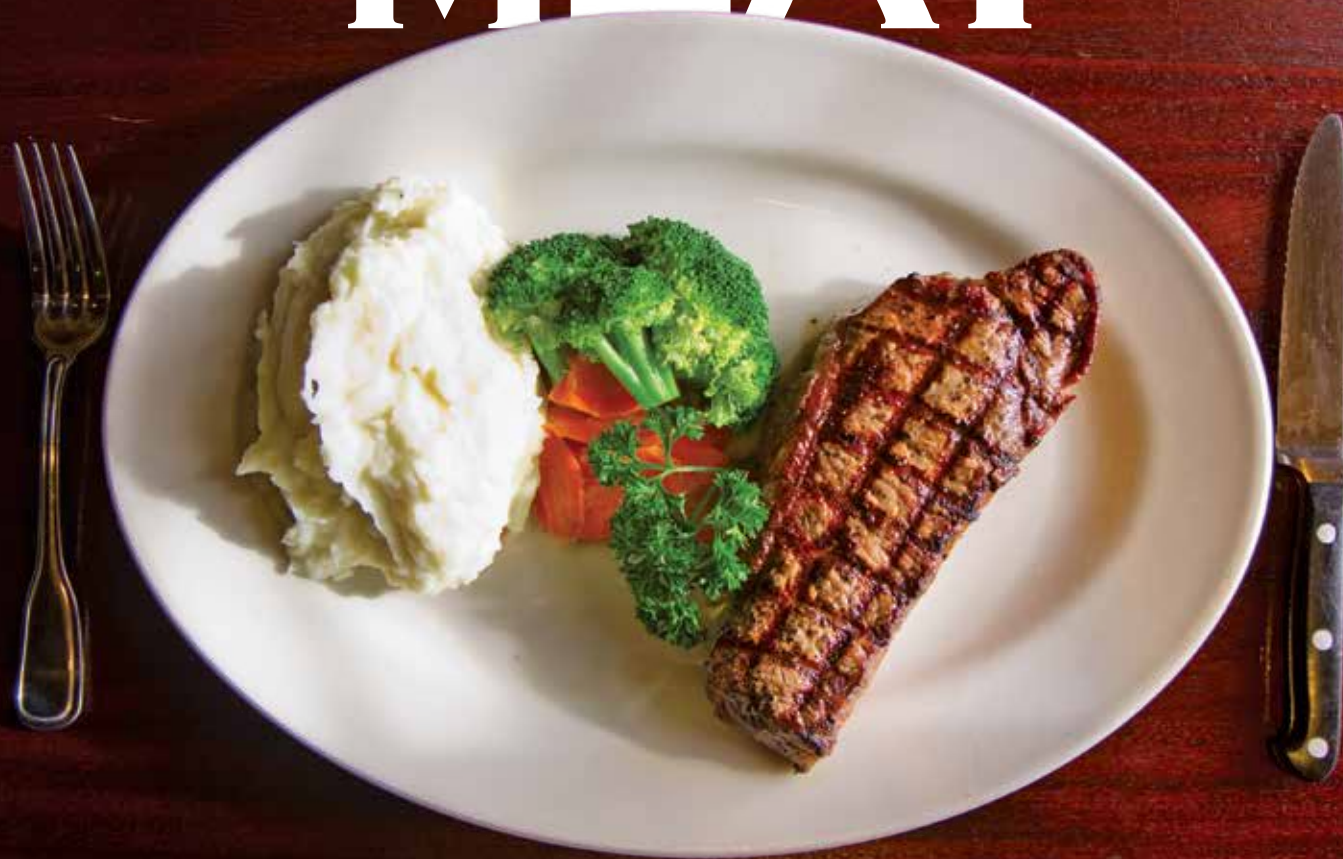


■ RESTAURANT REVIEW

## A MECCA FOR MEAT



### AFTER 40 YEARS, SUNDANCE RETAINS HIGH STANDARDS AND CHARM

Review by Dale F. Bentson // Photos by Michelle Le

**1** 974 was a momentous year. Richard Nixon resigned the presidency, the Oakland A's beat the Los Angeles Dodgers in the World Series, "The Sting" won best picture, the price of a first-class stamp rose to 10 cents, Robert M. Pirsig published "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" — and in Palo Alto, restaurateur

Robert Fletcher opened Sundance Mining Co.

The rest, as they say, is history. Sundance Mining Co. morphed into Sundance The Steakhouse and is thriving in its 40th year. Sons Aron and Galen Fletcher are now running the classic American steakhouse on El Camino Real in Palo Alto with top-notch food, attentive service,

an excellent wine list and décor that exudes old-school charm.

In these days of celebrity chefs, restaurant empires, glitzy chains and often unintelligible menus, Sundance stays with one location, keeps the facility in tip-top condition, trains the staff in fine-dining details, ensures the kitchen maintains the highest standards and uses

the finest ingredients — and the menu needs no translation.

Robert Fletcher and partner Richard Hamner acquired the Stanford View restaurant when the property became available in 1974. Both had worked for corporate restaurant chains: Fletcher was in charge of

► Continued on next page

Sundance Steakhouse's prime New York strip steak.

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building and opening Hungry Hunter restaurants, while Hamner was a regional manager for Jack in the Box.

After the successful launch of their Sundance Mining Co. steakhouse, the pair founded four Pacific Fresh restaurants, which they sold in 1991 to a Japanese company. After an amicable separation, Hamner went on to found the Una Mas chain of Mexican eateries.

Fletcher mined Sundance. His sons grew up in the restaurant

business but chose different career routes. Galen became a certified public accountant with Ernst & Young while Aron charted a course at Smith Barney (now Morgan Stanley). According to Galen, on Christmas morning in 1992, Robert asked his sons whether they were interested in taking over the business, or whether he should sell it. It was time in his life to take a step back.

By 1996, both brothers were working at Sundance full time — Galen first and Aron a few years later. In 2000, Robert retired, but he retains a financial and spiritual interest in the business.

“My dad was almost a stranger when we were growing up,” Galen recalled. “He was always working, always on the go, moving around from city to city opening up Hungry Hunter restaurants. I was determined that for the first 20 years, I wanted to fully participate in my family’s life. I didn’t want to miss out. I wanted soccer practices and all the school activities. I needed to stay in one place, concentrate on one business.”

It seems to have worked out for everyone, especially the dining public who keeps the place packed, or nearly so, throughout the year. Besides the dining rooms, booths, quiet nooks and



Sundance waiter James greets longtime Sundance customer Bob Siegmann at lunchtime on Dec. 16.

private dining areas, there is a lively bar scene with a long list of contemporary cocktails. The wine list boasts more than 400 labels, mostly California, and most of that cabernet — the perfect pairing for beef.

Slow-roasted for eight hours, the certified Angus prime rib is offered in 8-ounce to 14-ounce cuts: \$32.95 to \$42.95. On a recent visit, the juicy, flavor-

ful meat was served exactly as ordered — rare, with minimal fat. Creamy horseradish and hot au jus were served on the side. The meat was accompanied by vegetables and a choice of potato or rice.

Fork-tender was the 13-ounce USDA Prime New York strip steak (\$48.95). The steak was served at the optimum temperature: hot, but with time enough

for the meat to have rested after cooking. Meat proteins heat and coagulate during cooking, and moisture is driven towards the center. If the meat rests for a few minutes after it is off the fire, the protein molecules relax and reabsorb the juices. That’s what makes a perfect steak.

But Sundance offers more than just great beef. The Pacific swordfish (\$29.50) was sea-



The crab cakes are served with a sherry-cayenne aioli sauce.

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**APPETIZERS**

Bruschetta - toasted slices of oven baked bread topped with Roma tomato cubes marinated with olive oil, garlic and fresh basil.  
Crispy Zucchini Cakes - served with marinated cucumber & mint yogurt.

**SOUP/SALAD**

Butternut Squash Soup - Garnished with pumpkin seeds and olive oil.  
Venti Garden - Butter lettuce with organic mixed greens, shaved funnel, red onions, cherry tomatoes and toasted pecans with champagne vinaigrette dressing.  
Greens & Apples - Organic mix greens, topped with gorgonzola cheese crumbles, walnuts, cranberries, granny Smith apples and poppy seed dressing.

**ENTREES**

Filet Mignon - Filet mignon in a red wine reduction Served with broccolini and a risotto cake filled with blue cheese.  
Cioppino - Fresh salmon, snapper, clams, mussels, crab legs and prawns in spicy Venti tomato sauce.  
Braised Short Ribs in a light red wine sauce - served with polenta and seasonal fresh cut vegetables.  
Grilled Lamb Chops in a lemon vinaigrette sauce - Served with Swiss chard, and roasted potatoes.  
Linguine Pescatore - fresh salmon, snapper, clams, mussels and prawns in a spicy tomato sauce.  
Mushroom Ravioli - with Roma tomatoes and fresh spinach, in a light Marsala cream sauce.  
Grilled Salmon - served with sautéed spinach, wild rice and vegetables.

**DESSERT**

Tiramisu - Italian dessert, consisting of alternating layers of coffee-soaked lady fingers and sweet mixture of mascarpone cheese, eggs and sugar.

Executive Chef -Antonio Zomora

Limited Seating — Make reservations through [opentable.com](http://opentable.com) or [cucinaventi.com](http://cucinaventi.com)

Hours: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday - Thursday  
9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday - Saturday • 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday

1390 Pear Ave., Mountain View | (650) 254-1120 | [www.cucinaventi.com](http://www.cucinaventi.com)



Spring rolls have a filet mignon filling at Sundance Steakhouse.

breeze fresh, dusted with spices and grilled over an open flame. The fish was succulent and moist.

Sauteed New England sea scallops and wild gulf prawns (\$28.50) were plump and meaty, nestled in a reduced white wine garlic butter sauce with an ambrosial hint of fresh garlic and pepper that tickled the palate.

The chicken Marsala (\$22.95) was a pounded-thin breast, sauteed in Marsala mushroom sauce and then served under a blanket of earthy, fragrant mushrooms.

There were plenty of appetizers too. Mouthwatering golden brown crab cakes (\$14.95), filet mignon spring rolls (\$12.95) served on a gingery Asian salad and Idaho potato skins (\$11.50) with cheddar cheese, smoked bacon and chopped green onions.

The steakhouse classic wedge salad (\$9.95) comes topped with house-made blue cheese dressing, chopped tomato, crumbled blue cheese and smoked bacon. The clam chowder (\$6.50 cup; \$8.50 bowl) was loaded with clams, potatoes and onions.

Desserts aren't made in-house, but to house specifications. The signature mud pie (\$8.95) — coffee ice cream with an Oreo cookie crust in a puddle of hot fudge, topped with whipped cream and chopped peanuts — is big enough to share and has

**DINING NOTES**

**Sundance The Steakhouse**  
1921 El Camino Real,  
Palo Alto  
650-321-6798  
sundancesteakhouse.com

Hours:  
Lunch: Monday-Friday,  
11:30 a.m.-2 p.m.  
Dinner:  
Sunday-Monday, 5-9 p.m.;  
Tuesday-Saturday, 5-10 p.m.

- Reservations: ✓
- Credit cards: ✓
- Happy hour: ✓
- Children: ✓
- Takeout: ✓
- Outdoor dining: ●
- Party parties: ✓
- Parking: lot
- Alcohol: full bar
- Corkage: \$25
- Noise level: moderate
- Bathroom cleanliness: excellent

been on the menu since opening day. Also good was the New York cheesecake (\$7.95) with a strawberry fruit sauce.  
What's not to like? Happy 40th, Sundance. ■



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