





Best Of Oakland & the East Bay

Upstarts and Contenders: Introducing
some intriguing finalists who made our
2020 contest more challenging.

By Judith M. Gallman

Oakland Magazine typically highlights Readers' Choice winners and Editors' Choices in the annual Best Of Oakland and the East Bay coverage. But for 2020, vote tallying during phase one — the open-ended nomination portion where readers write in their favorites in a gazillion categories — got us thinking differently.

In phase two, or the finals, *Oakland Magazine* pits the top five vote-getters against one another in a drop-down menu format. That's when the real campaigns for winning begin. And while categories change some year to year, the ballot remains very similar. Thus, the winners aren't always such a surprise.

Many of the winners, in fact, seem to be shoe-ins. In Goods & Services, Ruby's Garden, Crossroads, and the Berkeley Bowl are perennial winners. Likewise, in Lifestyle & Leisure, The Crucible, the Oakland Zoo, and Oakland Technical High School predictably earn top accolades. And in Food & Drink, Everett and Jones, Zachary's Chicago Pizza, and Peet's are pretty sure bets for No. 1 spots.

So this year meet some of valiant contenders who made the finalist round, giving the longtime winners something to worry about. Each finalist can be proud of the status. Winning isn't always everything. Show these fine finalists some love while congratulating the winners.

Photographs by Pat Mazzera



Readers' Choices



Best Art Classes
The Crucible

Best Art Gallery
Oakland Museum
of California

Best Arts Organization
Oakland Museum
of California

Best Band
Green Day

Best Camp
Bay Area Girls
Rock Camp

Best Charitable Event
Alameda County
Community Food
Bank, Savor
the Season

Best Comedy Venue
Spice Monkey,
Comedy Oakland

Best Continuing Education
UC Berkeley
Extension

Best Cooking Class
Kitchen on Fire

Best Crafting Classes
The Crucible

Best Cultural Event
Oakland First
Fridays

Best Dance Studio
Oakland
Ballet School

Best Event Space
Impact Hub
Oakland

Best Game and Toy Store
Mr. Mopps

Best Golf Course
Tilden Park
Golf Course

Best Gym/Health Club
Oakland YMCA



Comedy Oakland

Best Pet Store
Pet Food Express,
Piedmont Avenue

Best Pilates Studio
The Working Body

Best Place to Board Pets
The Dog Social
Club Cooperative

Best Place to Take the Kids
Oakland Zoo

Best Preschool
Rockridge
Montessori School

Best Private
Elementary School
Head-Royce
School

Best Private High School
Bishop O'Dowd
High School

Best Private Middle School
Head-Royce
School

Best Public
Elementary School
Chabot
Elementary School

Best Public High School
Oakland Technical
High School

Best Public Middle School
Piedmont
Middle School

Best Senior Living
Piedmont Gardens

Best Spinning Classes
RIDE Oakland
Cycling Studio

Best Swimming Lessons
Oakland YMCA

Best Yoga Studio
Namaste

Best New Cause
Alameda County
Community
Food Bank

Best Nonprofit Group
Alameda County
Community
Food Bank

Best Personal Trainer
Mario P. Gaytan,
The Working Body



Finalists in Focus

Borrow Art, Not Books

What a concept: a borrowing library for art not books. That's what the **Oakland Art Library** is. Artist and designer Luke Fraser came up with the idea, and for \$20 per month, you can take home portraits, abstracts, pop art, or scenics — essentially whatever you heart desires — from participating artists to see if you like the art enough to purchase it. If your pensive, brooding mood in winter lightens to a joyful celebratory one this spring, swap out that somber pen and ink for a flowery watercolor. On every third Thursday, The Trending Inn opens its doors from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. to artists and art lovers for a reception in a space where more than 30 artists are represented. It's free to attend, so see what kind of art you've been missing. The Oakland Art Library was a finalist for Best Art Gallery and Best Arts Organization. *The Trending Inn, 357 12th St., Oakland, OaklandArtLibrary.com.*

Join a Dog Cooperative

This is one place your dog will love staying, guaranteed. That's because **The Dog Social Club Cooperative** is owned and run by dog lovers like Katie Wojnooski, Lindsey Parker, 50-ish dog handlers, and a pack of pet parents. The West Oakland facility has been designed with dogs in mind, from retractable roofs over play yards to wading pools and play equipment. Additionally, playgroups are limited to 15 dogs of similar energy levels, perhaps shepherds, pinschers, and poodles that can enjoy a stimulating environment with plenty of restful spots. The club is what Every Dog Has Its Day Care morphed into when its founder, Lauren Westrick, retired. Wojnooski, Parker, and supporters generated \$3 million in investments to buy the business and facility, and the coop took the leash in July 2019. The Dog Social Club Cooperative was a finalist in the Best Place to Board Pets category and captured the win. *1315 16th St., Oakland, 510-655-7832, DogSocialClub.com.*

Have Some — or Lots — of Laughs

Sometimes you just need a good laugh, and you can reliably LYAO at **Comedy Oakland**, the little club with big laughs. Hosted atop Spice Monkey restaurant and aside Howden Market, Comedy Oakland squeezes comedy-lovers into an intimate upstairs room where an audience of about 50 can eat and drink Spice Monkey specialties while snickering, guffawing, and giggling at established pros and up-and-coming comics, funnymen, and funnywomen. About half a dozen performers poke fun at themselves, the onlookers, or the just-finished comic in the wings each show. Lewd, crude, and objectionable material? Possibly. Silly, strange, and genuine stuff? You bet. Five shows a week — 8 p.m. Thursdays, 7:45 p.m. and 9:45 p.m. Fridays, and 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Saturdays — mean there are plenty of times for a howling good time. Spice Money — Comedy Oakland, Howden Market was a finalist in the Best Comedy Venue category, and won. *1628 Webster St., Oakland, 510-214-2626, ComedyOakland.com.*



Readers' Choices

Goods & Services

Best Accounting
or Tax Practice
Fisher & Company

Best Acupuncturist
Aimee Ruiz

Best Alternative
Medicine Practice
**East Bay
Acupuncture**

Best Animal Shelter
or Rescue Group
East Bay SPCA

Best Arts and Crafts Store
**BLICK Art
Materials**

Best Attorney
Brian A. Ripley

Best Auto Body Shop
**Uptown Body
& Fender**

Best Auto Repair
**Dana Meyer
Auto Care**

Best Bank, S&L,
or Credit Union
**Patelco
Credit Union**

Best Barbershop
**People's
Barber & Shop**

Best Bike Shop
Alameda Bicycle

Best Bookstore
Pegasus Books

Best Building Contractor
**Frank Silver,
FMS Projects**

Best Cannabis Dispensary
Harborside

Best Children's Clothing
Ruby's Garden

Best Chiropractor
**Jessica Lips,
Ginkgo
Chiropractic
+ Sensory
Development
Center**



Best Chocolate Shop
See's Candies

Best Clothing Resale
**Crossroads
Trading**

Best Dental Practice
**Oakland
Green Dental**

Best Dermatologist
Dr. Julia Graves

Best Eyeglass Store
Warby Parker

Best Financial Planner
**Samantha Dinh,
Paragon Financial
Planning**

Best Flower Shop
**Wisteria
Rockridge**

Best Frame Shop
**Cheap Pete's
Picture Frame
Factory**

Best Gift Shop
Urban Indigo

Best Grocery
Berkeley Bowl

Best Hair Salon
77 Salon Inc.

Best Hairstylist or Colorist
Trinh Tran

Best Hardware Store
**Grand Lake
ACE Hardware**

Best Home
Furnishings Store
**Uhuru Furniture
& Collectibles**

Best House
Cleaning Service
Hella Clean

Best Insurance Agent
**Monique
Thomas-Wayne,
AAA Insurance**

Best Interior Design Firm
**Tierney Conner
Architecture**

Best Jewelry Store
Pavé

Best Kitchen Remodeler
**Custom Kitchens
by John
Wilkins Inc.**

Best Landscaping Service
**Native Soil
Landscape**

Best Lighting Store
Berkeley Lighting

Best Men's Fashion
**Maple Street
Denim**

Best Mortgage Broker
**Suzanne
"Skip" Skipper, La
Salle Financial**

Best New Business
Queerconomy

Best Optometry Practice
**UC Berkeley
School of
Optometry**

Best Orthopedic Practice
**California Sports
and Orthopaedic
Institute**

Best Painting Contractor
**Cydney Ortzow
Painting**

Best Place to Get a Facial
**Rockridge
Day Spa**

Best Place to Get a
Manicure or Pedicure
Natural Nails Plus

Best Place to
Get a Massage
Bayan Roots

Best Place to Get Clothes
Altered
Eclipse Alterations

Best Plant Nursery
**Berkeley
Horticultural
Nursery**

Best Plumbing Contractor
**Albert Nahman
Services**

Best Print Shop
**Minuteman
Press-Oakland**

Best Real Estate Agent
**Jennifer Bauer,
The Grubb Co.**

Best Real Estate Company
Red Oak Realty

Best Residential Architect
**Rebecca
Amato, Amato
Architecture**

Best Roofing Contractor
Collins Roofing

Best Sewer Line
Contractor
Pipe Spy

Best Shoe Repair
Ike's Shoe Repair

Best Shopping District
**Fourth Street,
Berkeley**

Best Small College
Mill's College

Best Spa
Piedmont Springs

Best Therapist
Lucia Grauman

Best Veterinary Clinic
East Bay SPCA

Best Waxing Salon
**European
Wax Center**

Best Women's Clothing
Lesley Evers

Best Women's Shoes
Shoes on Solano



Finalists in Focus

Enter the Temple

Flowing prints, nubby sweaters, sleek special occasion dresses, stylish close-fitting jackets, bright tanks, and loose tunics: All that and more await those who enter this temple of contemporary fashions and designer outlet, **Outback in the Temple of Venus**, from Devi Jacobs. Customers combing the racks are as likely to be well-heeled power brokers as penny-pinching ponytailed college kids looking for the perfect ensemble to reflect their vibrant, one-of-a-kind personalities. Outback also minds the pulse an underserved market demographic — mature women in their 40s and older coveting designer fashions at reasonable prices in a wide range of sizes, from petite to plus sizes. Cozy and comfortable, textured and artistic, novel and classic describe the dresses, tops, shoes, accessories, and other offerings at Outback, which also has some men's fashion goods. Enter the temple to find your style. Outback was a finalist for Best Women's Clothing. 1799 Fourth St, Berkeley, 510-527-1945, OutbackInTheTempleOfVenus.com.



Outback in the Temple of Venus

Find Baby and Kids Stuff Galore

Valentine's Baby & Kids is just about the cutest store on the planet. Open the Piedmont Avenue shop's door, which is plastered with baby-and-me announcements for events and classes for moms, dads, babies, and siblings, and get ready for cuteness overload by way of toys, clothing, and gifts. Some clothes are strung across a faux laundry line overhead, while others items rest in cubbies or hang from racks. Need a onesie with an eye-appealing pattern, little rain boots sporting elephants, or a super-plush, soft toy? That's all waiting for you here, as are a tiny play area and book nook for little ones. Valentine's has new and used items, from clothes to accessories, and carries brands that moms and dads trust as well as a few local lines and puts a priority on organic, handmade, and high-quality goods. Valentine's was a finalist for Best Children's Clothing. 3820 Piedmont Ave, Oakland, 510-985-5437, ValentinesBabyAndKids.weebly.com.



Brother & Sisters Flower Shop

Garden Greenery Lifts Spirits

When exploring the Grand Lake neighborhood, put **Brother & Sisters Flower Shop** on the list of must-visits. Behind big iron doors in an outdoor area of the short-lived Grand Fare Market, Brother & Sisters feels more like a magical nursery than a flower shop, with a warren of spaces full of blooms, succulents, plants, and interesting ceramic planters, garden art, unique containers, grab-and-go bouquets, vintage vessels, and scented candles beckoning around every nook and cranny. Freya Prowe and Cagla Schaffer are the talented and passionate green thumbs behind the greenery, centerpieces, houseplants, wreaths, and arrangements and have a knack for picking unusual and hard-to-find flowers as well as drought-tolerant natives. Brother & Sisters does weddings, hosts pop-ups, and conducts workshops on topics as varied as holiday wreaths, flower crowns, and simple flower arranging. A visit here is truly good for the spirit, so enjoy some flower power today. Brother & Sisters was a finalist for Best Flower Shop. 3265 Grand Ave, Oakland, 510-899-9574, BrotherAndSistersflowers.com.

Readers' Choices



Best Bagels
Beauty's
Bagel Shop

Best Bakery
Kingfish Pub
& Café

Best Barbecue
Everett and Jones

Best Breakfast/Brunch
Brown Sugar
Kitchen

Best Burger
TrueBurger

Best Butcher Shop
Clove & Hoof

Best California Cuisine
Chez Panisse

Best Caterer
Market Hall
Caterers

Best Cheeses
The Cheeseboard
Collective

Best Chef
James Syhabout,
Commis

Best Chinese Restaurant
Shan Dong

Best Cocktails
Shakewell

Best Coffeehouse
Peet's Coffee

Best Deli
Saul's Restaurant
& Delicatessen

Best Dim Sum
East Ocean
Seafood
Restaurant

Best Diner
Bette's
Oceanview
Diner

Best Doughnuts
Colonial Donuts,
Lakeshore Avenue



Best East Bay Beer
Oakland United
Beerworks' Pilsner

Best Ethiopian/
Eritrean Restaurant
Enssaro Ethiopian
Restaurant

Best Farmers Market
Grand Lake
Farmers Market

Best Fast-Casual
Restaurant
Cholita Linda

Best Greek Restaurant
Ikaros

Best Happy Hour
Mad Oak

Best Ice Cream
Fentons Creamery

Best Indian/
Pakistani Restaurant
Vik's Chaat

Best Italian Restaurant
Belotti

Best Izakaya
Ippuku

Best Japanese Restaurant
Kiralá

Best Korean Restaurant
Bowl'd BBQ

Best Late-Night Dining
Mua

Best Local Brewery
Drake's

Best Lounge
District

Best Mexican Restaurant
Doña

Best Mezcal Selection
Calavera

Best Middle Eastern
Restaurant
La Méditerranée

Best Neighborhood Bar
Kingfish
Pub & Café

Best New Restaurant
Doña

Best Outdoor Dining
Drake's Dealership

Best Pizza
Zachary's
Chicago Pizza

Best Place to Drink Beer
Drake's Dealership

Best Pop-up Restaurant
S + M Vegan

Best Ramen
Ramen Shop

Best Restaurant
Wood Tavern

Best Restaurant Wine List
The Wolf

Best Retail Beer Selection
Berkeley Bowl

Best Salads
Market Hall Foods

Best Sandwiches
Ike's Love &
Sandwiches

Best Seafood Restaurant
Scott's Seafood

Best Seafood Retailer
Tokyo Fish
Market

Best Small Plates
À Côté

Best South- or Central-
American Restaurant
Cholita Linda

Best Southern/Soul Food
Brown Sugar
Kitchen

Best Spanish Restaurant
Duende

Best Taco Truck
Tacos Sinaloa

Best Thai/
Burmese Restaurant
Burma Superstar

Best Vegan Restaurant
Millennium

Best Vegetarian
Restaurant
Millennium

Best Vietnamese/
Cambodian/
Laotian Restaurant
Champa Garden

Best Wine Bar
Oakland Yard

Best Wine Store
Oakland Yard

Best Winery
Rock Wall
Wine Company



Finalists in Focus

Bagels Done Right

Hooray for Emily Winston, who just may have invented the most talked about bagels in the Bay Area. She finally took her pop-up concept to brick-and-mortar reality in 2019, setting up shop in the original Noah's — with blessings from the founder — as **Boichik Bagels** and the tag line, “There are no(w) good bagels in California.” The New Jersey native has been praised for her bagels since she started her cottage industry a few years ago. She set New York's H&H Bagels as her gold standard and spent about seven years perfecting the recipe for her super-premium rendition. The public loves these boiled-and-baked kosher bagels in all their varieties, not to mention the bialys, challah, lox, and cream cheese combos that also star daily. Winston has the operation down to assembly-line precision, so the line out the door moves along quickly. Boichik Bagels was a finalist for Best Bagels. 3170 College Ave, Berkeley, 510-858-5189, BoichikBagels.com.



Hoist a Mug

There's no shortage of breweries in the Jack London Square Warehouse District, and **Oakland United Beerworks** has quickly made a name for itself, thanks to its authentic German-, Bavarian-, and Belgian-style pilsners, ales, and lagers. With 12 taps, four HD TVs, two levels, and 65 seats, Oakland United is ready for beer fiends to sip samples of schwarzbier, hefeweizen, Märzen, saison, kirschweizen, and more. In the mood for an IPA, imperial stout, pale ale, or something fruity, rye-based, or malty? United has all that covered, too, plus seasonal choices, specialty beers, and collaborative brews. The space is industrial chic with viewing opportunities of the beer-making, and you might be able to rub elbows with the brewmaster. Oakland United was a finalist for Best Place to Drink Beer and its pilsner won Best East Bay Brew. Prost! 262 Second St., Oakland, 510-251-8898, OaklandUnitedBeerworks.com.



Reward Yourself for Getting Out of Bed

Piedmont Avenue seems to be channeling Seattle with its plethora of coffee opps. From Starbucks and Peet's to Blue Bottle and Gaylord's not to mention Timeless and Doña, this bustling avenue seems to have coffee available on every other corner. One indie outlet that made a mighty showing for Best Coffee in this year's Best Of contest is **Snow White Coffee Bar**, established in 2016. It's a teeny-tiny storefront with a colorful spirit animal mural outside inviting in all kinds of coffee lovers. Serving RoastCo coffee and Starter Bakery goodies, Snow White inside is minimalist, decorated simply with beautifully glazed mugs on one shelf facing merchandise and a small array of books on shelves across the room. No lines here — for now. A sign beckons, “Congratulations, you made it out of bed, come in for COFFEE.” Indeed. 3824 Piedmont Ave, Oakland, 510-808-7655, SnowWhiteCoffee.com.