

# San Francisco

FILM



Michelle Tea at Adobe Books, on 16th Street in the Mission.

## Valencia v. Valencia

Yesterday's dyke haunts are today's hipster clichés.

Seventeen years ago, local author **Michelle Tea's award-winning novel *Valencia* did for young lesbians what *On the Road* did for the Beat generation.** Based on Tea's own sex, drug, and tattoo-fueled search for love and community, the book gave voice to the experience of other young queers and helped make the Mission district their go-to destination. This summer, Tea made *Valencia* into a movie (due out sometime next year) and discovered some interesting things about the old hood in the process. Puerto Alegre is still slinging giant margaritas, music still pours out of Esta Noche nightly, and Katz Bagels, where Tea had an interview for her short-lived brothel job, is still going strong. But a lot has changed, as Tea wistfully pointed out on a recent tour of her old stomping grounds (she now lives in the lower Haight). "I loved the *Valencia* era, but it was kind of crazy," she says. "Besides, the city had changed a million times before I even got here. You can't be too attached to it."

■ KRISTIN SMITH

### BLONDIE'S

540 VALENCIA ST.

Tea wrote much of *Valencia* by hand, sipping cheap beer in the process, in what was then a dive bar frequented by working-class lesbians. Today, customers here order up \$12 artisanal martinis. This is also where Tea started the performance group Sister Spit. In one memorable incident, a member was about to take a chain saw to a pig's head, and an animal rights activist grabbed the head and raced down Valencia with it.

### NEW DAWN CAFE

3174 16TH ST.

Tea also did some writing in this café, where she says you could get a coffee for 50 cents and drink it all day. "The New Dawn aesthetic was like Goodwill meets a queen's closet," Tea recalls. "It was almost too dusty and cluttered to eat in there, except that we were then too hungover to care." Now it's Tokyo Go Go, a hipster sushi joint.

### RED DORA'S BEARDED LADY

485 14TH ST.

Tea describes this café with a backyard as the "epicenter" of dyke life in the '90s: "It was an absolute wonderland of punk queers," including lesbian writers like Kathy Acker, who read there. Today it's a gallery called Hungryman, situated between a designer chair store and a yoga studio.

### KFC

1058 VALENCIA ST.

In the book, Tea goes to KFC for mashed potatoes after she gets her tongue pierced in a spot that now houses Spork, a chic restaurant with an extensive wine list and free-range meat. (The name, though, pays homage to its previous occupants and their all-in-one cutlery.)

### ARMORY

1800 MISSION ST.

The only place on Valencia that has become queerer since the '90s is the Armory. "At the time, I would obsess about what was inside that huge building at the end of my block. Dead pigeons? Dead junkies? I couldn't imagine," says Tea. Now, of course, the Armory is home to Kink.com, a porn studio and fetish website.