part of a partnership between French fine-dining chef Claude Le Tohic and Alexander’s Steakhouse, was one of the palest of the bunch, making it stand out from the darker style favored by many contemporary San Francisco bakeries. Most panelists were quickly won over by its flavor, which Kadvany described as “buttery sweetness” and Fegan simply as “tasty.” The croissant was also airy inside. “This feels more like I’m in France,” Bitker said.

When told about his bakery’s ranking, Goyffon said he recently switched to a French butter that has a butterfat content of 84%, compared to the previous French one he used, at 82%. Higher butterfat means less water, so the butter is less likely to break during lamination, and it can produce better flavor, Goyffon said.

Juniper, a bakery from the owners of San Francisco’s Saint Frank Coffee, won our tasting.

Photos by Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

1. Juniper (\$5.25)

The owners of San Francisco's Saint Frank Coffee opened this Polk Street café-bakery in 2023 with high ambitions for its pastry; the following year, it won grand prize at the [2024 Best Croissants Competition](#). In this tasting, it scored 17 points higher than No. 2 and stood out in all three categories for its subtlety and balance. "It's like a perfect mix of salty and sweet," said Hernandez, who compared it, favorably, to a Ritz Cracker. "It's got a little buttery sweetness. It's a little bit burnished," Buchanan said.

Juniper head baker Amy Chen did not start her career in pastry: After 15 years in the tech industry, she enrolled in baking classes at the San Francisco Baking Institute during the pandemic, and joined Juniper as a partner after a brief stint working at the institute. She attributes the success of her croissant to the bakery's regular quality tests and to using a French cultured butter with 82% butterfat — though she's considering changing to a new one with slightly better flavor. "I can talk butter all day," she said. "It still excites me."

Should we blind-taste East Bay croissants next? Tell us about your favorite.

Jonathan P

Oakland, CA

09/08/26

yes! there are so many wonderful bakeries & patisseries in the East Bay

Sharon G

Albany, CA

09/08/26

Curious how Rotha (San Pablo Ave, Berkeley/Albany border) would compare! I like their baked goods as an occasional treat.

MARI E

El Cerrito, CA

09/08/26

Patisserie-Rotha <https://www.patisserierotha.com/>

rotha in albany/berkeley is best

Doris V

Oakland, CA

09/08/26

Fournée in Berkeley has to be on your list. Ubiquitous long lines do not lie.