Stanford Memorial Church, known to students as MemChu, is adorned with mosaics begun in 1900 and completed five years later.
It’s 9:30 on a balmy night, and I’m standing amid 20 looming, glimmering statues sculpted by Auguste Rodin. But I’m not in Paris—I happen to be on the Stanford campus, home to more Rodin bronzes than anywhere else outside the City of Light.

It might seem odd that a place nicknamed “the Farm” (thanks to its roots as railroad baron Leland Stanford’s stock farm) would boast such a fine crop of art. But the university’s Cantor Arts Center has a world-class collection of more than 70 outdoor sculptures. Architecture buffs will find plenty to engage them here as well, from beaux arts to Frank Lloyd Wright. Add in the lush grounds, with more than 43,000 trees, and you’ll find that this expanse of green is the perfect antidote to Silicon Valley’s infamous cube farms.

A haven in Silicon Valley

Take a break from high-tech Silicon Valley by enjoying the region’s softer side: Stanford University’s diverse art collection.

By Gayle Keck
Earlier in the day, I’d visited the Cantor’s newly expanded indoor Rodin galleries, which are spacious enough to enable the display of the university’s 200-plus Rodin works en masse. The monumental Thinker dominates a soaring circular space, while smaller figures, busts, astonishingly expressive disembodied hands and studies for larger pieces demonstrate the breadth of the sculptor’s genius. During a lively tour, docent Gayle Brugler revealed that Rodin preferred to exhibit his statues by candlelight. So now I’ve come back to see how these outdoor works look at night, illuminated much as they were in the artist’s studio (or, in this case, by a special in-ground lighting system). “Rodin was always thinking in lumps and holes,” Brugler said, “reflecting light and not reflecting light in his sculptures.” The dramatic setting illustrates her point. It seems strangely akin to the binary ones and zeroes being sculpted all across campus in buildings named for Hewlett, Packard and Gates.

I started my Stanford visit with a bird’s-eye glimpse of campus from the 250-foot-high viewing platform on art deco Hoover Tower. Stanford’s older buildings are a sea of red-tiled roofs, with the waters of the bay shimmering in the distance. A student guide pointed out the new nanotechnology lab that’s under construction and a recently completed “green” building funded by alum and Yahoo! co-founder Jerry Yang. (Building nomenclature isn’t all about the big-ticket alumni, though—there’s also a pair of modular structures dubbed Bambi and Godzilla.)

Back on the ground, I strolled the graceful, arched arcades of the university’s original, late-19th-century buildings crafted from yellow sandstone in a Romanesque-meets–California Mission style. The graceful, arched arcades of the university’s
The Cantor Arts Center displays the university’s 200-plus Rodin works en masse.
The 8,180-acre expanse of Stanford is so vast—the largest contiguous university campus in the U.S., sprawling over two zip codes—that it’s a challenge to see everything on foot.

Where to dine

Kaygetsu
328 Sharon Park Dr.
(at Sand Hill Rd.), Menlo Park
650-234-1084
kaygetsu.com

Don’t be put off by the strip-mall surroundings. This Japanese standout serves an exquisite five-course kaiseki tasting menu, as well as an à la carte menu, including sashimi and hard-to-find dishes, like savory custard chawan mushi.

Tamarine
546 University Ave., Palo Alto
650-325-8500
tamarinenrestaurant.com

Reserve well in advance for this chic modern Vietnamese restaurant and gallery, where the movers and shakers are outnumbered only by orders for the Shaking Beef.

The Village Pub
2967 Woodside Rd., Woodside
650-851-9888
thevillagepub.net

A bit farther afield, this stylish restaurant serves contemporary California cuisine, including housemade charcuterie, local cheeses and heirloom produce from a dedicated five-acre farm.

Cool Café at the Cantor Arts Center
328 Lomita Dr., Stanford
650-723-4177
museum.stanford.edu/visit/cafe.html

Dine on the outdoor terrace overlooking the Rodin sculpture garden. The café specializes in organic, sustainable gourmet sandwiches, salads and burgers from chef Jesse Cool.

by Andy Goldsworthy. Lurking in a trench, it evokes a slumbering dragon.

Along the way, I traveled shaded paths edged by vivid blue agapanthus and fuchsia oleanders, but the most spectacular display of color I encountered was in the mosaics of Memorial Church, facing the main quad. Italian artists used 20,000 shades of tile to create interior and exterior murals, including 34 hues of pink in the cheeks of the four angels who guard the church’s dome.

The 8,180-acre expanse of Stanford is so vast—the largest contiguous university campus in the U.S., sprawling over two zip codes—that it’s a challenge to see everything on foot. But you can always hop a golf-cart tour (reserve in advance) to discover the more far-flung sights.

You feel this emotional connection to the environment, and you don’t know why—but Wright knows why,” Cain said, pointing out how the exterior flows into the interior through intricate walls of windows.

From the pattern in the floor to a towering skylight in the kitchen (or the “laboratory,” as Wright called it) to custom-designed furniture, the architect’s “honeycombs” are everywhere. But the temperamental talent didn’t always get his way—two fireplaces were added in an extensive Wright-designed 1957 remodel, against Wright’s original wishes. A determined Jean Hanna hopped in her car and drove alone to Arizona, convincing Wright to give her what she wanted.

After my long day of exploring, what I wanted was a relaxing dinner. Continuing with the art and architecture theme, I headed down spectacular Palm Drive, flanked with 166 Canary Island date palms, and dropped by a

 several months of renovations, Hanna House (nicknamed the Honeycomb House) was a seminal structure for Wright. He adopted a hexagonal pattern as his motif, leaving no 90-degree corners. “It made the carpenters crazy,” confided my guide, Julie Cain.

The architect designed around the ancient valley oaks embracing the hilltop home.

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Getting there

The Stanford campus is about 24 miles from San Francisco International Airport and about 18 miles from San José International Airport.

San José International Airport (sjs.org) is in the midst of a major, multiyear construction project that includes a new rental car center, a parking garage, demolition of Terminal C, improvements to Terminal A and construction of the new Terminal B. The new concourse is partially completed. (Southwest Airlines will be the only carrier using it until next June, but check-in and baggage claim will still be at Terminal A.) The old, unused international terminal is scheduled to begin in mid-2010, with an opening date in early 2011. Virgin America and American Airlines will then be moved to the new concourse, which will also have a new gourmet market, a wine bar and dining options with a Slow Food focus. Until Terminal 2 is completed, two domestic carriers, Virgin America and JetBlue, are located in the new International Terminal. San Francisco Airport Museums (sfoarts.org) curates a wonderful, eclectic mix of rotating exhibits, including art, anthropology, design, sports, animation and transportation. Past shows have ranged from the art of the martini to Native American baskets. The most extensive displays are in the International Terminal and Terminal 3.

Stanford campus

Cantor Arts Center
338 Lomita Dr., Stanford 650-723-4177; museum.stanford.edu
Open Wed.–Sun. Rodin sculpture garden open daily and lighted until midnight.

Hanna House
650-725-8352, libre.stanford.edu/architect/hanna_house

More art

Allied Arts Guild
75 Arbor Rd., Menlo Park 650-322-2405, alliedartsguild.org
A collection of artists’ studios and shops set in a lovely series of gardens.

First Friday Art Walks
Pacific Art League of Palo Alto
668 Ramona St., Palo Alto 650-321-3891, paloaltoartwalk.com
The PAL’s gallery shop and a number of other galleries are open on the first Friday of each month from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., many offering live music, entertainment and refreshments.

Stanford Theatre
221 University Ave., Palo Alto 650-324-3700, stanfordtheatre.org
A lavish, restored movie palace showing classic films, preceded by live organ music on the “Mighty Wurlitzer.”

The road less taken

Stanford University is an easy diversion when calling on Silicon Valley company headquarters:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Distance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sun Microsystems</td>
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Gayle Keck is a Lowell Thomas Award–winning travel writer who lives in San Francisco.