

## The coolest thing about Francis Ford Coppola's Italian restaurant may surprise you

There's more to San Francisco's Cafe Zoetrope than classic pasta and pizza dishes

by Gail Johnson on April 2nd, 2018 at 11:59 AM



The Short Story Dispenser at Francis Ford Coppola's San Francisco restaurant sits against a mirror in the middle of the front room.

by GAIL JOHNSON

The coolest thing about Francis Ford Coppola's casual Italian restaurant in San Francisco, [Cafe Zoetrope](#), isn't the food. Which is not to say the fare isn't good, because it is—very good, in fact, and reasonably priced.

Nor is it that the smart wine list includes selections from his eponymous Geyserville winery, along with other pours, some premium, from California and Italy.

It's not the fact that the eatery is situated in the historic Sentinel building, a flat-iron, wedge-shaped North Beach landmark from 1906. In 1972, Coppola bought the building (can you imagine?) to house his production company, American Zoetrope.

*The Godfather II and III, Apocalypse Now, The Outsiders, Dracula*, and other titles were written, edited, or sound-mixed there.

Nor is it the vast collection of photos, awards, and other mementos from the director's stellar career.

It's the slender contraption, a kind of vending machine, that stands in the middle of the front room: a [Short Story Dispenser](#).

It has three buttons: 1, 3, and 5, each one corresponding to the number of minutes required to read. You press a button, and out spits a little tale on a paper chit. You can select as many stories as you like.

It's free. It's brilliant.

A French start-up company called Short Edition designed and launched the dispenser in 2011. Cafe Zoetrope's machine is the first in the United States.

Not all stories are necessarily kid-friendly, but the concept appeals to all ages, combining technology with the timelessness of story-telling and simple pleasure of reading. It's way better than a screen to keep young readers occupied and entertained during a meal.

It's not surprising that Coppola, who's quite the Renaissance man, placed the machine in his restaurant; in 1997, he cofounded *Zoetrope: All-Story*, an internationally acclaimed story and art quarterly. It recently won the 2018 American Society of Magazine Editors' [Award for Fiction](#), the highest honour for American periodicals, marking its second straight win and third in the last five years. *Zoetrope: All-Story* beat out *Harper's Magazine*, the *New Yorker*, and other finalists.