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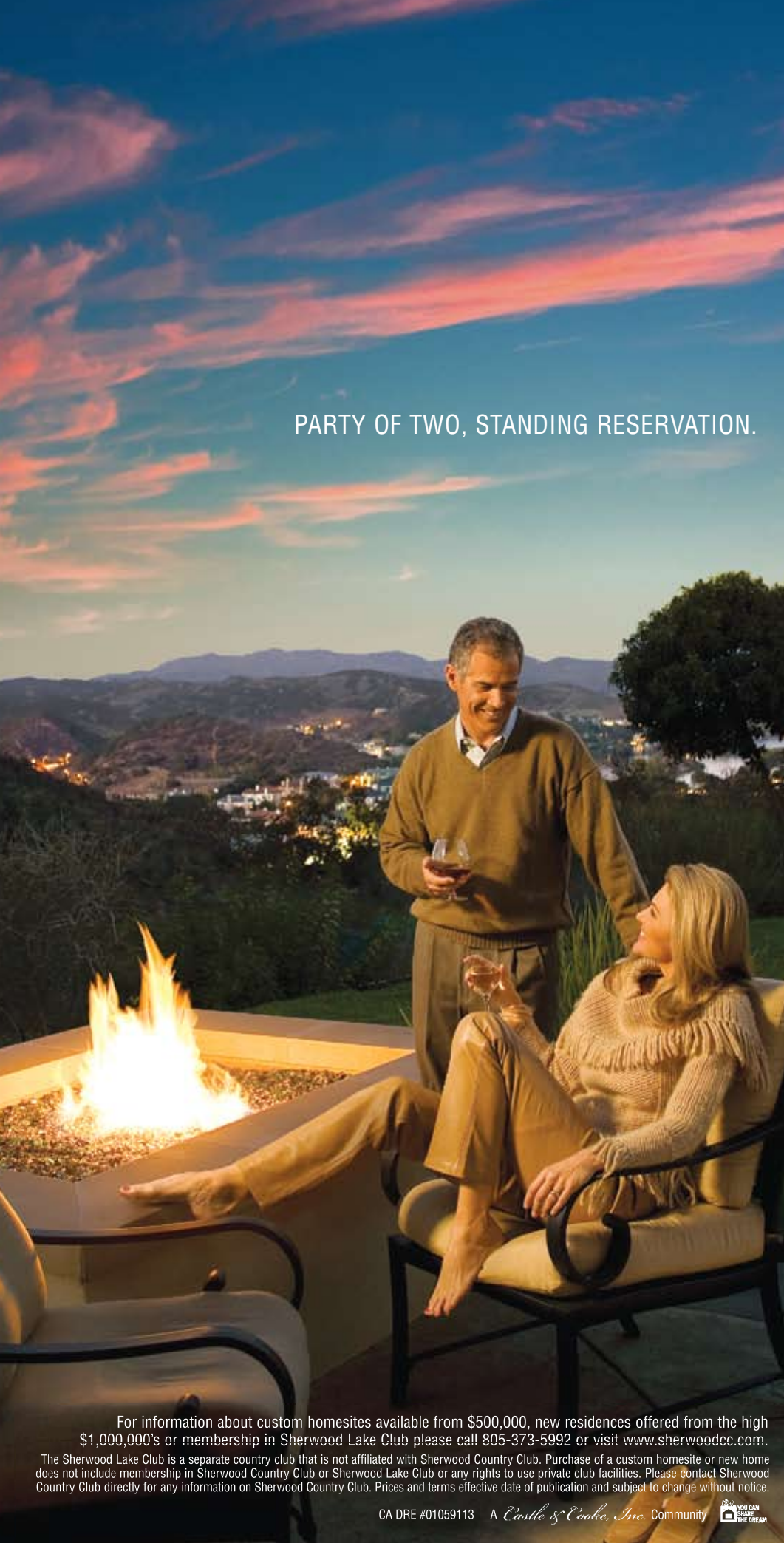
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GARY MOSS

## Guilty Pleasures\* (That I Will Admit To)

### In no particular order:

The “Maccaroni Puttanesca in Carozza” from Trattoria Farfalla in Westlake Village. This is *bucatini*, which is like a thick spaghetti, with tomato sauce, black olives, and capers. They dump the bowl of blazing hot pasta into a partially carved out wheel of Parmesan cheese and stir it around so it gathers up the gooey cheese, and then they re-plate and serve it. And then I inhale it.

Hot pretzel bread with butter at Mastro’s (in Thousand Oaks).

Philly cheesesteak sandwich at The Ranch in Westlake Village. (I’m not alone; see page 52.)

Fried Spanish olives with garlic aioli from Safire in Camarillo.

Caramel Banana Bread Pudding from Café 14 (in Agoura Hills). I don’t have a huge sweet tooth, but I could take a bath in this stuff.

Saint André cheese slathered on a baguette. (You can usually get the baguette hot from the oven at around 5 p.m. at Gelson’s.)

The Scotch eggs at Crown & Anchor (in Thousand Oaks) are a culinary wonder: hard-boiled eggs wrapped in sausage, then breaded and deep-fried.

John Wm. Macy’s Cheddar & Asiago CheeseCrisps from Cost Plus World Market. I look like a cartoon when I eat them.

Spaghetti carbonara from Tra di Noi in Malibu.

Chocolate Florentine lace cookies from Victor Benes Bakery at Gelson’s (with a glass of milk, of course).

Wise Dipsy Doodles. This is an East Coast brand of chips—they’re like Fritos with ridges—that I can only find locally at Malibu Kitchen & Gourmet Country Market.

My husband’s Cadillac margarita, on the rocks with salt. He shakes it like crazy over ice, which gives it a frothy goodness that makes me want more than one. (Check out the recipe on our Facebook page.)

Now I’m hungry, so enjoy the rest of the issue.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynne".

Lynne Andujar, Editor in Chief  
and Associate Publisher  
[edit@805living.com](mailto:edit@805living.com)

\*My staff has just informed me that a “guilty pleasure” doesn’t necessarily have to be culinary-oriented. Doubtful, I checked the dictionary and it turns out they are right. As long as it induces a “minor feeling of guilt” it counts. Oh boy—it’s a good thing I only get one page an issue. —LA





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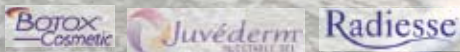
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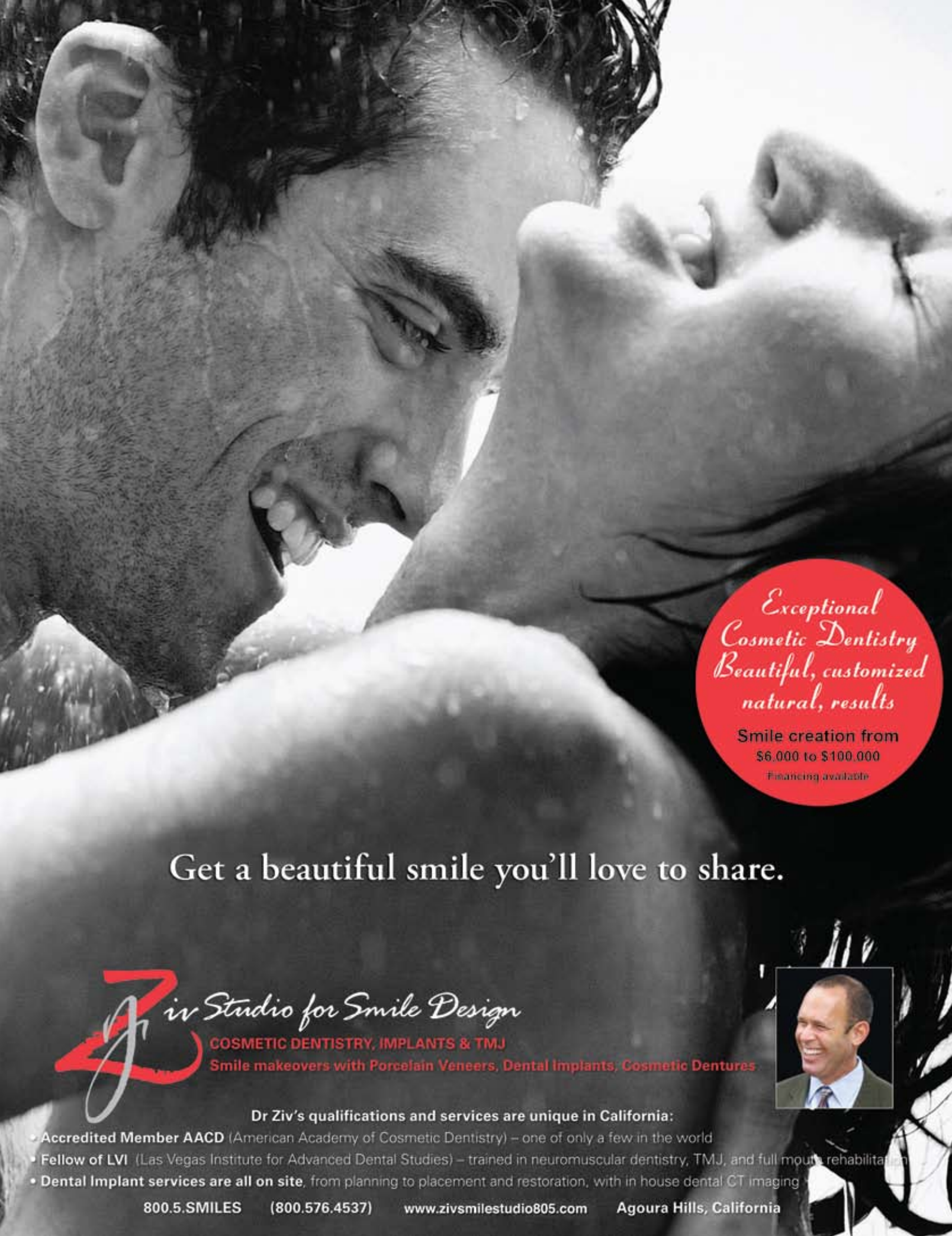
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# Behind the Scenes

## DON'T TELL ANYONE, BUT ...

Forget being cool or self-disciplined: Guilty pleasures are what we enjoy when we think nobody's looking. Maybe it's singing along with tunes from a favorite eighties rock band (Guns N' Roses, anyone?), or maybe it's eating an old-school bakery cupcake—trans fats and all—with gobs of fluffy frosting. Here's what a few *805 Living* contributors love to indulge in—despite knowing better.

Contributing editor **MARYANN HAMMERS** (*Mind/Body/Soul*, page 38) spends a lot of time thinking about health and nutrition, but she doesn't *always* follow the rules. **Empty carbs—the more unhealthful, the better—are my guiltiest pleasures: sweet potato fries. A whole basket of fries at Islands. The bread at Macaroni Grill. My other guilty pleasures are watching Judd Apatow and/or Seth Rogen movies (though if you ask me, I'll claim to only see indies); perusing gossipy websites like *OMG!* and *TMZ*; and drinking the Jungle Juice Martini at Padri.**

Contributing editor **MARK LANGTON** keeps all of our events up-to-the-minute for *Insider* and *Hot Ticket* each month, as well as profiling charity events in *Good Deeds*. While his love of sushi is well known (he's written about it for this magazine), his guilty pleasure is a particular order. **By far my favorite sushi delicacy is giant clam. It is a bit more esoteric than the standard fish you find in most restaurants, and therefore it usually costs about three times what a standard order of sushi goes for. But I get to spread the guilt around since my wife loves it, too.**



Photographer **ELIZABETH MESSINA** (“Love Is in the Air,” page 65) is a married artist, a mother of three, and a romantic who says that she loves to bring a little more beauty and sweetness into the world. **My guilty pleasures are chocolate and shoes and kisses—not necessarily in that order.** To see more of her work, visit her websites, [www.elizabethmessina.com](http://www.elizabethmessina.com) and [www.alovelyworkshop.com](http://www.alovelyworkshop.com), or her blog, [www.kissthegroom.com](http://www.kissthegroom.com).

Contributing writer **FRANK NELSON** (*Arts & Culture*, page 40) admits to several guilty pleasures, which, he says, are all connected. **A Saturday or Sunday at home with no visitors; a lovely long lunch with a glass (or two) of New Zealand sauvignon blanc; and then the biggest guilty pleasure of all: slipping under the covers for an afternoon nap.** Nelson is the author of two lighthearted travel books, *All You Need is Luck* and *A Little More Luck*; for more information, visit [www.allyouneedisluck.com](http://www.allyouneedisluck.com).

Contributing editor **CYNTHIA HOUSE NOONEY** (*Pursuits*, page 42) enjoys nothing more than laughing so hard she cries. **Offbeat movies like *Superbad*, *Tropic Thunder*, and *Borat* make me roar out loud. And the quirky TV comedy *It's Always***



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# This Month at Ojai Valley Inn & Spa

*Sunny in Philadelphia* pushes the humor envelope in unexpected and irreverent ways. One of my favorite guilty pleasures is gathering around the tube in the company of family members for comic release and doubling-over; they are usually howling right along with me.

Contributing editor and resident restaurant expert **ANGELA PETTERA** co-wrote our “Guilty Pleasures” feature (page 52) this month in addition to her usual restaurant reviews, news, and *Dining Guide* updates. But Pettera has her own guilty pleasure that has nothing to do with food: I lock myself in the bathroom and make ugly faces in the mirror. And I don’t mean Rosie O’Donnell ugly or Gilda Radner ugly. I’m talking Phyllis Diller ugly. The kind of ugly that might make my husband reconsider marrying me. Sure, it’s weird—but darn, it makes me laugh.



JOEL SERRATO/WWW.JOELSERRATO.COM

**JOSE VILLA** (“Love Is in the Air,” page 65) is a fine-art wedding photographer, so it’s fitting that his favorite guilty pleasure is related to his passion for the art: I love photography books from the old-time photographers, and I buy way too many. So many that I know it would take me at least three months to go through all of them. To see more of Villa’s wedding photography (and his unique portraits of kids, too), visit [www.josevilla.com](http://www.josevilla.com) and [www.josevillakids.com](http://www.josevillakids.com).

“Guilty Pleasures” feature (page 52) this month—but she didn’t let him in on the fact that he plays an integral role in one of her favorite guilty pleasures. *The Bachelor* is my must-see TV. Yes, I’m hooked. I can’t help tuning in to watch a gaggle of beautiful women woo a handsome hunk with the hopes of finding true love. So, Chris, tell me: Will Jake Pavelka find his soulmate this season? I’m dying to find out. Wallace is an award-winning journalist whose work has appeared in more than 70 newspapers nationwide.

Contributing editor **JEMMA WILDERMUTH** rounds up must-have items for our *Finds/Style* department each month (see this month’s lingerie and jewelry picks on pages 20 and 22), but her favorite guilty pleasure is something you can’t buy. Sitting in the quietness of a new day dawning. Not one peep to be heard. The guilt? These stolen stillnesses are most delicious when all my peeps are still asleep! Sshh ... ■



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# Finds

By Lynne Andujar

## PASSION FOR PINK

A blushing beauty in all its shades of glory.



**Sweet Surrender**  
"Pink Velvet" cupcake topped with pink cream cheese frosting (\$2.75 each, \$28 per dozen); Cupcakery, Thousand Oaks, [www.cupcakeryonline.com](http://www.cupcakeryonline.com).



**Whisper Sweet Somethings**  
*Love Poems* by Nobel laureate Pablo Neruda (\$12); Anthropologie at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, or Santa Barbara, [www.anthropologie.com](http://www.anthropologie.com).



**Mood Lighting**  
Lollia "Imagine Petite Luminary" (\$32) in a pretty pink plaid; Bella Claire Home, Westlake Village.



**Inner Beauty**  
"Beauty Comes from Within" easy-to-stash purse pen (\$40); Sarah Horowitz Parfums, Westlake Village, [www.sarahhorowitz.com](http://www.sarahhorowitz.com).

### A Pink Moment

Gucci stainless steel and rubber bracelet "Twirl" watch (\$650); Dejaun Jewelers at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks; or Westlake Village; [www.dejaun.com](http://www.dejaun.com).



**Love Letters**  
Acme Studio "Angels" pen designed by Karim Rashid (\$68); Graphaids, Agoura Hills, [www.graphaids.com](http://www.graphaids.com).

### Cozy Sips for Two

Marvelous magenta Bodum "Chambord" thermal jug (\$40); Crate and Barrel, Woodland Hills, [www.crateandbarrel.com](http://www.crateandbarrel.com).



### Hot Wheels

Haro "Zimzala Molly" cruiser in pink frosting (\$450); Newbury Park Bike Shop, Newbury Park, [www.npbikeshop.com](http://www.npbikeshop.com).

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Alex Sepkus "Heart" pendant (\$1,000); **A.H. GASPAR, JEWELER**, Montecito, [www.ahgaspar.com](http://www.ahgaspar.com).

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Golden Earth "Love" essential oil (\$20); **PC GREENS**, Malibu, 310-456-0353; or [www.goldenearth.net](http://www.goldenearth.net).

"Sassy" pump (\$245); **CHARLES DAVID** at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park, [www.charlesdavid.com](http://www.charlesdavid.com).

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Design is in the details at Riviera Resort & Spa in Palm Springs, but not just in the lobby. Guest rooms have pool, garden, or mountain views; the Watsu pool at SpaTerre is a destination unto itself.

## Design in the Desert

Those who need a well-designed environment to get in the mood should check out the swanky reinvented Riviera Resort & Spa in Palm Springs this Valentine's Day. Good from February 12 to 14, the "Be My Valentine" package includes a one-night stay, a prix-fixe dinner for two at Circa 59, breakfast in bed (both meals include gratuity), a couple's massage, and turndown service featuring a chocolate gift box (\$499; additional nights from \$249). The property re-launched in October with a design called "Hollywood glam with a twist"—think graphic wall treatments, luxurious, oversized upholstered furniture—and has a lounge vibe throughout the resort that's reflected in the updated furnishings that marry mod and glam in a fresh new way. 760-327-8311; [www.psriviera.com](http://www.psriviera.com)

## MON AMOUR IN SLO

A romantic trip to France just wasn't in the budget for Valentine's Day this year, but instead I found the charm and elegance of *la belle France* right in San Luis Obispo (SLO) at Petit Soleil (rooms from \$159; 805-549-0321; [www.petitsoleilslo.com](http://www.petitsoleilslo.com)). Owners John and Dianne Conner greet guests for breakfast and are attentive to the details that make a stay in this enchanting hideaway memorable. For example, a pillow on the bed says "Bonjour" when you arrive and is cleverly flipped to say "Bonne Nuit" at turndown.

I stayed in the "Joie de Vive" suite, a large room with a sumptuous bed, warming fireplace, pullout sofa bed, and fridge and wet bar cunningly concealed in a shabby-chic piece of furniture (similar pieces also hid two TVs and served as storage in the breakfast room). The suite decor pairs Provençal patterns in sunny reds and yellows and blues with leopard print accessories, which sounds odd, but it works. Each room has its own fun and innovative design scheme, as concocted by Dianne. (The "Rendez-vous" room is an ode to hotelier John Conner's parents, who

were married in France in 1945; "Chocolat" features a mural reminiscent of the famous DeleSPAUL-HAVEZ cocoa print; "Le Chantecler" has a fun, not overdone rooster theme.)

Though some rooms run a little toward the small side, the whimsical, romantic decor more than makes up for it. An evening wine and nibbles reception offers the chance to taste vintages from the area (and often France) while mingling with the property's other guests; a generous breakfast the next morning affords the same opportunity. The B&B is five short blocks from downtown SLO, so walking to dinner is an option; bike rentals are available across the street.

Petit Soleil is one of SLO's 37 hotels participating in the "Sincerely, Romantic" package through February 28, which includes a six-piece assortment of truffles from Sweet Earth Organic Chocolates and a bottle of Douce Amie Sweet Orange Muscat wine from SLO winery Edna Valley Vineyard with a three-night weekend stay. Prices vary depending on accommodation; [www.sincerelycalifornia.com](http://www.sincerelycalifornia.com).



The "Joie de Vive" suite at Petit Soleil in SLO invites guests with a sunny Provençal-inspired design theme (top); beautiful vistas in SLO come included as part of the "Sincerely, Romantic" hotel package through February 28.





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## Luxury Weddings with a View

The couple-friendly 60-room Ventana Inn and Spa in Big Sur is a romantic getaway any time of year, but it's especially memorable for guests looking for a destination to tie the knot that's easy to return to year after year (for anniversaries, for example). One of the most popular spots for nuptials, according to catering sales manager Jessica Drewett, is the Wedding Site, a flagstone patio that accommodates up to 80 guests for the ceremony and offers a gorgeous view of the neighboring hillsides (and is especially magical and fragrant when the jasmine-covered entry arch is blooming). For larger parties (up to 200), the Lower and Upper Terraces are swank, lounge-inspired outdoor sites off the property's restaurant with an outdoor fireplace and stunning coastline views.

Guest rooms are a soothing blend of rustic and luxurious. Many have wood-burning fireplaces and balconies with hammocks, and some have outdoor hot tubs, while others boast large soaking tubs in the rooms right next to the beds for spa-tastic relaxation. Brides and grooms should opt for the freestanding Big Sur Cottage with a king poster bed, fireplace, dining alcove, oversized soaking tub for two, and a separate dressing area, plus a deck with a hot tub, hammock, and forest canyon views.

The waiting list for weddings is generally 9 to 12 months; both packages (including rental of the entire property for wedding guests) and à la carte pricing are available from \$75 to \$125 per person. Ventana's staff can provide recommendations or on-site services for officiants, florists, transportation—and everything else wedding-related—for stress-free planning. 831-667-2331; [www.ventanainn.com](http://www.ventanainn.com)



Say "I do" in natural splendor at the luxurious Ventana Inn and Spa in Big Sur, which can accommodate intimate gatherings or parties with up to 200 guests.

IMAGE BY RACHAEL SHORT PHOTOGRAPHY

## SAVE SOME GREEN

Visitors to Palm Springs can stretch their vacation dollar with "Top Spot" discount cards, automatically given to guests at check-in at The Westin Mission Hills Resort & Spa, Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa, The Westin Mission Hills Resort & Villas, Agua Caliente Casino Resort Spa, Country Inn & Suites by Carlson, and The Hilton Garden Inn, Rancho Mirage. The card entitles visitors to discounts for the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway; Palm Springs Art Museum; The Living Desert zoo and botanical gardens; and the Indian Canyons, trails, and exhibits about the Agua Caliente Cahuilla Indians. ■

### Hot Tip

Give your sweetie the gift of a getaway with a gift certificate from [www.californiabedbreakfastinns.com](http://www.californiabedbreakfastinns.com), a registry of romantic inns and B&Bs located in California destinations like Sonoma and Napa, Palm Springs, Mendocino, even Santa Ynez (Santa Ynez Inn) and Santa Barbara (Simpson House Inn).







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# Insider FEBRUARY EVENTS

By Mark Langton

2/4-14

## Through February: VENTURA HARBOR COMEDY CLUB

Ventura Harbor Village. Ventura's home for local comedians as well as national acts, the Ventura Harbor Comedy Club (VHCC) offers several shows weekly. Owned and run by two seasoned comics, who have appeared on national television and toured extensively, Andres Fernandez and Randy Lubas know how to book the best talent. VHCC has several theme shows, such as ethnic and "Live TV Taping" nights, and discounted tickets are available by simply dining at one of the many Harbor Village restaurants. For more information call 805-644-1500 or go to [www.venturaharborcomedyclub.com](http://www.venturaharborcomedyclub.com).

## February 4-14: SANTA BARBARA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

The Arlington Theatre, Santa Barbara. A favorite among film actors because of its location, this comprehensive festival will host many of the top actors of the day. In addition to screenings, there will be panel discussions with top producers, directors, and writers, as well as celebrity tributes and free family-oriented events and screenings. Tribute recipients who will be in attendance include Sandra Bullock, James Cameron, Colin Firth, and Julianne Moore. Each tribute is a gala unto itself and open to the public. For more information call 805-963-0023 or go to [www.sbiff.org](http://www.sbiff.org).

## February 18-21: LOS ANGELES BOAT SHOW

Los Angeles Convention Center. Boats of all sizes and styles are on display, from 6 feet to over 60 feet, plus all the nautical accessories needed for fun on the water. Whether boating enthusiasts are into cruising, fishing, sailing, personal watercraft, or wakeboarding, this is one of the most popular events on the West Coast. For more information call 714-633-7581 or go to [www.losangelesboatshow.com](http://www.losangelesboatshow.com).

## February 20: STANLEY CLARKE

The Canyon Club, Agoura Hills. Bassist extraordinaire, composer, and jazz legend Stanley Clarke performs a special show highlighting works from his recent release *Songs in the Garden*. Known for his electrifying speed and grace, Clarke redefined the jazz bass genre, most notably with his groundbreaking jazz-fusion group Return to Forever. He is accompanied for this performance by jazz heavyweights Ronald Brunner on drums and Ruslan Sirota on keyboard. For more information call 818-879-5016 or go to [www.canyonclub.net](http://www.canyonclub.net).

## February 20: THE VINTNERS' EXPRESS

Direct Relief, Santa Barbara. This biannual event is dedicated to raising funds for Santa Barbara's Direct Relief International, which provides free medical supplies to underserved countries all around the world. Presented by the Santa Barbara County Vintners' Association, the event will feature appetizers prepared by six of the area's best chefs and a gourmet dinner prepared by New West Catering. There will also be 39 winery-hosted tasting stations, and the highlight of the evening is a live auction featuring special wine lots and luxury lifestyle items. For more information call 805-879-4952 or go to [www.sbcountywines.com](http://www.sbcountywines.com).

## March 5: STAND UP FOR CHILDRENS HOSPITAL LOS ANGELES—AN EVENING WITH JAY LENO

Skirball Center, Los Angeles. Formed in 2001 by a group of women in the Conejo Valley and the West San Fernando Valley, the Centennial Guild is exclusively dedicated to serving Childrens Hospital Los Angeles, the area's only children's hospital. The fundraiser begins with cocktails and dinner, followed by a performance by comedian Jay Leno, then dancing afterward. For more information call 818-936-4450.



3/6-5/10

## March 6-May 10: SANFORD BIGGERS: MOON MEDICINE

Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum. Internationally renowned artist Sanford Biggers presents this major monographic show consisting of new and old sculpture, video, installation, and a newly commissioned public performance. Biggers is known for his exploratory and improvisational works inspired by the diverse cultures he has experienced all over the world. Influences include the philosophical and religious practices of Buddhism, Indo-European voodoo, and Santeria, as well as African-American popular culture. For more information call 805-966-5373 or go to [www.sbcaf.org](http://www.sbcaf.org). ■



## Here's an idea:

**TASTE OF SANTA BARBARA CULINARY & ART TOUR.** Captain Jack's Tours offers a number of specialty trips in and around Santa Barbara, but this one stands out as a real Valentine's Day treat. The tour begins with lunch prepared by a Santa Barbara chef, who provides a personal cooking demonstration before guests get to sample the finished product. The next stop is Chocolats du Calibressan, where chocolatier Jean-Michel Carre works his magic for more delicious creations. Then it's over to the studio of Saul Alcaraz for a demonstration of the ancient art of glass blowing. Combine it with a romantic sunset sailing excursion for a totally decadent Valentine's Day. For more information call 805-564-1819 or go to [www.captainjackstours.com](http://www.captainjackstours.com).

3/5





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†You are eligible to join LFCU if you work for one of our partner companies or belong to a variety of associations. Please ask for details.

805LIVING.COM FEBRUARY 2010



By Mark Langton

THROUGH 3/21

## Through March 21: **AMERICA'S WILDERNESS IN ART: A GROWING COLLECTION**

Wildling Art Museum, Los Olivos. Spectacular artistic depictions of our country's wilderness—from impressive landscapes to native animal inhabitants—are on display from the museum's permanent collection. Works date back to 1912. For more information call **805-688-1082** or go to [www.wildlingmuseum.org](http://www.wildlingmuseum.org).

## February 10: **AFRICAN FOLKLORE EMBROIDERY**

Calabasas Library. Join renowned author and teacher Leora Raikin for a fun and educational lecture and interactive workshop. Learn colorful multicultural needlecraft art from this transplanted South African who learned the techniques from her mother. Raikin's new book, *Safari through African Folklore Embroidery*, as well as embroidery kits, will be available. For more information call **818-999-6094** or go to [www.aflembroidery.com](http://www.aflembroidery.com).

## February 11: **WHAT'S HAPPENING TO PLANET EARTH?**

Baxter Biosciences, Westlake Village. Dr. Discovery (real-life physicist and educator Dr. Richard Elsley) explains in simple terms how climate change, water shortages, food shortages, rising fuel costs, and other environmental factors are affecting our planet. This lecture is part of The Discovery Center for Science and Technology's Science Speaker Series. For more information call **805-905-8168** or go to [www.sciencespeakerseries.org](http://www.sciencespeakerseries.org).

## February 12–April 25: **EMPIRE ELEGANCE: THE AGE OF REDOUTÉ**

Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. This exhibit is named in honor of Pierre-Joseph Redouté (1759–1840), a Belgian painter and botanist renowned for his exemplary paintings of flora in an era where artists performed a crucial role in French 18th- and 19th-century natural history. For more information call **805-682-4711** or go to [www.sbnature.org](http://www.sbnature.org).

## February 12–14: **CALIFORNIA INTERNATIONAL ANTIQUARIAN BOOK FAIR**

Hyatt Regency Century Plaza, Los Angeles. On display and for purchase are rare books and manuscripts dating back nearly 500 years, from a 17th-century Shakespeare folio to a mint condition 20th-century Jack Kerouac novel. Books in several categories are for sale, including the history of travel and exploration, early science and medicine, children's books, literature and the arts, and more. A special exhibit, "From Author to Oscar," highlights great books that were made into great movies. For more information call **800-454-6041** or go to [www.labookfair.com](http://www.labookfair.com).

## February 14: **THE HARLEM GLOBETROTTERS**

Staples Center, Los Angeles. As popular as ever after 84 years, the Harlem Globetrotters blend true basketball talent with amazing trick shots and their own special brand of humor. This year's team includes the stars of the reality show *The Amazing Race*, Nate "Big Easy" Lofton and Herb "Flight Time" Lang, who finished fourth. For more information go to [www.staplescenter.com](http://www.staplescenter.com).

## February 15: **PRESIDENTS DAY CELEBRATION**

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, Simi Valley. Learn about our presidents at this multifaceted event. Activities include musical entertainment, storytelling, arts and crafts, and presidential and first lady look-alikes. There is also a special exhibit in the museum: The Ferdinand Magellan is a Pullman observation rail car that served as the official presidential rail car from 1943 to 1958. For more information call **800-410-8354** or go to [www.reaganlibrary.com](http://www.reaganlibrary.com).

## February 20: **CHINESE LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATION**

Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. The Conejo Chinese Cultural Association has been organizing this annual event for more than 30 years. Students from Thousand Oaks Chinese School, Pearl of Pacific Music Association, and the Thousand Oaks Chinese School choir will perform a variety of ethnic music and folk dances. There will also be a special performance by Karen Han, an internationally renowned *erhu* (ancient Chinese two-string violin) virtuoso who has performed with the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Her works have been featured on soundtracks of several movies, including *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Last Emperor*, and *Memoirs of a Geisha*. For more information call **805-446-2175**. ■



## Here's an idea:

Teach your kids about tools as they build a variety of projects from pre-fabricated kits at Home Depot's free **KIDS WORKSHOPS**, held the first Saturday of each month. Designed to be both educational and practical, projects include toolboxes, fire trucks, and mail organizers, as well as more detailed projects such as a windowed birdhouse, bug house, or Declaration of Independence frame kit. Kids get to keep their creations, and they also receive a kid-sized orange Home Depot apron. For more information and to find a local Home Depot, go to [www.homedepot.com/kidsworkshop](http://www.homedepot.com/kidsworkshop).



2/14





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## FEBRUARY

**February 28:** The 53rd edition of *IT'S MAGIC!* comes to the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civics Art Plaza. An international cast of some of the world's best magicians perform, including the winner of Las Vegas' Best Magician award—Lance Burton—and acts from Hollywood's famed private club The Magic Castle. For more information call 805-449-2787 or go to [www.toaks.org/cap](http://www.toaks.org/cap).

## MARCH

**March 5:** *CHEECH AND CHONG: GET IT LEGAL* is the name of the comeback tour for the iconic comedy duo of Richard "Cheech" Marin and Tommy Chong. Appearing at The Arlington Theatre in Santa Barbara, the show features classic material from the pair's successful albums and films of the 1970s and '80s, as well as some new bits that they have created for this tour. For more information call 805-963-4408 or go to [www.thearlingtontheatre.com](http://www.thearlingtontheatre.com).

**March 12–13:** More than 20 local professional and exhibition dance groups comprised of more than 100 dancers take the stage for *BASSH* at Lobero Theatre in Santa Barbara. Performances include ballroom, Argentine tango, swing, salsa, and hip-hop. There is also an opening-night gala following the performance where guests can dance and mingle with the performers. For more information call the Santa Barbara Dance Alliance at 805-966-6950 or go to [www.sbdancealliance.org](http://www.sbdancealliance.org).

**March 19–21:** The Paso Robles wine region celebrates 100 years of zinfandel history in the area at the *ZINFANDEL FESTIVAL*. Events include special vintner tastings, samplings of zinfandel-friendly foods, and an auction with Paso Robles wine country items. A portion of the proceeds benefits health, education, and community services for the vineyard workers in the community. For more information call 805-239-8463 or go to [www.pasowine.com](http://www.pasowine.com).



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**March 25–April 1:** Celebrating “The Method” school of acting, **METHODFEST** in Agoura Hills and Calabasas features fresh new filmmakers and actors and pays tribute to established actors and filmmakers who have contributed to this genre. In addition to screenings of American and foreign feature and short films, there are acting workshops, filmmaking panels and seminars, and several live musical performances by indie artists. For more information call 310-535-9230 or go to [www.methodfest.com](http://www.methodfest.com).

**March 29:** As one of the most prolific and continuously performing bands in history, **CHICAGO** brings its mix of jazz, rock, pop, and horn-driven hits to the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Although the band has had many members over its 40-plus years, four of the original members are still going strong, and they are one of just a few bands that have never broken up. For more information call 805-449-2787 or go to [www.toaks.org/cap](http://www.toaks.org/cap).

### APRIL

**April 17:** A great place to find and taste many of the wines of the Santa Ynez Valley is at the **SANTA BARBARA COUNTY VINTNERS' FESTIVAL** at River Park in Lompoc. More than 130 members of the Santa Barbara Vintners' Association will be pouring their wines; some of the area's finest chefs will serve noshes; and there's also live music. Attendees will have a chance to win large-format wines, special bottlings and verticals, and lifestyle items at the silent auction, with proceeds benefiting local charities. For more information call 805-688-0881 or go to [www.sbcountywines.com](http://www.sbcountywines.com).

**April 23–May 2:** The Cabrillo Music Theatre presents **LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS** at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. This crazy send-up of 1950s science-fiction stories features a score by Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, whose credits include Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and The Beast*, and *Aladdin*. As the story goes, Seymour, a nerdy floral assistant, discovers an exotic talking and singing plant that makes him a local celebrity. Unbeknownst to Seymour, the plant is actually

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an alien bent on global domination. It turns out that the plant must have human blood to thrive—and hilarity ensues. For more information call 805-449-2787 or go to [www.toaks.org/cap](http://www.toaks.org/cap).

**April 30–May 8:** The **VENTURA MUSIC FESTIVAL** will feature Itzhak Perlman, considered one of the most important and talented violinists of the 20th century. A four-time Emmy Award and 15-time Grammy Award winner, Perlman will perform at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center on May 1. Several world-class performances will take place at locations around Ventura during the festival. For more information call 805-648-3146.

## Save the Date

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### FEBRUARY

**February 6:** One of Santa Ynez Valley's most anticipated events of the year is **THE FAMILY SCHOOL'S ANNUAL AUCTION DINNER**. The Family School (preschool through grade 5) in Los Olivos boasts a low teacher-to-student ratio and a comprehensive curriculum with a hands-on environmental and ecological focus. It's no coincidence that this year's dinner will be prepared by chef Bradley Odgen of Solvang's Root 246, which promotes farm-fresh, locally grown ingredients. The event takes place at Solvang's Hotel Corque and starts with wine tasting of some of the best of the Central Coast and a silent auction with several unique wine lots and other offerings. There will also be a live auction and dancing. For more information call 805-688-5440 or go to [www.syvfamilyschool.org](http://www.syvfamilyschool.org).

**February 10:** Join Lindero Canyon Middle School's award-winning Jazz Band "A" for **JAZZ NITE**, an annual fundraiser to help the band participate in the Reno Jazz Festival. (Last year, "A" took top honors in the middle school category at the Reno festival, one of the largest in the country.) Along with the band's performance, there will be a special set by the Matt Finders Combo (featuring a former member of the band from *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*) and other world-class musicians. The program celebrates the 60th anniversary of Miles Davis' *Birth of the Cool* album, and there will also



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be a silent auction. For more information call 818-889-2134 or go to [www.lindero canyonmiddleschool.net](http://www.lindero canyonmiddleschool.net).

**February 20:** The Community Conscience "Under One Roof" human services center holds its annual **MARDI GRAS BALL** at the Westlake Hyatt in Westlake Village. The event includes champagne and hors d'oeuvres, a five-course dinner with wine, live and silent auctions, and live entertainment and dancing. The Community Conscience complex allows groups in Thousand Oaks and the greater Conejo Valley to operate administrative offices rent-free. For more information call 805-494-3543 or go to [www.communityconscience.org](http://www.communityconscience.org).

**February 25: LIFE IS GOOD AT GARDEN COURT**, held at the Canary Hotel, honors the 40th anniversary of the Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara. In celebration of the event's surf theme, the real-life "Gidget," Kathy Kohner Zuckerman, will be in attendance as the honorary chair. Guests can enjoy cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, a gourmet buffet, and the chance to bid on auction items. The Garden Court Endowment Fund assists low-income seniors in Santa Barbara to live independently. For more information call 805-884-0095 or visit [www.gardencourt.org](http://www.gardencourt.org).

**February 27:** The Casa Pacifica Angels presents the **ANGELS BALL** black-tie gala at Sherwood Country Club in Thousand Oaks. The event features cocktails, dinner, dancing, and a live auction. Proceeds benefit Casa Pacifica's professional programs and services, which provide medical and psychological assistance for neglected, abused, and at-risk youth and their families in the tri-county area. For more information call 805-445-7800 or go to [www.casapacific.org](http://www.casapacific.org).

## MARCH

**March 7:** You can help the hungry and disadvantaged just by taking a little stroll around the Conejo Valley. The **32ND CONEJO VALLEY CROP WALK** raises funds that go to the needy in 80 countries to help with relief, development, and refugee assistance. Twenty-five percent of all money raised stays in the community and benefits MANNA Conejo Valley Food Bank, Meals on Wheels, Lutheran Social Services, and Catholic Charities. For more information call Sherrill Hyink at 805-492-3674.



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**March 19:** The Thousand Oaks Woman's Club celebrates 45 years of service to the Conejo Valley with **FRIENDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD** at Los Robles Greens in Thousand Oaks. The event benefits The Community Care Center, which provides services to the area's homeless and needy. The event features a luncheon and fashion show. For more information contact Sharon Richardson at [sharon@thousandoakswomansclub.org](mailto:sharon@thousandoakswomansclub.org) or go to [www.thousandoakswomansclub.org](http://www.thousandoakswomansclub.org).

**March 20:** Friends of Oak Park Schools presents **PARTY AROUND THE WORLD** at Dole Foods corporate headquarters in Westlake Village. Dole's corporate chef will create an international dining experience, coupled with wine and beers from around the world. The event benefits the Oak Park School District, which receives only about a third of its funding from the state of California. For more information call 818-735-3270 or go to [www.friendsofoakparkschools.org](http://www.friendsofoakparkschools.org).

**March 22:** Here's your chance to play the exclusive Sherwood Country Club greens in Thousand Oaks, the same course that recently hosted the Chevron World Challenge. The **PROVIDENT FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT GOLF CLASSIC** helps raise funds for the Bogart Pediatric Cancer Research Program at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles. In addition to a great day of golf on one of the world's top-rated courses, players are treated to a complimentary barbecue lunch and an evening dinner and cocktail party at the Sherwood clubhouse. For more information call 323-330-0519 or go to [www.bogartfoundation.org](http://www.bogartfoundation.org).

## APRIL

**April 11:** A month prior to the 2010 Amgen Tour of California (May 16 to 23), the **BREAKAWAY FROM CANCER** ride allows local cyclists to ride two of the actual routes: Stage Two from Davis to Santa Rosa, and the eighth and final stage: A multi-lap circuit of roads in Thousand Oaks, Westlake Village, and Agoura Hills (including the legendary Rock Store climb up Mulholland Highway to Kanan Dume Road). A portion of entry fees helps support Amgen's Breakaway from Cancer initiative, designed to raise awareness of the variety of resources for cancer patients, which include prevention, education, patient care, advocacy, and financial support. For more information go to [www.breakawayride.com](http://www.breakawayride.com).

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**April 19:** The Meadowlark Service League (MSL) hosts its annual **CHARITY TENNIS TOURNAMENT AND LUNCHEON**. The event kicks off with a women's doubles tournament at various locations around Camarillo, including Las Posas Country Club and Spanish Hills Country Club. Following the tennis matches is a luncheon at Las Posas Country Club, featuring a fashion show, a shopping boutique, and opportunity drawings. MSL raises funds for more than 30 local organizations and provides a scholarship fund for graduates of Adolpho Camarillo and Rio Mesa high schools. For more information call 805-630-7257 or go to [www.meadowlarkserviceleague.com](http://www.meadowlarkserviceleague.com).

## GIVEback

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**OWIEBOW WOWIE:** In 1989, Thousand Oaks resident Gina Woods found herself recovering from surgery in the hospital children's ward (there were no adult beds available). Her roommate was a young girl recovering from brain surgery, who was upset when a nurse brought in a stuffed dog with a torn ear. "It's broken!" the little girl exclaimed, throwing the doll on the floor. Woods told the girl, "It's not broken, it just has an owie, like you," and then bandaged the dog's ear. Thus began Woods' mission to care for and comfort young children diagnosed with life-threatening diseases who have no support. OwieBowWowie and Friends Foundation (OBWF) provides "OwieBowWowies" (huggable plush puppies) with a blanket and coloring book to kids undergoing treatment at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA). According to CHLA, one thousand children are admitted to CHLA each month; approximately 440 of those kids face their medical treatments alone. Woods' goal is to make sure no child feels alone while in the hospital. For more information call 805-497-0534 or go to [www.owiebowwowie.net](http://www.owiebowwowie.net). ■

*If you would like to submit your event or organization for possible inclusion in Insider, please e-mail the information and a contact number/e-mail to [insider@805living.com](mailto:insider@805living.com). Please submit your request no later than 14 weeks prior to the issue in which you'd like the information to appear.*

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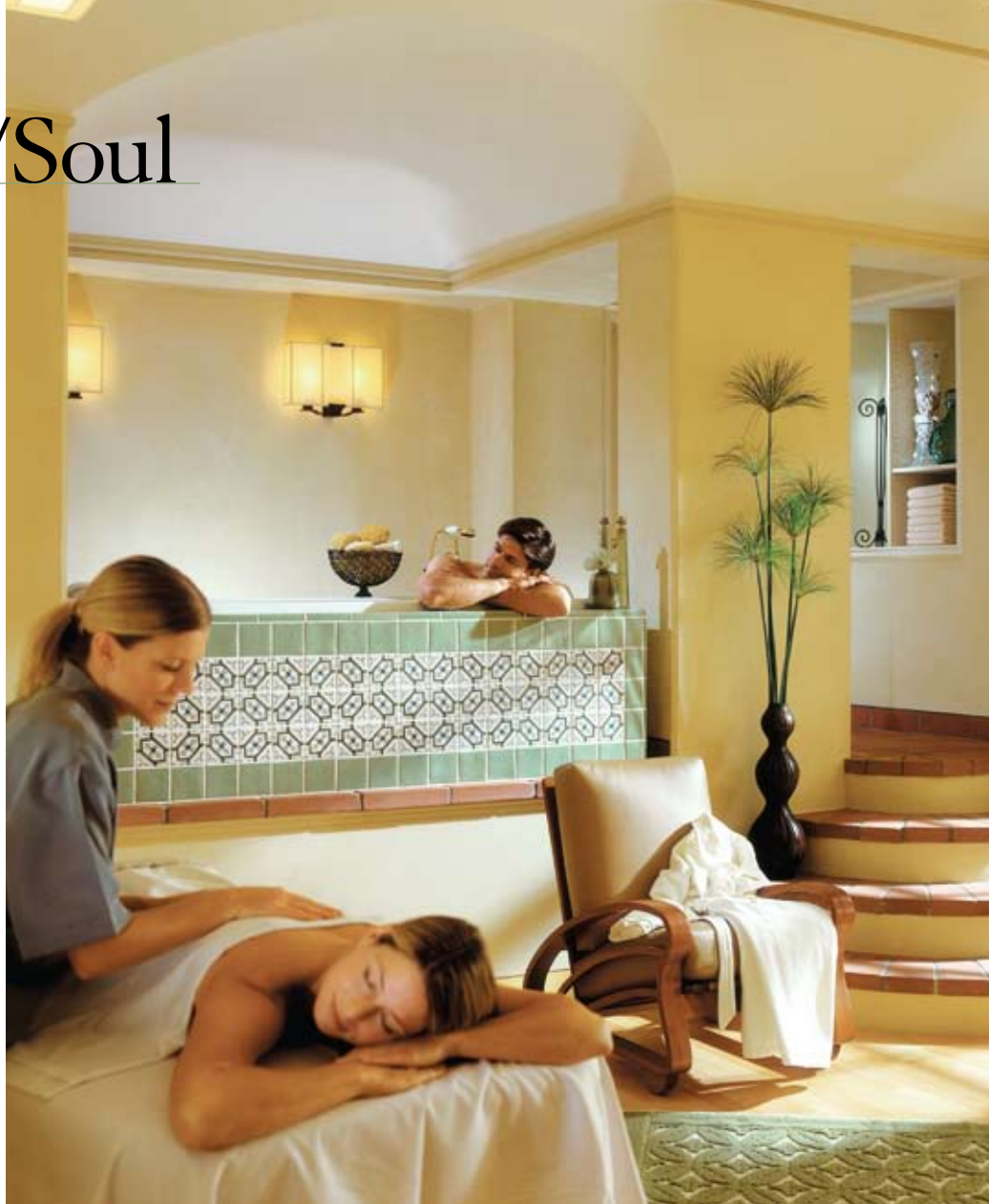
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# Mind/Body/Soul

By Maryann Hammers

The only thing better than a Valentine's Day massage at the Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara is one shared with the one you love.



## SENSUAL, SUMPTUOUS SPAS

Privacy is on the spa menu with these romantic couple's packages.

**FEBRUARY IS THE PERFECT MONTH** to share a sensuous spa treatment with your sweetie. Though a spa day à deux may seem overly extravagant the rest of the year, in February it seems perfectly fitting to swathe yourselves in soft robes, nestle by the fireplace with champagne, share a foaming milk bath or hot tub, then enjoy a couple's massage in a private suite or poolside cabana. Sound enticing? Check out these local spa packages for even more indulgences.

With a primo setting on Butterfly Beach, the **Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara** already qualifies as a lavish getaway. Its glamorous Coral Casino Beach and Cabana Club (definitely not your run-of-the-mill hotel fitness center) and Olympic-size pool perched over the sand and ringed by private cabanas take it over the top. The "Sunset Sanctuary" package (\$990 per couple) includes four hours in the master spa suite with Jacuzzi

tub, steam shower, fireplace, and French doors that open to a private ocean-view terrace. Wrap yourself in the silky-soft robe and sip on hot tea or chilled pomegranate lemonade while your hands and feet get massaged for the next 30 minutes. Then it's time for an 80-minute stone therapy massage. Finally, the two of you can relax on the terrace and watch the sun set while sipping champagne and savoring a three-course dinner and dessert. [www.fourseasons.com/santabarbara/spa](http://www.fourseasons.com/santabarbara/spa)

With its whitewashed adobe buildings, red-tile roof, hand-painted tiles, and wrought-iron details, **Spa Ojai at Ojai Valley Inn & Spa** harkens back to another time and place. The Kuyam treatment (\$50) does, too. Kuyam is a Chumash word that means "a place to rest together," and this signature package includes cleansing mud, dry heat, inhalation therapy, and guided meditation—and



that's just for starters. Next, guests choose between a cozy candlelit couple's treatment room with a fireplace or an outdoor treatment by the spa relaxation pool. The Abhyanga Four Handed Massage (\$280) is twice as indulgent because each person has two therapists working simultaneously and symmetrically, with every lavish stroke synced with rhythmic Eastern music.

Afterward, the resort offers many other amenities to prolong the relaxation. Sit outdoors at the Oak Grill restaurant, in the shadows of the mountains and massive oaks, and enjoy a Hot Ojai Cowboy. Don't blush: It's a cocktail made with Jack Daniels, hot lemonade, and ginger syrup. Before heading home, try the spa's signature scrub (\$145), made with locally

grown, organic ingredients such as ground pumpkin seeds, lavender buds, rich avocados, and the peel and pulp of pixie tangerines. [www.ojairesort.com](http://www.ojairesort.com)

It's a scenic drive to get to **Sycamore Mineral Springs Resort**, nestled in the forests and meadows of San Luis Obispo. This 100-acre property is dotted with secluded hillside mineral springs hot tubs, a creek-side labyrinth, and a meditation garden. With the "Wine and Dine" package (\$225), couples soak under the stars in the mineral springs or a hot tub, followed with a wine-therapy couple's massage and dessert with wine by the fireplace or on the century-old stone patio.

It's hard to drive straight home after such relaxation, so consider the possibility of extending the moment with an overnight stay (from \$159) in a spa suite with forest or meadow views, a four-poster mahogany king bed, fireplace, and hot tub on a private balcony. [www.sycamoresprings.com](http://www.sycamoresprings.com)



## So Near, Yet So Far

These sexy urban spa retreats are just an area code away.

The mere mention of Beverly Hills connotes extravagance, and it's tough to find a more luxe setting than the storied and stylish **Four Seasons Hotel Los Angeles at Beverly Hills**. A hotel suite has been transformed into a fabulous "Couple's Valentine Spa Suite" (from \$380 per couple for 60 minutes) with candles, rose petals, aromatherapy, soft music, and private balcony with a view of twinkling city lights. Guests are greeted with champagne before enjoying a couple's massage, then have private time together with chocolate-covered strawberries. [www.fourseasons.com/losangeles](http://www.fourseasons.com/losangeles)

Be among the first to check out the new **Ritz-Carlton, Los Angeles** (above), opening February 15 at downtown's new LA LIVE, the \$2.5-billion sports and entertainment center. Rent a private poolside cabana on the 26th-floor rooftop terrace with city and mountain views, and order a spa service such as the synchronized Couple's Loving Touch Massage. A foaming milk bath for two, with champagne, is available before or after the treatment. [www.ritzcarlton.com](http://www.ritzcarlton.com) ■

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By Frank Nelson



## HOLLYWOOD GLAMOUR, 805 STYLE

The 25th Santa Barbara International Film Festival attracts locals and celebs alike.

**THIS MONTH'S 25TH SANTA BARBARA** International Film Festival ([www.sbiff.org](http://www.sbiff.org)), with appearances by some of the industry's biggest names and a mouth-watering menu of around 250 films, looks sure to enhance the annual event's reputation on the national festival circuit. This festival promises to be as glamorous and glitzy as ever, with versatile actress Sandra Bullock, *Titanic* and *Avatar* director James Cameron, Julianne Moore, and suave English actor Colin Firth among those receiving the red-carpet treatment.

This 11-day feast of films, awards, panel discussions, and parties has attained such lofty status in part due to the dates it takes place—February 4 to 14—just one month before the annual Academy Awards in Los Angeles. Indeed, this festival, with its sprinkling of U.S. and world premieres, is perfectly timed to ride the wave of excitement because Oscar nominations are announced just two days before Santa Barbara's festival.

Mark Sylvester, a festival board member for more than 10 years and involved in the event since its inception in 1986, says this is the last such showcase before voting ballots go out to members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. About 70 of the Academy's more than 6,000 members live in or around Santa Barbara, and Sylvester says the local star power, combined with the auspicious timing, helps account for the festival's high profile and the level of A-list talent attending.

"The festival has really changed in the last few years," says Sylvester, who was also a co-founder of the now-defunct Wavefront Technologies, which created the opening trailer for the very first festival. "It's much more on the radar, much more important. It has become a nationally known festival."





Sylvester, involved in the festival's creative opening sequences for about 10 years, says the caliber of actors, directors, producers, and writers who come for awards and discussion panels reflects the event's importance. After 25 years, he says, Santa Barbara is now "a player in the world of film festivals."

While Oscar buzz may rub off on this event, there's another magic ingredient that Sylvester and almost everyone else involved in the festival credits for its amazing success: Roger Durling. The flamboyant executive director, who keeps everyone guessing about the color and style of his hair at each festival, has electrified the event since coming on board in 2002.

"Roger has really made it ... he's the guy," says Steve Cushman, president of the Santa Barbara Chamber of Commerce, who was on the festival board about 20 years ago.

Candace Schermerhorn, director of programming for the past three years, agrees, saying that Durling was in the right place at the right time: "His passion and enthusiasm for film, and the festival, has taken it to new heights."

Though Schermerhorn singles out Durling, she also credits the many volunteers and staff behind the festival. Programming, for example, involves whittling down more than 2,500 worldwide submissions—from animation shorts to full-length features—

## At a Glance:

This year's 25th Santa Barbara International Film Festival runs from February 4 to 14. Around 200 films are scheduled to be screened during the 11-day festival. Films screen at the Arlington, Lobero, Victoria Hall, Museum of Art, and Metro 4. More than 400 volunteers will help ensure everything runs smoothly.

Red carpet celebrities include Sandra Bullock, Colin Firth, Vera Farmiga (*Up in the Air*, *The Departed*), Peter Sarsgaard, Julianne Moore, Christoph Waltz (*Inglourious Basterds*), Stanley Tucci, and James Cameron. Films are divided into several categories, including Santa Barbara filmmakers, extreme sports, nature, and Latino.

The festival offers numerous ticket packages including a \$1,655 Platinum Pass that allows attendees to get into any film, award ceremony, or other event. On a more economical scale, the four-film mini-pak costs \$57.

for the final lineup. A review committee of about 30 people sits at the center of that process, ensuring that every submission is seen at least twice before the final selections are filtered through Schermerhorn, Durling, and other key players. "It's definitely a team effort," she says.

This year's festival presents what Schermerhorn describes as a "slate of films that reflect the globe," including insights into everyday life in countries such as Tajikistan, Iran, and Iraq, plus a special focus on Quebec.

After 25 years, the festival also flexes some significant economic muscle. Despite the recession chewing 25 percent off this year's budget, director of operations Rodney Gould says it attracts about 70,000 people—roughly one-third of them from out of town—and pumps around \$28 million into the local economy.

But for Cushman, the impact goes well beyond even those impressive figures: "To me, the real power of the film festival is the recognition Santa Barbara gets around the world from the event and the stars who come here."

Cushman, a huge movie fan, senses that over the last five years, festival attendees have been getting younger. This year he hopes to restore the balance, saying, "I'm taking a week off and going to as many films as I can." ■

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## WILL FLY FOR FOOD

These pilots *really* know how to “do lunch.”

### Hungry Pilots

Moran and Rangno aren't the only pilots who fly in for lunch. Visit any small airport on a Saturday and you'll be sure to see groups of private aircraft pilots discussing where to go for a meal before they take off into the friendly skies. For dining destinations, many have referred to *The \$100 Hamburger, A Guide to Pilots' Favorite Fly-in Restaurants* by John F. Purner (McGraw-Hill, 2003, 1998).

THE ORIGINAL PLAN WAS TO FLY to Santa Barbara for lunch. Afterward, we'd pass over Santa Ynez and Santa Paula, and I'd be home in plenty of time to pick up my kids from school. So said John Moran and Jim Rangno, for whom the plan wasn't the least bit out of the ordinary. “We fly somewhere for lunch and back quite often. It's a guilty pleasure,” says Westlake Village resident Rangno, a retired Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) sergeant who's been buddies with attorney and former LAPD commander Moran for 40 years.

I met the two at my favorite morning haunt, where along with a few others, we're known as “the regulars.” Moran and Rangno love to laugh and joke, often at the expense of each other, and they're full of tales about police work (the grit, grime, and follies) as well as a variety of other topics, including scuba diving, hunting, weight lifting, horse grooming, politics, sports, and literature.

Oh, yes—and flying. Both are experienced private aircraft pilots who invited me to accompany them on one of their flights. Never mind the fact that at any moment I can turn into a white-knuckle flier. Moran and Rangno promised we wouldn't fly upside down and scheduled our flight for a calm, clear day.

Fast-forward to that day: We departed Camarillo Airport after Moran checked the tires, wing tips, and oil and fuel levels of his four-seater Piper Dakota. While Moran ran the engine to ensure all controls were working, Rangno opened an adjacent hangar and revealed his Experimental RV-6, an aerobatic airplane quite capable of performing rolls, loops, spins, and dives. My stomach lurched. Luckily, the plane wasn't available for use: It was under repair, and only seats two.

Minutes later, the three of us were aboard Moran's Piper, which seemed to lift effortlessly into the sky with barely a



bounce. My good-natured friends struck the right tone to make me feel comfortable and confident. They were congenial but focused, thorough, and cautious.

As pilot, Moran provided play-by-play analysis (we were wearing headsets and microphones) of the plane's altitude (5,500 feet for most of the trip), the airspeed (136 knots, or 150 miles per hour), and a sudden change of plans. A thick cloud cover 100 feet above Santa Barbara Municipal Airport would prevent us, and any other aircraft, from landing there that morning. "Guess we're going to San Luis Obispo.

About an hour after takeoff, we landed at San Luis Obispo Airport. The proximity to the restaurant was incredible. Moran parked his plane much closer to the restaurant than most of us can get near a destination with our cars. Sort of like tying up a boat to a dockside restaurant. We walked a few steps and sat down to order at Spirit of San Luis, where a number of other patrons were eating and relaxing.

Sitting in the company of pilots made me wonder whether they view every flight, no matter how short or long, as an adventure. "Absolutely!" said Rangno.

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San Luis Obispo Airport . . . . .	Spirit of San Luis
Santa Barbara Municipal Airport . . . . .	Shoreline Beach Café (brief walk)
Santa Maria Airport . . . . .	Pepper Garcia's
Santa Paula Airport . . . . .	Logsdon Restaurant
Santa Ynez Airport . . . . .	Chumash Café (brief shuttle ride)

Probably can't land in Pismo either," said Moran. "That's okay. This way, you'll get to see more."

Copilot Rangno assumed the role of color commentator, directing me to sights below. "Follow the riverbed down there," he said soon after we changed course. "See the line of white buildings? Good, now do you see a black strip? That's the Santa Paula airport."

"It doesn't look like anyone's there today," added Moran, "but you should see the place on Saturdays. A lot of people fly in to eat breakfast or lunch at Logsdon Restaurant, which serves very good food. I think it's the best fly-in restaurant in the 805 area."

As we continued our journey, Moran and Rangno took turns as aerial tour guides. "It's not that easy to identify places when you first start flying," said Rangno. I was grateful for their assistance in spotting Ojai, Lake Casitas, Santa Ynez, Lompoc, Lake Cachuma, Santa Maria, Vandenberg Air Force Base, Pismo Beach, and Paso Robles. "You see interesting things from above," said Moran. "Roads that lead nowhere, fire damage, isolated houses, and of course, mountain ranges and the coastline. It's enjoyable to look around."

"Every flight is different, each airport is distinct, and like today, a change of plans means a different experience. Our thought process about where to fly is similar to the way golfers decide which course to play: What's the weather like? Do we want an uncomplicated or challenging flight? Where haven't we been in awhile? Next week, for instance, we might think, hey, let's go to Big Bear. It's a fun time of year for that. The flight pattern takes you right over the ski slopes."

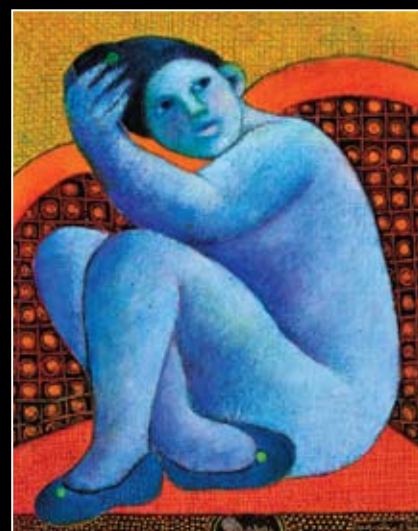
Plus, said Moran with a wink as he dug into his huevos rancheros, "We get to be 805 airport food critics! How fun is that?"

During our flight back to Camarillo, conversations were less technical; we talked about our families and backgrounds, but mainly we enjoyed the scenery. "Many Southern Californians think there's no land left, but up here you realize there are vast expanses of empty land," said Rangno. "We're lucky to live in a country where ordinary citizens can buy planes and fly in our nation's airspace. It's a privilege and a great pleasure."

Roger that! I had no complaints, sweaty palms, or motion sickness. Just gratitude for a picture-perfect day among pleasant company. And I made it home in time for pickup. ■

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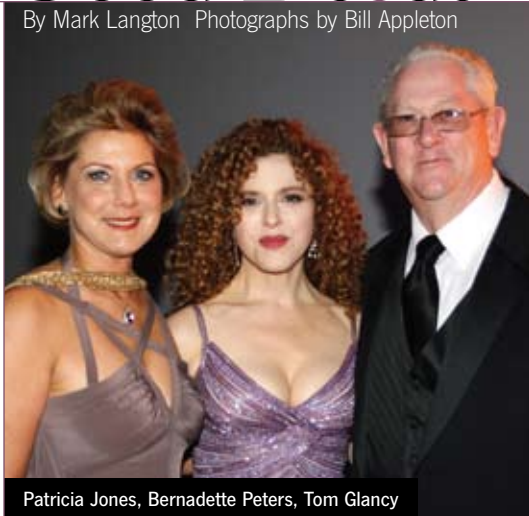
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# Good Deeds

By Mark Langton Photographs by Bill Appleton



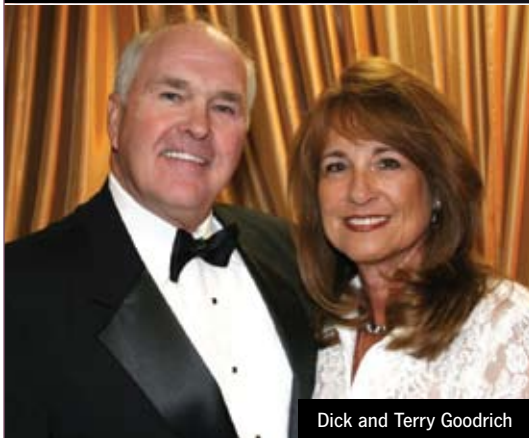
Patricia Jones, Bernadette Peters, Tom Glancy



Fred Kavli, George Jones



Richard and Elizabeth Grossman



Dick and Terry Goodrich



Marnie and Tom Mitze

## A STRONG ALLIANCE

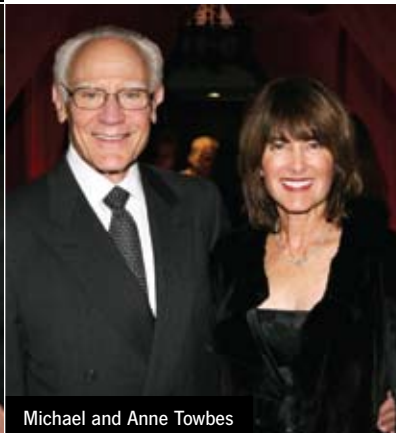
Celebrating 15 years with AFTA and the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza.

**THE EVENT:** The annual Alliance for the Arts Awards and Gala celebrated the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza's 15th anniversary with an awards dinner recognizing donors, artists, and volunteers for their contributions. The event, which helped raise funds for a variety of art and entertainment programs presented at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center, included a Broadway-style evening of entertainment featuring a performance by the Cabrillo Music Theatre and a concert by Tony Award-winning stage and screen star Bernadette Peters (accompanied by the New West Symphony), who performed at the Civic Arts Plaza's grand opening in 1994.

**THE CAUSE:** The Alliance for the Arts (AFTA) is the official nonprofit organization of the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Since the performance space's opening, AFTA and the city of Thousand Oaks has enabled it to continuously operate in the black. AFTA and its partnership with the Civic Arts Plaza has been recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts and the League of Cities as a successful model for public/private partnerships. *For more information about the Alliance for the Arts call 805-449-2590 or go to [www.toaks.org/cap/alliance](http://www.toaks.org/cap/alliance) or [www.allianceforthearts.org](http://www.allianceforthearts.org).* ■



David Wurth, Nancy Israel, Claris and Nelson Dodge



Michael and Anne Towbes



Annette Plotkin, Bernadette Peters, Ron Plotkin



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# Good Deeds

By Mark Langton Photographs by Judi Burnstead



Kay Wade, Victoria Reitz, Ronda Jackson



Sue Theule, Rick Baker



Vicki Suiter, Tim McNickles



Shepard Vineburg, Brad Haan



Kelly Azzarello, Jennifer Voglebach

## DESIGNED FOR SUCCESS

Interior designers join forces for local housing charity.

**THE EVENT:** Held this past December, the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) fundraiser took place at the Via Colinas Design Center in Westlake Village and was presented by the Los Angeles chapter of ASID and hosted by À la Maison. After enjoying appetizers provided by Wolfgang Puck Bistro in Westlake Village, industry partners and interior designers attended a lecture on business development strategies. Several stores in the complex stayed open after-hours so guests could experience the wide range of products offered at the design center. *For more information about ASID Los Angeles, call 310-659-4716 or go to [www.asidla.org](http://www.asidla.org).*

**THE CAUSE:** "ASID's motivation with these events is community connectivity," said event organizer Ronda Jackson. A portion of the proceeds from every ASID Block Party goes to a local charity; in this case the recipient was Many Mansions of Thousand Oaks. Many Mansions provides well-managed, affordable housing to low-income residents of Ventura County and its surrounding communities, as well as job-placement programs for adults and educational programs for children. Another ASID community lecture takes place March 12 at Ferguson's Kitchen and Bath in Santa Barbara and benefits Child Abuse Listening & Mediation (CALM). *805 Living* was a proud sponsor of the December event, and will sponsor the March lecture as well. *For more information about Many Mansions go to [www.manymansions.org](http://www.manymansions.org), and for information about CALM go to [www.calm4kids.org](http://www.calm4kids.org).* ■



Lyndee Radenbaugh, Mary Radenbaugh



Helene Lotto, Nichole Miller



Michael Gallagher



Dirk Vahle, Carla Blanco



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2. The **METROPOLITAN BED** (\$1,625 king) from Brownstone Furniture is made of plantation-grown mahogany; an antique crackle gold finish adorns the molding while cotton sateen backs the headboard. Available at *Pacific Rim Home, Westlake Village, [www.pacificrimhome.com](http://www.pacificrimhome.com).*
3. Sleek and stylish for rooms both transitional and modern, the **QUILTED LEATHER HEADBOARD** (\$4,399) by designer Rick Janecek for Global Views provides back support while reading and big impact at first sight. Available at *Karma Home Accents, Westlake Village, [www.karmahomeaccents.info](http://www.karmahomeaccents.info).*
4. Ethan Allen reinvented the classic sleigh bed in the **MODERN GLAMOUR GRAMERCY BED** (from \$1,599), which means the headboard is a nod to the original but the lower footboard is less imposing (and makes the bedroom appear larger). Available at *Ethan Allen, Agoura Hills, [www.ethanallen.com](http://www.ethanallen.com).*
5. Hickory Chair's custom-upholstered **CALLA BED** (\$5,418) is infinitely versatile and provides a sumptuous perch from which to dream. Available at *Grace Home Furnishings, Los Angeles, [www.gracehomefurnishings.com](http://www.gracehomefurnishings.com); and at Barclay Butera, Los Angeles, [www.barclaybutera.com](http://www.barclaybutera.com).*



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guilty







*pleasures*

**Locals confess their favorite indulgent eats (when no one's looking).**

Obviously, a guilty pleasure can come in many forms. It seems, though, that foods rank at the top of nearly everyone's list. A few brave residents of the 805 thought it was about time to bring their culinary cravings out into the open, and they divulged the secret indulgences they enjoy when the rest of the world is looking the other way.

**By Angela Pettera and Sarene Wallace  
Photographs by Gary Moss**

## editor's picks

It's hard to beat a *Philly cheesesteak sandwich* for naughty satisfaction. The Ranch in Westlake Village makes a killer version called "The Philly." The meat is tender and juicy, the cheese sauce is tangy and salty, the homemade bun is soft and absorbent—so bad for the arteries, so good for the soul.

The *apple pie* at Stella's Restaurant in Newbury Park is a classic: flaky crust, tasty apples, and it comes with or without a scoop of vanilla ice cream.

—Angela Pettera

### MARC HERNANDEZ

*Owner, Brent's Deli  
Westlake Village*

Besides all of the wonderful goodies that Hernandez has access to at Brent's, he occasionally looks elsewhere for indulgences. At Cupid's Hot Dogs he'll get a chili dog with cheese and mustard. He's also a big fan of Ben & Jerry's Chubby Hubby ice cream. "It's chocolate-covered, peanut-butter filled pretzels in a vanilla-swirl ice cream," he says. "The butter cake at Mastro's should be on that list, too," he quickly adds. —A.P.

### ANDREW FIRESTONE

*Proprietor of Firestone Walker  
Brewing Co. in Buellton  
and recent star of the reality-  
TV show The Bachelor*

"I would have to say that currently my favorite guilty pleasure is the "DBA Steak & Black Bean Chili" at the Firestone Taproom. I know, I know, it would seem that I am totally biased, but this is honestly the best naughty dish in the county. This is chili that should not be approached gingerly with a spoon, no, no. This requires serious attention and a variety of utensils used carefully so as to not be overwhelmed by massive chunks of steak. This is made with our Double Barrel Ale, prime beef, and [chef Humberto Huizar's] secret blend of spices."—A.P.

### SAM QUERREY

*Professional tennis player  
currently ranked 25th in the U.S.  
Grew up in Thousand Oaks*

"Because of my profession, I rarely indulge myself with sweet desserts or unhealthy foods. I try to stay in the best shape I can, and that means I limit the sweets I put into my body. Although, there are times when even I succumb to certain weaknesses, especially indulgent, naughty foods. In-N-Out Burger has always been a favorite of mine. I travel over half the year, and therefore I rarely have time to stop by In-N-Out. But the Double-Double is my favorite burger in the world and every now and then, when I'm home, I'll scarf down a couple. Lately I've also been indulging in some Pinkberry frozen yogurt. The pomegranate flavor is my favorite." —A.P.

### JIMMY YOUNG

*President & CEO,  
McConnell's Ice Cream  
Santa Barbara*

"We're a dessert-first kind of family. 'Always save room for dinner' is what we say," jokes the president of the super-premium ice-cream company. But for times when dessert won't do? "To me there's something about a perfectly cooked artichoke. That and my mother's nori fried rice."

Young's grandfather was sent to a Japanese internment camp on Ellis Island during WWII; Young's mother, as a little girl, would sneak eggs in to her imprisoned father, which he would then use to make this fried-rice recipe for himself and his fellow inmates. It starts with hot bacon grease and soy sauce, cooked white rice, toasted nori (dried seaweed), chopped scallions, sliced water chestnuts, peas, and then crumbled bacon. After the rice mixture gets hot, crack a couple of raw eggs into the pan and stir through until cooked. "It's like our ice cream—definitely not low-fat," says Young, who adds that his grandfather ate it every day for breakfast. —A.P.

### PAUL DELAGNES

*Owner, The Bread Basket Cake Co.  
Camarillo*

"Well, I like steaks—big, fat, juicy ones, any time of the day or night," Delagnes confesses, "topped with a nice blue cheese." —A.P.

### ALEX BENES

*Director of marketing and  
communications,  
Wood Ranch BBQ & Grill  
Agoura Hills*

"Sadly, it's pretty much everything I eat," says Benes. For him, extravagance is all about how much time it takes to prepare a dish. One meal he considers especially sinful, though, is his Cuban roast pork marinated in *mojo* sauce with black beans and rice with fried plantains. Another decadent dish is his homemade long, thin *tagliatelle* noodles sauced with a short-rib-and-tomato ragout, then dusted with dark chocolate shavings. His ultimate homemade indulgence: Italian *timpano*, a drum-shaped pie filled with pasta, meatballs, hard-boiled eggs, chicken, salami, cheese, vegetables, and tomato sauce. Says Benes,

"This is a dish that I first had many years ago in Italy at the home of a friend. Many people in this country likely first learned of the *timpano* from the movie *Big Night*." —A.P.

### PAULETTE LAMBERT, RD, CDE

*Director of nutrition, California  
Health & Longevity Institute  
Westlake Village*

"Treats should be special," insists Lambert, who knows all too well that most of us allow ourselves treats almost every day. But she does recognize the need to go overboard once in a while. "In my opinion, there is a time to indulge." She would prefer that we all eat well 80 percent of the time and indulge only 20 percent of the time; an extra 700 to 800 calories per week is ideal.

So where does Lambert spend her extra calories? Cheese. —A.P.

### JUSTIN BALDWIN

*Co-proprietor,  
Justin Vineyards & Winery  
Paso Robles*

"When I'm in New York, I have Daniel Boulud's foie-gras-and-short-rib burger at DB Bistro Moderne. It's \$50 [after adding a drink, tax, and tip], but it's worth it." When asked about any super-luxe meals he allows himself at home, he admitted to now and again cracking open a \$500 bottle of French Bordeaux to enjoy with a pizza. —A.P.

### JAMIE WEST

*Executive chef,  
Ojai Valley Inn & Spa*  
Despite working right next to a spa every day, West doesn't always eat low-cal meals (nor does he always cook them). Mint-cream-filled Oreo cookies are his favorite diet-killer. —A.P.





*to die for.* STELLA'S APPLE PIE & SWEET ARLEEN'S BREAD PUDDING



**SHANE ALEXANDER**

*Singer/songwriter  
Westlake Village*

The man with an acoustic guitar around his neck and a roster of songs that have made it on TV (*Brothers and Sisters*, *Criminal Minds*, *Bones*, *White Collar*) apparently has a weakness for peanut butter. “I’ve been known to eat a whole row of Chips Ahoy with Jif,” he confesses. “The white-chocolate peanut-butter turnovers at Moz Buddha Lounge are probably my favorite dessert ever.” And then it gets worse (or better, depending on whom you ask): “When I’m really looking for trouble, I’ll get the Mud Pie Mojo at Coldstone Creamery in a chocolate-dipped cone.” The coffee ice cream is loaded with peanut butter, Oreo cookie pieces, roasted almonds, and fudge. Elvis would be proud. —A.P.

**CHRIS HARRISON**

*Host, The Bachelor and  
The Bachelorette  
Westlake Village*

Harrison says he moderates his guilty pleasure of a turkey pastrami Reuben with sweet potato fries from Brent’s Deli in Westlake Village by sharing it with his wife, Gwen. “It’s our go-to meal,” he says. The meat is “lean and seasoned well,” and the rye bread is “fantastic.” The fries? They’re best when they’re a little overdone and crispy, he says. “We love New York, and we love New York delis. Brent’s is about the closest you can get to a real New York deli [around] LA.” —Sarene Wallace

**JIM CHURCHILL**

*Tangerine grower  
Ojai*

Admitting to having a thing for greasy meat, Churchill explains the preferred mode of delivery

is through a Reuben sandwich, preferably from the Ojai Coffee Roasting Company. This sandwich is “what you want it to be; they do it up right,” he says, adding “I don’t [indulge] very often, because it’s not the best thing in the world for you.” The thick, hot sandwich combines good pastrami, good sauerkraut, real dressing (never mayonnaise!), and good rye bread. Churchill measures delis by their Reubens, so he knows a good one when he tastes one. —S.W.

**PASCAL BEALE-GROOM**

*Cookbook author; owner,  
Montecito Country Kitchen  
Santa Barbara*

“Absolute heaven” is how Beale-Groom describes the steaming plate of sautéed fresh morel mushrooms in a cream sauce that her aunt, Marie-France Delas, makes in France. “It’s the epitome of a guilty pleasure for me,” she says, explaining

**editor's pick**

Sweet Arleen’s is a new bakeshop in Westlake Village specializing in cupcakes and individual bread puddings. We can’t get our minds off of the French toast bread pudding sauced with maple syrup and pralines. —A.P.

that she grew up in London and spent holidays in France visiting relatives. For this main course dish that her aunt makes during the holidays, she sautés the wild mushrooms in butter and then melds their smoky, earthy flavors with a simple, yet rich, sauce of crème fraîche, salt, and pepper. —S.W.

### KATHY LONG

*Ventura County Supervisor  
Camarillo*

When Long moved to California from Detroit nearly 30 years ago, she brought a love of Greek food with her. One of her beloved dishes is the octopus salad from The Greek at the Harbor restaurant in Ventura. “It’s a guilty pleasure because not everybody likes it,” she laughs. “It has a unique taste and is one of my favorites.” Long relishes the salad of baby octopus, olive oil, green onions, bell peppers, seasonings, and Greek olives served hot (rather than chilled). Other favorites include *saganaki* (flaming cheese), “which is marvelous,” and garlicky *tzatziki* dip with yogurt and cucumber. —S.W.

### LANCE OROZCO

*News director, KCLU radio  
(88.3 FM, 102.3 FM, and 1340 AM)  
Thousand Oaks*

During next month’s pledge drive at the station (March 18 to 27), it’s a pretty sure bet the KCLU crew will call in a takeout order of cheesecake from Brent’s Deli in Westlake Village in Orozco’s honor. After all, Orozco is wild about cheesecake and his birthday falls during the pledge drive. Although it’s become a tradition, just to be sure, Orozco makes sure to drop a hint or two. Orozco used to make cheesecake, but it came out grainy. So now he lets Brent’s do the baking. The deli’s version has a richness that’s not over the top, he says. —S.W.

### BUDI KAZALI

*Owner, executive chef,  
The Ballard Inn & Restaurant  
Santa Ynez Valley*

Kazali can trace his addiction to pork belly back to his childhood, when his mom, Santy Kazali, would braise pork belly, dice it, and serve it in a soy-sauce-based broth with hard-boiled eggs and rice. He has passed his passion for pork belly on to his young children, he says, and also includes Red Roast Kurobuta Pork Belly with Napa Cabbage Fondue on his restaurant’s menu. When he’s cooking the fatty meat used to make bacon, he confides that he can’t help himself—he has to take a nibble. Its flavor, he says, stems from *umami*, a Japanese term that represents a mouth-filling flavor sensation. Kazali enjoys all different pork belly preparations, giving props to Korean eateries’ grilled version that diners dip in a sesame oil-salt mixture. —S.W.

### STEVE GROSSMAN

*Brewery ambassador,  
Sierra Nevada Brewing Co.  
Camarillo*

In the mid-1960s, a neighbor introduced Grossman (then a teenager) to Sita Restaurant, the first Thai restaurant in the west San Fernando Valley. Grossman’s first bite of *pad prik king* opened his world to an abundance of flavors that exploded on and cascaded over his palate, he says, and he fell instantly in love with curry. His fascination with Indian and Thai curries continues to this day. He makes chicken *tikka masala* at home every couple of months and says it pairs beautifully with Sierra Nevada’s Torpedo India Pale Ale. Cooks can reduce the sauce’s guilt by substituting half-and-half for the cream, “but why bother?” he asks rhetorically. —S.W.

### CYNTHIA MIRANDA

*General manager, Elements  
Restaurant Bar and Catering  
Santa Barbara*

As a conscious eater who believes that feeding your head, soul, and body are equally important, Miranda says, “You can have a really decadent dish, but you can eat it and feel good about it.” For her, guilty pleasures revolve around processed foods she ate as a child, something that “you know it’s not good for you, but you have to eat it.” These include Pringles potato chips (original flavor). “It’s the light, crispy saltiness about them and that they’re always perfect,” she says of the chip’s appeal. —S.W.

## editor's pick

Fox Sports Grill in Westlake Village does things to *potato chips* that should be illegal. They top their thick, freshly fried spud slices with blue cheese, bacon crumbles, tomatoes, and green onions. It’s as good as it sounds.

—A.P.

### JOANNE McGRATH

*Co-owner,  
McGrath Family Farms  
Oxnard*

McGrath doesn’t have a sweet tooth, so it’s cheese that she claims as a guilty pleasure. While she likes a variety of cheeses, she’s especially fond of baked Brie in a sourdough round. “It’s rich and creamy; it’s like eating butter,” she says. McGrath’s instructions for making the cheesy appetizer include cutting the center from the bread and adding a couple rounds of Brie. Bake it in the oven to melt the Brie and give the bread a crisp crust, and to allow the interior to soak up the cheese. Break off chunks of bread and dip in the pool of cheese. “Every bite would be satiating, just completely joyful, but at the same time you’re feeling guilty that you shouldn’t be eating it,” she says. —S.W. ■





*delicious.* FOX SPORTS  
GRILL'S BLUE CHEESE CHIPS



CityCenter, a mammoth 67-acre complex of hotels, condos, restaurants, shops, and casinos, opened in December. Las Vegas is betting that it will reinvigorate Sin City's economy.





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# A TALE OF TWO PROPERTIES

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**LAS VEGAS REMAINS RELEVANT FOR ALL TASTES, BIG AND SMALL.**

**BY ANTHONY HEAD**

It had been more than three years since I last set foot (and money) in Las Vegas. Back then, the family fun days had ended and no one was opening themed properties anymore. Pirates and knights and clowns were out of favor and more grown-up properties, like Wynn Las Vegas, were coming onto the scene.

I had been going to Vegas at least once a year for too long, and quite frankly, at the end of that trip, I was tired of it all—tired of the crowds, tired of the million-dollar jackpots I never won, tired of walking up and down the Strip beside the endless parade of gawkers from Omaha who openly wondered how they moved the Eiffel Tower over from Paris. Boarding the flight back home, I decided there was no need to return.

Then, this past November, when the opportunity came up to go to Las Vegas, a strange thing happened: I said “yes.” I would be paid to go, which is incentive enough, but as I boarded the plane, I conceded that, in fact, I had missed Las Vegas. There were some self-imposed ground rules: I wouldn’t drop one shiny nickel in the slots or sit at the blackjack table and throw away my kid’s tuition money one five-dollar chip at a time. Plus, to reduce the walking (men of a certain age, and all that), I’d basically stay anchored in one place.





This page: High atop the Monte Carlo, Hotel 32's rooms bring a chic sense of intimacy to Las Vegas. Bottom: Dragon Noodle Co. and Sushi Bar, in the Monte Carlo, is no gamble when it comes to Chinese food.



Opposite page, top: For Helen Cheung, general manager of Dragon Noodle, even as Las Vegas changes, it remains a great vacation destination. Bottom: The bright, airy lobby of Aria Hotel welcomed guests to the new CityCenter in December.

My short report on Las Vegas: It's the same and it's changing. Crowds? Yes. More restaurants? Naturally. Big, bigger, and ginormous resorts opening? Of course. But when was the last time "smaller is better" was a working motto for this city?

It is for Hotel 32 ([www.hotel32lasvegas.com](http://www.hotel32lasvegas.com)), a boutique hotel that opened high atop the Monte Carlo Resort last August. Right away I knew this wasn't the Vegas of my past. This place is

so boutique that it only encompasses a single floor (32). Gadget geeks will be in heaven here; however, for Luddites (like me) who are scared of technology, be warned: Hotel 32 is cutting edge. The shower, coffeemaker, and television remote, which also controlled the lighting and the curtains, were a little *too* cutting edge. Everything needed to be programmed, which meant I never enjoyed an in-room cup of coffee, couldn't experience the full benefits of the multi-head shower, and watched nothing but the Weather Channel.

But once the drapes opened (quite by accident, I assure you), the views were as wonderful as ever. At night, the city sparkles as if lit by millions of Christmas lights, and at dawn and dusk the Spring Mountains to the west glow in the desert sky's watercolor brilliance. Even with the cranes and other construction equipment breaking the skyline, Vegas from above is pure eye candy.

Hotel 32's accommodations (from studios to a two-bedroom penthouse; rates start at \$250 a

night) are very comfortable, with lots of open space and nouveau bachelor-pad designs. Each is individually furnished and might feature a billiard table or a spacious living area. There are "suite assistants" to help with the technology and a concierge at the ready in a private, quiet lounge with no games. Customer service is still taught in Las Vegas, and taught very well at Hotel 32. After all, the odds are you'll head home penniless, and if they can get you to smile while leaving—that's something of a trick.

Keeping my promise, I kept my money in my pocket. Although while strolling through the Monte Carlo casino, I was reminded how I still love the electronic jangle of slot machines, but I missed the metallic splash of coins whenever a machine paid off. It's all tickets and debit cards now, which can't be nearly as much fun to cash out. My gloom, though, was lifted by the aromas from Dragon Noodle Co. and Sushi Bar, located next to the casino floor, which more than made up for lamentations of yesterday's jackpots.

For me, Chinese food isn't a guilty pleasure, it's a necessity; and *great* Chinese food is practically its own food group. Dragon Noodle is a winning hand. Helen Cheung, the general manager, who is originally from Hong Kong, says, "My menu is good for American and Chinese. We have the authentic dishes that are the star dishes everyone loves."

The menu is quite extensive and includes traditional Chinese dishes and sushi selections. The restaurant's recent upgrade has rendered a visually striking space, including the "Cosplay" lounge, inspired by the Japanese hobby of dressing



up in anime costumes (the servers are suitably attired). Here, Cheung whipped up a Volcano (an oversized goblet of rum, cognac, and fruit juices set aflame before serving) and began serving one great dish after another, her enthusiasm growing throughout the evening. “I love Las Vegas,” she told me. “I’ve seen it change a lot, and it’s still changing, but it’s still an important place.”

The next day, I did more of the same: stayed put. Even in mid-November, the weather remained pleasant by the pool. I read, I took notes, and I relaxed in relative peacefulness, with the exception of the massive construction project grinding and slamming right next door. Vegas is, after all, always growing.

Then came lunch at D. Vino, an Italian restaurant that opened inside the Monte Carlo in mid-November. General manager Giorgio Ferrero moved to the U.S. from Torino, Italy, about 15 years ago, honing his restaurant skills in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Aspen before settling in Las Vegas. “I needed to escape the cold,” he says. “Plus, this is a great community to live in. The people coming here are never stressed out. It’s a great environment to work in.”

For Ferrero, “service and food and wine all go together,” and whether diners are hungry for something casual (wood-fired pizza, house-made pastas, etc.) or more upscale (diver scallop crudo with pink pepper crust, for example) D. Vino delivers. But it seems Ferrero’s heart is really about the wine: There are around 400 Italian and Californian wines by the bottle, an engaging Wine Map flight program that allows imbibers to track the origin of each wine they try, and an Enomatic wine system, which features 16 wines in a self-serve format. Ferrero refers to it as a “soda fountain of the sophisticated.”

Despite my self-imposed exile to one hotel, this trip had become a “Tale of Two Properties” because right next door to the Monte Carlo was the site of CityCenter ([www.citycenter.com](http://www.citycenter.com)). This was the reason for all the construction equipment, cranes, and men in hard hats wandering around. CityCenter was going to be huge and what Las Vegas hoped would lead the way out of an economic downturn.

This was still more than a month before CityCenter’s official debut, but the next morning, I took advantage of the opportunity to tour the site and get a dizzying behind-the-scenes look at the 67 acres of hotels, condos, restaurants, and shops—it’s a behemoth, even by Vegas standards. Despite the name, it’s not a municipal property; the \$8.5-billion price tag represents the largest private development in the U.S. The overall look and feel, however, is intended to produce an urbane, city-like buzz. Curvaceous and sleek with wide-open outdoor spaces, modern water features, and

\$40 million in public art, the whole thing lends something of an international metropolis feel to area. Eventually, there will be 6,000 rooms, 4,000 of them at the Aria hotel-casino, which opened in December (rates start at \$149 on weeknights). Of course, there’s high-end shopping, countless restaurants with internationally renowned chefs, and casinos.

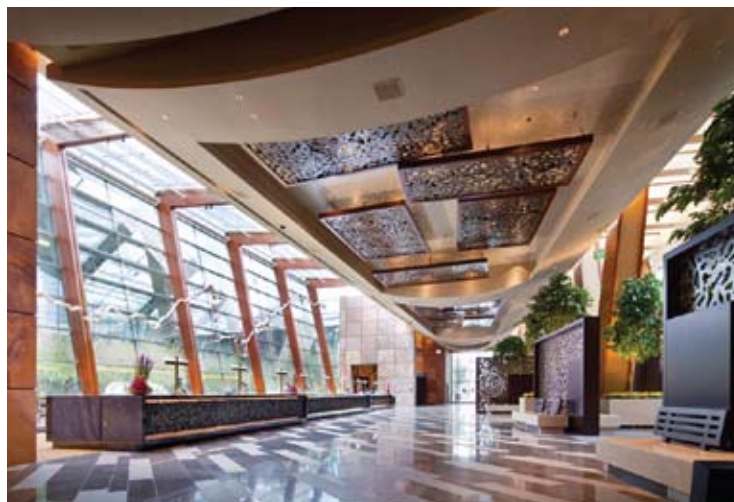
I would argue that CityCenter represents the next evolutionary phase of Las Vegas, not because of its size or scope, but rather because of its approach to energy efficiency and environmentalism. It seeks to top the current slate of Las Vegas amenities, comfort, and luxury—and do it with a “green” thumbprint. Designed with environmental forethought—like low-water-use fixtures, wood purchased from sustainable sources, and water-efficient landscaping—CityCenter has been certified with several “gold” environmental ratings on the nationally recognized LEED system.

Curious about how this all would affect other properties, I headed back and lunched at The Pub (a large, recently refurbished beer-and-burger joint) with Rick Goldstein, vice president of food and beverage for the Monte Carlo. Goldstein says that MGM Mirage, which owns the Monte Carlo and is the chief force behind CityCenter, is committed to making sure all its properties are fresh for CityCenter’s opening. “With the newest project next door, there’s going to be more traffic coming this way. We want to retain our loyal guests while keeping new ones coming in.”

Right now, Goldstein considers the Monte Carlo a core property of the company, but his goal is to bring it into the next phase of luxury. “We’ve already changed the look and feel of the restaurants and we built Hotel 32 to bring us up to more luxurious standards. We’ve been around for almost 15 years, but we’re always striving to make it a new experience for everyone.”

On this last flight home, I couldn’t decide whether or not I was through with Sin City. Las Vegas could either be America’s guilty pleasure or a progressive force in urban planning. One thing’s for certain: It’ll be around if I decide to visit again. ■

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Leyla Cohen



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Tim Freund



Victoria Gidlund



Millie Gordon



Bernyce Green



Jeanne Harrison



Carolin Hoff



Butch Horowitz



Aleksandra Hunt



Judi Irwin



Diane Kane



Mary Ellen Kane



Liz Kaseno



Stephen Kaseno



Sherry Keowen



Hong Kim



The Lamensdorfs



Mary Lavorato



Chuck Lech



Andrea McCabe



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Carol Ostwald



Gary Paller



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Judy Quarles



Carrie Rice



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Tara Rose



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Nancy Urcia



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A full-page photograph of a bride and groom laughing joyfully in a field. The groom is on the left, wearing a dark suit, and the bride is on the right, wearing a white wedding dress. They are both looking upwards and laughing. The air is filled with falling pink and orange petals. The background is a soft-focus green field under a bright sky.

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## BLENNER WEDDING VENDORS



### INVITATIONS:

William Ernest Brown Paperie,  
www.williamernestbrown.com

### WEDDING COORDINATOR:

Lisa Vorce, www.ohhowcharming.com

### OFFICIANT:

Rabbi David Wolpe, 310-474-1518

### PHOTOGRAPHER:

Elizabeth Messina,  
www.elizabethmessina.com

### ENTERTAINMENT:

Fifth Avenue Orchestras & Entertainment,  
www.themusicconnectionorchestra.com

### FLORAL DESIGN:

Asiel Design, www.asielfdesign.com

### WEDDING CAKE:

LaStarr & Co. (cupcakes),  
www.lastarrcakes.com

### CATERER:

Tiffany Emch, catering manager, Ojai Valley Inn & Spa, www.ojairesort.com

### RENTALS:

Carlos Novoa, Tabella,  
www.tabelladesign.com/home.html

### EVENT DESIGN:

Lewis Barker, Barker Décor Service,  
www.barkerdecorservice.com

### WEDDING DRESS DESIGNER:

Reem Acra, www.reemacra.com; Jimmy Choo (shoes), www.jimmychoo.com

### GROOMSWEAR DESIGNER:

Brooks Brothers (tuxes),  
www.brooksbrothers.com; Armani (shirts), www.armani.com; Brioni (ties), www.brioni.com; Converse (shoes), www.converse.com

### BRIDESMAID DRESSES:

Ariane Goldman,  
Two Birds, www.twobirdsbridesmaid.com

### HAIR STYLIST:

Mika Fowler, Gavert Atelier,  
www.gavertatelier.com

### MAKEUP ARTIST:

Jennifer Galperson, Chroma,  
www.chromamakeupstudio.com

### JEWELRY:

Engagement ring by Elyse Jacob,  
www.elysejacob.com; wedding bands by Phillip Press, www.platinumrings.com

## TAMI GOLDMAN & JONATHAN BLENNER

OJAI VALLEY INN & SPA

BY CYNTHIA HOUSE NOONEY PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELIZABETH MESSINA



The color orange isn't just Tami's favorite color: It was also her late father's favorite. "It was important for me to feel his presence on my special day," she says. Guests are still talking about the orange-and-white themed celebration that Tami describes as simple yet elegant, and fun for all participants. "Their enjoyment mattered as much as ours, so we planned our wedding around a long weekend. We wanted everyone to feel included."

Tami made sure every last detail reflected her style and personality. "I'm a modern minimalist. I like clean lines, and everything has to have a design, a reason, and a purpose," she says. That included the surprise she gave Jonathan during their first kiss as husband and wife—dozens of orange monarch butterflies were released to symbolize the beginning of their lives together.

Afterward, the two snuck into the Hacienda Ballroom for a preview of the festivities ahead and enjoyed a moment alone. "People told me it would be the most beautiful day of my life, and it absolutely was," Tami says. "I loved every exciting, energetic, magical minute of it—and my father was there with me the entire time."

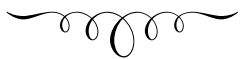






# DELIGHTFUL DETAILS

IN ANY WEDDING, THE SMALLER ELEMENTS GET NOTICED JUST AS MUCH AS THE BRIDE'S DRESS. HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR MEMORABLE PIECES TO ROUND OUT THE DAY.



1

✧ RING OF JOY. Santa Barbara-based florist Tricia Fontaine designed this wreath with roses, sage, and waxflower for a Montecito wedding with French provincial flair. *Tricia Fontaine*, [www.triciafontaine.com](http://www.triciafontaine.com). *Event Planner*, *La Fleur Weddings & Events*, [www.lafleurweddings.com](http://www.lafleurweddings.com). *Photograph by Elizabeth Messina*; [www.elizabethmessina.com](http://www.elizabethmessina.com).



2



3



**1. LUCKY CHARM.** Whimsical details—especially when they are symbolic—add character to an event and create great photo opportunities. *Event Planner, La Fleur Weddings & Events, [www.lafleurweddings.com](http://www.lafleurweddings.com). Photograph by Elizabeth Messina; [www.elizabethmessina.com](http://www.elizabethmessina.com).*

**2. GARDEN FRESH.** Camilla Svensson Burns designed a loose and informal bridal bouquet with white peonies, garden roses, lavender, mint sprigs, and scented geranium. The raffia-wrapped stems give the bouquet a casual, effortless appeal. *Camilla Svensson Burns Couture Floral & Event Design, [www.camillaflowers.com](http://www.camillaflowers.com). Photograph by Jose Villa; [www.josevilla.com](http://www.josevilla.com).*

**3. VINTAGE FLORALS.** The bride and her event planner, Rebecca Stone ([www.duet-weddings.com](http://www.duet-weddings.com)), collected a variety of vintage dinner plates with floral patterns from area flea markets and antique shops. For the centerpieces, the florist (*Camilla Svensson Burns, see above*) used a mix of vintage containers from her own collection including teapots and mercury glass. *For more details from this wedding, turn the page. Photograph by Jose Villa (see information above).*

**4. MIX AND MATCH.** To add to the romantic-retro vibe of her wedding, the bride brought together vintage and contemporary dresses for her bridesmaids—fulfilling the long-standing tradition of incorporating “something old, something new.” *For more details on this wedding, turn the page. Photograph by Jose Villa (see information above).*



DELICATE dogwood sugar blossoms cascade over this pretty-in-pink wedding cake created by pastry chef Don Hall from the Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara ([www.fourseasons.com/santabarbara](http://www.fourseasons.com/santabarbara)). *Photograph by Kristen Beinke; [www.kristenbeinke.com](http://www.kristenbeinke.com).*











## DIANE AINJIL HALBER & CHRISTOPHER BILLS

CROSSROADS ESTATE, LOS OLIVOS

BY CYNTHIA HOUSE NOONEY PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOSE VILLA



**M**usic brought Diane Ainjil Halber and Christopher Bills together. He recorded the demo CD of her all-girl punk-rock band in 2004. So the couple asked guests to sign a vintage record of the first dance song (“I Love You Because” by Jim Reeves) in lieu of a traditional guestbook, which seems entirely fitting.

So, too, were the setting and theme for their intimate affair for 49 guests. Their vision: Create a French countryside experience with vintage parasols and games under the sun, followed by elegant evening decor and delicious food. A limitless candy and dessert table, a cascading wall of ribbons, and an acoustic guitarist added joyful touches. Guests lined up to receive personal photos from a silhouette artist, and many went back for seconds.

“It was extraordinary because it felt like home,” says Diane. “The guests felt like they were an integral part of the whole event, rather than just spectators. Although we received positive feedback from everyone, the biggest compliment came from my dad. He turned to me and said, ‘This looks like a work of art.’”

## BILLS WEDDING

### VENDORS



#### INVITATIONS:

Created by bride. Printed by Unit I Press, [www.unitipress.com](http://www.unitipress.com)

#### WEDDING COORDINATOR:

Rebecca Stone, [www.duet-weddings.com](http://www.duet-weddings.com)

#### OFFICIANT:

Sara Burdette, 805-687-7055

#### PHOTOGRAPHER:

Jose Villa, [www.josevilla.com](http://www.josevilla.com)

#### ENTERTAINMENT:

DJ Nahchey, [www.dashdjs.com](http://www.dashdjs.com); Karl Johnson, silhouette artist, [www.cutarts.com](http://www.cutarts.com); Anthony Ybarra, acoustic guitarist, [www.ybarramusic.com](http://www.ybarramusic.com)

#### FLORAL DESIGN:

Camilla Svensson Burns, [www.camillaflowers.com](http://www.camillaflowers.com)

#### WEDDING CAKE:

A Piece of Cake, [www.apieceofcakesb.com](http://www.apieceofcakesb.com); Decadence Wedding Cakes, [www.decadenceweddingcakes.com](http://www.decadenceweddingcakes.com)

#### CATERER:

Santa Barbara Barbecue Gourmet Catering, [www.santabarbarabarbequegourmetcateringandgrilling.com](http://www.santabarbarabarbequegourmetcateringandgrilling.com)

#### RENTALS:

Classic Party Rentals, [www.classicpartyrentals.com](http://www.classicpartyrentals.com); Anyone for Tea?, [www.anyonefortea.net](http://www.anyonefortea.net); La Tavola, [www.latavolalinen.com](http://www.latavolalinen.com)

#### EVENT DESIGN:

Trevor Zellet, Bella Vista Designs, [www.bellavistadesigns.com](http://www.bellavistadesigns.com)

#### WEDDING DRESS DESIGNER:

Badgley Mischka, [www.badgleymischkabride.com](http://www.badgleymischkabride.com); Miu Miu (shoes), [www.miumiu.com](http://www.miumiu.com)

#### GROOMSWEAR DESIGNER:

Hugo Boss, [www.hugoboss.com](http://www.hugoboss.com)

#### BRIDESMAID DRESSES:

Vintage designer finds on eBay, [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com); Bloomingdale's, [www.bloomingdales.com](http://www.bloomingdales.com)

#### HAIR STYLIST AND MAKEUP ARTIST:

Mar Romero, Team Hair & Makeup, [www.teamhairandmakeupservice.com](http://www.teamhairandmakeupservice.com)

#### JEWELRY:

Engagement ring by Tiffany & Co., [www.tiffany.com](http://www.tiffany.com); wedding bands by Eli's Jewelers, 213-623-1611

#### TRANSPORTATION/VINTAGE CAR:

Classic Motoring Car Rentals, [www.classicmotoringcarrentals.com](http://www.classicmotoringcarrentals.com)

# COZY CRÊPES

These romantic wraps snuggle a variety of fillings and are surprisingly easy to make.

**CRÊPES ARE THE CULINARY EQUIVALENT** of the little black dress. These fashionably thin French pancakes are a timeless classic that can be dressed up or down to be deliciously vogue on any menu, from breakfast through dessert. Simplicity is part of their charm. So is their versatility.

“Crêpes are delicate, light, and ethereal almost, and then contain a wonderful sweet or savory filling,” says Lou Seibert Pappas, author of *Crêpes: Sweet & Savory Recipes for the Home Cook* (Chronicle Books, 2006). “I really like a variety of crêpes, a different one all the time, as they are so good around the clock.”

Originating centuries ago in Brittany, in northwest France, crêpes were used as bread and usually weren't filled, writes Pappas, adding that until about a century ago, all crêpes used buckwheat flour. Today, savory main-course crêpes traditionally still use buckwheat flour; sweet crêpes use wheat. Milk, eggs, butter, salt, and sometimes sugar are added to the flour, producing a thin batter that quickly cooks into a paper-thin pancake that invites nearly limitless combinations of toppings or fillings.

But first you need to master the art of cooking crêpes; it's easier than you think. Pour chilled batter into a heated pan, then tilt and swirl to coat the bottom. In a few seconds, the crêpe is ready to flip onto the other side. That's all. The hardest part is cooking them fast enough to keep up with demand.

Whenever I make them, my kids hover. They know a fresh-from-the-pan crêpe—spread with butter, jam, or Nutella chocolate-hazelnut spread—is heavenly. The crêpes they enjoy are reminiscent of what visitors find in France.

During summer months, stands set up along Parisian and other city streets, for example, sell made-to-order crêpes about 12 inches in diameter filled with jam, Nutella, chocolate spread, or whipped cream, says Denis Rion, chef-owner of Cigale Cafe (*Oak Park*, [www.cigalecafe.com](http://www.cigalecafe.com)), who grew up in France near the Swiss border. “It's a very yummy snack in the afternoons,” he adds.

For Valentine's Day, turn the popular street food into sophisticated, flirty crêpes suzette, complete with Grand Marnier flambé. Or wrap crêpes around eggs, Swiss cheese, and ham to turn the French pancakes into a breakfast-in-bed treat for your sweetheart.

Throughout the year, top crêpes with fresh, seasonal fruit dusted with powdered sugar to serve as a light brunch item. The dish easily moves into dessert with a scoop of vanilla ice cream or pouf of whipped cream.

For a more substantial meal that's still quick to the table, bake crêpes filled with a creamy mixture of chicken, sour cream, green chiles, and cheddar cheese until the cheese melts; or roll crêpes around sautéed mushrooms, onions, artichokes, and Swiss cheese.



“Try different flours, as they are special,” encourages Pappas, who loves buckwheat and chestnut-flour crêpes. Chestnut is slightly sweet and nutty, and works with sweet or savory crêpes, while buckwheat flour has an earthiness to it; it's high in protein and healthful fiber. Garbanzo is another healthful flour; it imparts a savory flavor to the pancakes. You can also experiment with cornmeal or whole-wheat flour in crêpe batters. For added interest, mix in minced sun-dried tomatoes or fresh herbs, like chives, basil, and tarragon, writes Pappas.

On the sweet side, doll up white-flour batter with a bit of cocoa powder, cinnamon, espresso, citrus zest, or poppy seeds. Blend toasted, shredded coconut into the batter for crêpes with an island vibe when served with fresh pineapple and banana bites. Add a swath of chocolate ganache and toasted-almond garnish, and now the coconut crêpe takes its cue from an Almond Joy candy bar. With so many looks and tastes, crêpes will never go out of style. Just like the little black dress.

PHOTO BY JEAN-BLAISE HALL. CRÊPES, SWEET & SAVORY RECIPES FOR THE HOME COOK (CHRONICLE BOOKS, 2006); PHOTO BY JIM STOTT. STONEWALL, KITCHEN BREAKFAST: A COLLECTION OF GREAT MORNING MEALS (CHRONICLE BOOKS, 2009)



## Crêpe Cravings A BIT OF FRANCE ON THE PLATE.

On February 2, celebrate Candlemas as they do in France. Known as *la Chandeleur* (or “crêpe day”), people feast on crêpes and test their luck by holding a coin in their writing hand while flipping a crêpe in a pan with the other. If they catch the crêpe, it’s said the family will prosper the remainder of the year.

For those who want to leave the cooking to someone else, say for Valentine’s Day, there are restaurants nearby that serve sweet and savory crêpes.

Yvan Morin, who grew up in France and owns **Pacific Crêpes** (*Santa Barbara, www.pacificcrepe.com*), serves a wide range of main course and dessert crêpes. Start the day with *La Complète*, a buckwheat crêpe with eggs, ham, Swiss and mozzarella cheeses, and mushrooms. End it with a *Martinique*, which features fresh bananas, chocolate sauce, vanilla ice cream, and rum flambé.

Denis Rion, chef-owner of **Cigale Cafe** (*Oak Park, www.cigalecafe.com*), focuses on southern French cuisine. The dessert menu includes crêpes *suzette*, which naps crêpes in a Grand Marnier-spiked sauce. Though Rion does not flambé the dish tableside, it’s a decadent finish to dinner.

Hugo and Sabrina Barthe, owners of **Chocolatine** (*Thousand Oaks, www.chocolatine.net*), both hail from France. Their decidedly French patisserie and tearoom serves a chicken crêpe with mushrooms, mozzarella, and a white sauce. For dessert, choose a sweet crêpe with homemade raspberry or strawberry jam, lemon sugar (a lemon juice spritz and granulated sugar for a sweet-tart effect), Nutella, or Tahitian, a soft meringue spread studded with caramelized hazelnuts.

In its savory offerings, **Le Ciel Crepe Café** (*San Luis Obispo, www.lecielcrepes.com*) takes

crêpes for a Greek spin in the Hollister Peak crêpe, with fresh spinach, kalamata olives, roasted almonds, and feta cheese crumbles. Yogurt-cumin sauce tops it off. For dessert, dig into sautéed apples with caramel sauce in the Lopez crêpe.

**Melt Gelato & Crêpe Café** (*Simi Valley Town Center, www.meltgelato.com*) satisfies shoppers’ cravings with two delicious treats. Before ordering gelato, dine on the *Farmer Brown* crêpe, complete with bacon, fried egg, cheese, and mushrooms. Kids will like that their favorite peanut butter and jelly sandwich has been reimagined into a crêpe here.

*805 Living’s* Facebook fans report that they enjoy crêpes from **The Crêpe Café** at Universal City Walk (*Universal City, www.citywalkhollywood.com*) and **Le Petit Cafe and Bakery** (*Ventura, www.lepetitrestaurant.com*). >>



## RECIPES

### BASIC FRENCH CRÊPES

*Recipe comes courtesy of Stonewall Kitchen Breakfast: A Collection of Great Morning Meals by Jonathan King, Jim Stott, and Kathy Gunst (Chronicle Books, 2009).*

- 1½ cups low-fat milk
- 3 large eggs
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- ½ teaspoon salt
- about ⅓ cup canola oil

1. In a blender, mix the milk and eggs until well blended. Add the flour, butter, and salt and blend until frothy and thoroughly mixed. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour and up to 6 hours.

2. Heat a heavy 8-inch skillet over medium heat. Using a pastry brush, lightly oil the bottom of the pan. The skillet is hot enough when you place your hand several inches above it and it feels very hot. Add about 3 tablespoons batter (the easiest way is to pour it from a small ladle) to the skillet, swirling it around so that you have the thinnest possible covering on the bottom of the pan. The crêpe should be very thin and coat the entire bottom of the skillet. Let cook for about 1 minute, or until the crêpe starts to set. Use a small metal or offset spatula, and carefully lift the crêpe up from the base of the skillet and flip it over. Cook for another minute or so on the other side. The crêpe should be a pale golden brown. Set aside on a large plate.

3. Repeat with the remaining batter. You can stack the crêpes gently on top of each other and reheat later, depending on how you're serving them. If making them ahead of time, stack them with a small piece of waxed paper between each crêpe to keep them from sticking together.

*Makes 20 crêpes.*

#### Variations:

**LEMON-HERB:** Add 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh rosemary, chives, and thyme to the batter. Serve with melted butter flavored with fresh lemon juice and more chopped herbs.

**CHEESE AND HAM:** Fill a hot crêpe with about 2 tablespoons grated cheese and 1½ tablespoons chopped cooked ham. Fold in half.

**ASPARAGUS AND GOAT CHEESE:** Roll a hot crêpe around 2 or 3 cooked asparagus spears and 2 tablespoons crumbled goat cheese.

### CHOCOLATE SOUFFLÉ HALF-MOON CRÊPES

*Recipe comes courtesy of Crêpes: Sweet & Savory Recipes for the Home Cook by Lou Seibert Pappas (Chronicle Books, 2006).*

#### CHOCOLATE SOUFFLÉ

- 4 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 4 eggs, separated
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon cream of tartar
- 5 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

#### GARNISH

- Powdered sugar for dusting
- Whipped cream or vanilla or coffee ice cream

Prepare the chocolate crêpes (recipe follows).

#### TO MAKE THE CHOCOLATE SOUFFLÉ:

In a double boiler over barely simmering water, melt the chocolate. Let cool to room temperature. In a large bowl, beat the egg whites until foamy. Add the salt and cream of tartar and beat until soft peaks form. Add 3 tablespoons of the sugar and beat until stiff, glossy peaks form. In a medium bowl, beat the egg yolks until pale. Beat in the remaining 2 tablespoons sugar. Stir in the chocolate and vanilla. Mix one-third of the egg whites into the yolks, then gently fold in the remaining whites.

Place the crêpes on 2 lightly buttered baking sheets. Spoon 2 rounded spoonfuls of soufflé on one half of each crêpe and fold the other half over gently to cover. If desired, assemble to this point and let sit at room temperature for 1 hour before baking.

To bake, preheat the oven to 350°F. Bake in the oven for 10 minutes, or until puffed and set. Dust with powdered sugar. Serve at once, topped with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream.

*Makes 12 crêpes; serves 6.*

### CHOCOLATE CRÊPES

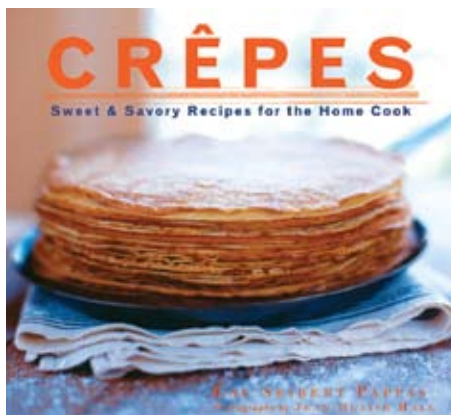
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup milk
- ⅓ cup water
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- ⅓ cup unsweetened cocoa
- ¼ cup sifted powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon rum, Cointreau, amaretto, brandy, or other liqueur (optional)
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted; plus 2 to 3 teaspoons for coating the pan

In a blender or food processor, blend the eggs, milk, water, flour, cocoa, powdered sugar, vanilla, optional flavoring, and the 2 tablespoons melted butter for 5 seconds, or until smooth. Stir down and repeat, if necessary. Or, to mix by hand, sift the flour and cocoa into a medium bowl and add the powdered sugar. Whisk the eggs until blended, mix in the milk, water, vanilla, and optional flavoring, and whisk this mixture into the flour and cocoa; stir in the 2 tablespoons melted butter. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour (2 hours is preferable) or up to 24 hours.

Gently stir the batter if it has separated. Heat a seasoned 6- or 7-inch nonstick crêpe pan over medium-high heat until hot. (Use a 9- or 10-inch pan for larger crêpes.) Wipe the pan lightly with butter, lift the pan from the heat, and pour in 2 to 3 tablespoons of batter for a 6- or 7-inch pan, or about ¼ cup for a 9- or 10-inch pan, tilting and rotating the pan to coat the surface. Cook until almost dry on top and lightly browned on the edges, about 1 minute. Loosen the edges with a metal spatula and flip the crêpe over using your fingers or the spatula, then cook the other side for about 15 seconds, or until lightly browned. Turn the crêpe out onto a clean tea towel to cool. Repeat with the remaining batter, wiping the pan with butter as needed and stacking the crêpes as they are cooked.

For serving immediately, cover the crêpes with aluminum foil and keep them warm in a preheated 200°F oven. For serving later, wrap them in plastic wrap in quantities intended for each use and slip them into a self-sealing plastic bag. Refrigerate the crêpes for up to 3 days, or freeze them for up to 2 months.

*Makes 16 to 18 crêpes (6- or 7-inch), or 10 to 12 crêpes (9- or 10-inch).* ■





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On the far eastern edge of the Santa Ynez Valley, the gorgeous Happy Canyon is home to Star Lane and five other vineyards.

# MORE JOY FOR WINE LOVERS

Happy Canyon brings a little bit of Bordeaux to Santa Barbara County.

LAST YEAR, ON OCTOBER 8, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB) published a formal rule designating a new American Viticultural Area (AVA) in California. Today, that AVA is known as “Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara.” This newly recognized grape-growing area comprises nearly 24,000 acres on the extreme eastern end of the Santa Ynez Valley; it’s south and east of the San Rafael Mountains, west of Lake Cachuma, and north of the Santa Ynez River. The total area is small compared to, say, Napa Valley (with nearly a quarter of a million acres). What’s more, there are fewer than 500 acres currently being used for commercial viticulture production. Obviously, there’s still a lot of elbow room in the AVA, and so this is sure to be just the beginning.

When the TTB designates a new AVA, it means that petitioners have clearly demonstrated a uniqueness to the region’s topography, climate, geology, and other characteristics that set it apart from the surrounding area, in this case, the larger Santa Ynez Valley. Some use the word “terroir” to emphasize how the complete natural environment of a vineyard’s location imparts the characteristics and flavors to the wine, and not just

the grapes and production methods. Such AVA designations, in turn, allow vintners to promote the regional character of their wines.

“In my opinion, the establishment of this new AVA protects the unique qualities of the area,” says Kurt Ammann, manager of consumer direct marketing for Star Lane Vineyards ([www.starlanevineyard.com](http://www.starlanevineyard.com)) in Happy Canyon. “This is a legal definition. It protects the grower and consumer.”

Star Lane was established in 1997 and has a 250-acre vineyard in Happy Canyon dedicated to Bordeaux varietals (current releases include a 2007 sauvignon blanc, a 2006 cabernet sauvignon, and a 2006 merlot). Cabernet sauvignon seems to be the benchmark wine in California, and many oenophiles agree that most of Santa Barbara County is simply too cool to produce superior cabs. But in Happy Canyon, that’s apparently just not the case. Ammann says that Happy Canyon producers like Star Lane are excited to have this AVA designation because, along with all the other contributing factors, the area’s warm afternoons and cool evenings are especially conducive to these grapes.





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## Taste

"We warm up first in the morning and cool off last at night. Even six or seven miles away, it's not the same weather, it's not the same soil," Ammann says. "It's amazing how different something can be in such a small space. In the growing season, it's easy to be 100 degrees in Happy Canyon and 60 degrees in Lompoc, just about 34 miles apart. It's incredibly diverse out here."

In order for vintners to include the Happy Canyon designation on their labels, at least 85 percent of the grapes used to produce a wine must come from the AVA. The label will help vintners distinguish their products from other Santa Barbara County locations, while allowing consumers to pinpoint exactly where the wines originated.

Larry Grassini, co-owner of Grassini Family Vineyards ([www.grassinifamilyvineyards.com](http://www.grassinifamilyvineyards.com)), says he originally came to Happy Canyon for the horses. "This was before the days of *Sideways*. This area of Santa Ynez was still relatively unknown."

Discovering the winemaking potential of the area, Grassini first planted in 2002 and now has 35 acres under vine (half are cabernet sauvignon). Additionally, Grassini is just finishing the construction of a 15,000-square-foot winery, which includes 7,000 feet of caves. It's expected to be completed near the end of February.

Grassini credits Wes Hagen, winemaker and vineyard manager for Clos Pepe Vineyards in Santa Rita Hills ([www.clospepe.com](http://www.clospepe.com)), for dealing with the TTB's paperwork. "He had successfully prepared the petition for the AVA of Santa Rita Hills," Grassini says, "and he shepherded us through this whole convoluted production in around three years, which is very good for the process. Now we're hoping to really make a mark. It's a tough time in the wine business, especially with the economy we're in."

Grassini will be introducing the winery's first commercial releases, a 2007 cabernet sauvignon and a 2007 sauvignon blanc, in April. (Stephen Tanzer, editor of the *International Wine Cellar*, recently tasted a barrel sample of the cabernet and rated it 91 points.)

Roger Higgins, co-owner of Cimarone Wines ([www.cimarone.com](http://www.cimarone.com)), bought his 103-acre piece of Happy Canyon in 2000 and planted in 2001. Today, he has 26 acres of vines and the services of winemaker Doug Margerum, founder of Wine Cask in Santa Barbara. "Our first vintage, 2006, was released in 2008. We're just releasing the next generation of the wines," says Higgins. Those releases include the 2007 Le Clos Secret (a cabernet blend) and the 2007 Gran Premio sangiovese. Additionally, Cimarone's second label, 3CV (which stands for Three Creek Vineyard) will be debuting a 2009 sauvignon blanc this spring.

"The funny thing about Happy Canyon, nobody knows where it's situated by and large, there are only six vineyards, and no public tasting facilities," Higgins says. "But if anyone were to stumble across this place, they would be astounded at how gorgeous it is. When I talk to people from LA, and they tell me they're going to 'wine country,' I can't believe they're heading all the way up to Napa when with just a two-hour drive they can be here."

It's probably a safe bet, however, that as more wines from Happy Canyon hit the market, and as more producers discover the distinct conditions of this area, that's all bound to change very soon. ■

For more information on Happy Canyon and its producers visit [www.happycanyonava.com](http://www.happycanyonava.com).





## The Armchair Oenophile®

CENTRAL COAST WINES MADE EASY.

By Anthony Head

Purebreds of any kind are always popular, but sometimes a mixed breed is more desirable. To prove this abstract point, let's look at merlot. How this grape got to be so popular I'll never know because it usually needs a heck of a distinguished pedigree (and a lot of good fortune from Mother Nature) to make wine that isn't thin, vapid, and tinny.

Candor Merlot Lot 2, on the other hand, is something of a Central Coast mixed breed—and proudly so. With the expertise of Hope Family Wines behind the production, Candor is a juicy combination of 2007 and 2008 grapes from both Paso Robles and Santa Barbara County. It fills the mouth with medium-full-bodied flavors before ending softly and satisfyingly. It's a great match for beef, rich pasta dishes with red sauce, and even heavy chicken dinners. It would even pair well with dark chocolate truffles on February 14.

My suggestion is to stick it in the fridge for about 20 minutes before opening and serving. Chilling it down, just slightly below room temperature, will enhance the rounded, bouncy fun of this loveable mutt. ■

Candor Merlot Lot 2 (\$18)  
[www.hopefamilywines.com](http://www.hopefamilywines.com)

# Akashic Garden Cafe



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**This page:** Owner Cyrena Nouzille started brewing beer at home in 1999, until an explosion of a dubbel batch led her to believe it was just as easy to make 10 barrels as 10 gallons. Thus, Ladyface Alehouse was born. **Opposite page, clockwise:** Brewer David Griffiths specializes in wheat beers and ales; “gastropub” food includes Belgian twice-fried *pomme frites*; Ladyface’s Art Nouveau logo encapsulates brasserie style.

## LADYFACE ALEHOUSE & BRASSERIE

Enjoy the rich tradition of a French tavern in Agoura Hills.



**AH, THE BRASSERIE**—a French style of alehouse built upon camaraderie and beer. It’s a wonderful model for a mid-priced restaurant, and the new Ladyface Alehouse & Brasserie in Agoura Hills does the genre proud.

Owner Cyrena Nouzille, who took her home-brewing hobby professional, lived in Paris for a spell. Her husband, Jean-Luc, hails from the Provence region of France and is intimately familiar with brasseries. Brewer David Griffiths supports the theme through his specialization of Belgian wheat beers and ales. He oversees the on-site brewing of Ladyface Ale Company’s Blond Ale and India Pale Ale; expect all 16 taps to be filled with Ladyface ales in the near future. He’s also chosen to serve beers like Belhaven Scottish Ale and Anderson Valley Brother David Dubbel along with wine and cocktails.

Ladyface’s interior has an open floor plan, which is warmed up with wooden cabinetry, tables, and chairs. A long communal table fills up quickly every night with large groups of friends or small collections of strangers who get to know each other as their meal progresses. Ladyface Ale Company is named for the Ladyface Mountain, which sits behind the restaurant and can be seen from the back patio. The menus and logo (to be etched on their grain silo) portray a lady illustrated in Art Nouveau style.

Chef Ray Luna (Patina Group, Spago, Shutters, Pasadena Brewing Co.) has crafted a menu that perfectly marries country-French brasserie fare with American pub grub to create a “gastropub” experience. “I had done an American brewpub before,” he says, “but it was missing a bit of panache.” Here he dishes up fun and indulgence in sophisticated packages.

At lunch or dinner, crispy Belgian twice-fried *pommes frites* (\$5) get sprinkled with one of three seasonings and can be dipped in decadent sauces, like aioli, a ketchup made with Red Ale, or even blue-cheese fondue. At dinnertime, the small plates section of the menu lists ale-battered fish-and-chips (\$12) and traditional Belgian *moules frites* (\$13) among other options. The sausage plate (\$12), available all day, comes with slices of soft pretzel bread and an insanely good violet mustard imported from France. It’s made with grape must (a by-product of the wine-making process) that lends a deep-purple color and a sweet





undertone to the condiment (8-ounce jars of it are for sale for \$16 in the pantry area of the Brasserie).

The niçoise salad (\$12) also shows up on both the lunch and dinner menus. It features local produce (as do all the salads and the daily slaw selection), fingerling potatoes, crunchy green beans, and perfectly poached albacore. The French onion soup (\$5), draped in Gruyère, is always vegetarian.

Sparkling water (free), lemonade (\$2), and French-press coffee (\$3) are available with meals, but this is a brasserie after all, so order a freshly pulled pint and enjoy. There's even a beer ice cream float (\$6) available for dessert if you request it. Now that's indulgent. ■

*Ladyface Alehouse & Brasserie (29281 Agoura Road, Agoura Hills) will hold its grand opening on February 6; it is open daily from 2 p.m. to midnight Monday through Friday and noon to midnight Saturday and Sunday. For more information about Ladyface's prix fixe chocolate-and-beer-pairing menu for Valentine's Day, call 818-477-4566 or visit [www.ladyfaceale.com](http://www.ladyfaceale.com).*

## DIALED IN

News from the local dining scene.

### Wine, Chocolate, and Cheese

This being an issue about indulgence, there had to be a mention of the launch of Oxnard's **Wine, Chocolate, & Cheese Tours**. The tour is an extension of the Ventura County Wine Trail and may include stops at Bella Victorian Vineyard, Herzog Wine Cellars, and Rancho Ventavo Cellars in Oxnard; and Cantara Cellars in Camarillo (check [www.visitoxnard.com](http://www.visitoxnard.com) for an updated list of participating wineries). Each winery pairs its wine with cheese, chocolate, or small appetizers. Tours are held every Saturday (except for Herzog) and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. and include a shuttle ride between wineries. The price is \$75 per person; reservations are required 24 hours in advance and can be made by calling the California Welcome Center (805-988-0717). Tours depart from the Welcome Center located at 1000 Town Center Drive, Suite 135, Oxnard.

### PUCK UPGRADE

The **Wolfgang Puck Bistro** in Westlake Village has retooled its menu in order to deliver higher-quality food at still-reasonable prices. Joe Essa, the president of Wolfgang Puck Worldwide and a managing partner, recently discussed the change in the restaurant's approach. "I was wrong before," he said. "We can't be competitive as a fast-food restaurant because of the quality that Wolfgang demands. We need to do what we do best." Therefore, Essa sat down with the culinary director of the Bistros, Matt Bencivenga, to recapture the style of the early Spago menus. Puck himself approved the final Bistro menu, which incorporates higher-end ingredients (bigger shrimp, finer olive oil, better cheeses) in its salads, sandwiches, pizzas, and entrées. The food presentation has gotten better, too. Salads are composed, not tossed; the roasted beet salad (\$7) and the Greek shrimp salad (\$15) are both set on whole, tender Bibb lettuce leaves. The pizza crust is thinner and less uniform than before with more crunch (\$9 to \$16 per pie). The



fish is fresh, and diners will likely taste the difference in the oven-roasted salmon with roasted potatoes and horseradish cream (\$17). The sirloin burger (\$12) is topped with aged cheddar and Niman Ranch bacon. To reflect the new upscale attitude toward the food, counter service has been discontinued. Even at lunchtime there is full table service. (Oh, yes, the plates are new, too.) *The Wolfgang Puck Bistro is located at 30990 Russell Ranch Road, Westlake Village, 818-597-1902. For more information visit [www.wolfgangpuck.com/restaurants/casual-dining/Wolfgang-Puck-Bistros/7562/section-overview](http://www.wolfgangpuck.com/restaurants/casual-dining/Wolfgang-Puck-Bistros/7562/section-overview).*

## Indulge Your Funny Bone

Mike Takeda, owner of **CAFÉ FIRENZE** in Moorpark, has invited The Laugh Pack into his wine bar to perform every Thursday night. Doors open at 6 p.m. with the comedy starting up around 8 p.m. The entire dinner menu is available during the shows. Of course, the full bar will be pouring stiff drinks all night. The Laugh Pack has a large stable of comedians, so check the website ([www.thelaughpack.com](http://www.thelaughpack.com)) for the lineup of the evening's performances. Host Bruce Fine introduces comics like Wendy Liebman, Orny Adams, John Heffron, and Dwayne Perkins; often a crooner is included in the lineup, too. The young Frank Sinatra impersonator Phil Turk does a bang-up job of keeping spirits high. Tickets are \$15; there is no drink minimum. *Café Firenze is located at 563 W. Los Angeles Ave. in Moorpark. Call 805-530-3764 for reservations and to reserve tickets. You can also reserve tickets online through The Laugh Pack website. ■*

Have a tip for our restaurant news pages? E-mail our dining editor at [angela@805living.com](mailto:angela@805living.com).



# 805 DINING GUIDE

The *Dining Guide* includes restaurants from Santa Barbara to Malibu. Our aim is to inform you of restaurants with great food that you might not have experienced yet. The guide is arranged not by cuisine type, but by style of restaurant. "Fine Dining" choices have an elegant atmosphere and very professional service. Restaurants included under the "Foodie" heading are heralded for their wonderful chef-driven cuisine, regardless of atmosphere. "A Good Bet" listings are just that—solid, casual, and delicious. "The Chain Gang" highlights the best of the national restaurant chains, and the "Fun, Fun, Fun" category brings you spots geared toward a good time. Enjoy!

## KEY TO SYMBOLS:

**NEW** Denotes restaurants new to the *805 Living Dining Guide*.

**LOOK** Indicates an update to an existing listing.

Restaurant information is subject to change without notice.

We will be adding new listings to the *Dining Guide* each month. Please send any comments and suggestions to [angela@805living.com](mailto:angela@805living.com) or write to us at 805 Living, 3717 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd., Westlake Village, CA 91362, attn: Taste of the Town.

## FINE DINING

These restaurants have a skilled kitchen team, a lovely dining room, and great service. Some of the spots require elegant attire, but most allow for all styles of dress, from fancy to casual.

### 71 PALM FRENCH & AMERICAN BRASSERIE

71 N. Palm St.  
Ventura, 805-653-7222  
[www.71palm.com](http://www.71palm.com)  
French-American  
Entrées \$8–\$28

#### Romantic

More casual than it might seem at first, this brasserie-style eatery proves very friendly through and through. For instance, there are bowls of water on the porch of this Craftsman house to welcome pets; and the patios upstairs and down are great for kids. The bar area offers beer, wine, and cocktails with its own happy-hour specials. The French-American menu from chef Didier Poirier offers addicting nibbles, like french fries with garlic aioli, black tiger shrimp cocktail, Alsatian-style pizzas, and warm duck confit salad. Main courses include steaks, a double-cut pork chop, a Kobe burger, Atlantic salmon, and New Zealand rack of lamb. Poirier teaches cooking classes each month that culminate in a three-course meal paired with wines. He also hosts occasional winemaker dinners featuring wines from the Central Coast, Napa, and Sonoma. 71 Palm is open for lunch and dinner Monday through Saturday.

### BOCCACCIO'S

32123 Lindero Canyon Road  
Westlake Village, 818-889-8300  
Continental  
Entrées \$12–\$27

#### Saturday & Sunday Brunch, Great View

The floor-to-ceiling windows offer great views of the lake from inside the restaurant. The outdoor patio is the most popular spot for dining, however. Either way, it's a perennial favorite for ladies who lunch and the senior set. The seafood is always perfectly cooked in the Mediterranean manner (fried calamari, lobster ravioli, seafood risotto, Dover sole meunière). At lunch, a wide range of salads from Waldorf to Cobb to niçoise really satisfies. Brunch dishes up classics like French toast, omelettes, and eggs Benedict.

### BOUCHON

9 W. Victoria St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-730-1160  
[www.bouchonsantabarbara.com](http://www.bouchonsantabarbara.com)  
Wine Country  
Entrées \$24–\$35

#### Romantic

The name is French for "wine cork" and this theme carries throughout the restaurant. Wines from the Santa Barbara area (the Santa Ynez and Santa Maria valleys), especially chardonnay, pinot noir, and syrah, are the focus of the wine list. More than 40 varieties are available by the glass. The highly seasonal cuisine is created to pair well with the wines. (In other words, no strong vinegars or sauces that might fight with and kill the flavor of the wine.) Ingredients are mostly secured locally, especially produce and seafood. Some dishes you might see more regularly than others include baby beet and carrot salad with goat cheese; bourbon-and-maple-glazed duck; lightly smoked Pacific ahi tuna; venison loin in a blackberry demi-glace; and apple tarte tatin.

### CA' DARIO

37 E. Victoria St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-884-9419  
[www.cadario.net](http://www.cadario.net)  
Italian  
Entrées \$15–\$28

#### Romantic

Chef and owner Dario Furlati features dishes from his native northern Italy at this popular trattoria that gets high marks for service from regulars. His menu features some unusual choices like fusilli pasta with artichokes, shiitake mushrooms, and truffle oil; radicchio and ricotta-cheese crêpes; terracotta-baked chicken with a tomato and red-wine sauce; and a classic rib-eye steak with white beans and sage.

### CAFÉ PROVENÇAL

2310 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Thousand Oaks, 805-496-7121  
[www.cafeprovençal.biz](http://www.cafeprovençal.biz)  
French  
Entrées \$16–\$37

#### Romantic


This small French bistro run by Serge Bonnet in the Select Conejo Plaza can get you in and out quickly at lunchtime with its "Formule Express" three-course lunch (\$16). Dinner offers a more relaxed experience but there are still bargains to be enjoyed. Come on Monday night for a surf-and-turf special (\$26); on Wednesday and Thursday nights a "Deluxe" five-course dinner is paired with wines (\$45). On the à la carte menu you'll find a few pastas plus fish—like sand dabs, sole, and salmon. Meats include veal, lamb, chicken, and beef prepared in a Continental style. Café Provençal serves lunch Monday through Friday and dinner nightly.

### CHAPTER 8 STEAKHOUSE & DANCE LOUNGE

29020 Agoura Road  
Agoura Hills, 818-889-2088  
[www.678dine.com](http://www.678dine.com)  
Steakhouse  
Entrées \$17–\$39

#### Live Music, DJ, Dancing

Chef Michael Carriero has fancied up the menu at this over-the-top dance lounge with a red and black color palette. The pan-seared scallop appetizer gets a kick of flavor from some Spanish chorizo and basil oil. Lobster lollipops are complemented by white-corn sauce. The truffle and Parmesan fries are addictive, but there are plenty of other potato options that go with the à la carte wood-grilled steaks. Fish lovers can enjoy a chilled seafood platter served with tequila cocktail sauce and spicy mustard sauce. For dessert, the warm rockslide brownie comes with chocolate lava, pecans, and a caramel macchiato shot. Live music on Friday and Saturday nights. Dinner Tuesday through Saturday nights.



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## LOOK CHARLIE'S MALIBU

28221 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, 310-456-3132  
www.charliesmalibu.com  
American  
Entrées \$16–\$45  
*Romantic*

Across the street from the Malibu Pier, Charlie's feels like a Malibu resident's living room. The bar is usually stocked with locals checking out wines by the glass, taste, or flight via the Enomatic system. Sommelier Caitlin Stansbury focuses on small producers like the vintners in Malibu. In the dining room, beautiful leopard-print chairs and paintings by Jane Seymour lend color to the otherwise minimalist white decor. A few tables dot the raised back patio, which sits behind a pane of glass. The menu is chock-full of steakhouse classics by chef David Linville. Charlie's is open for dinner nightly.

## COAST RESTAURANT & BAR

31 W. Carillo St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-879-9100  
www.canarysantabarbara.com  
California Bistro  
Entrées \$13–\$28  
*Romantic, Sunday Brunch*

This restaurant sits a bit below street level in the fun Canary Hotel. The main dining room is quiet and comfortable, but most people seem to take dinner in the bar area where it's much livelier. The entire menu is available in either venue. Go for the Santa Barbara mussels with chorizo, the tasty wild mushroom ravioli, the perfectly grilled and juicy pork chop, and the pudding-like chocolate lava cake. Chef Brian Parks keeps things interesting with his farmers' market dinners on Tuesday nights and a Sea Captain's dinner every Friday with fresh seafood from that day's fishing boats. Sunday brunch has live music from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Happy hour has great deals Monday through Friday from 4 to 7 p.m. Coast is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily.

## ELEMENTS

129 E. Anapamu St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-884-9218  
www.elementsrestaurantandbar.com  
Eclectic  
Entrées \$19–\$36  
*Romantic, Great View*

Soaring ceilings inside plus fresh air on the patio with great views of the Santa Barbara courthouse keep everyone happy. Dishes here are eclectic and imaginative. A panko-lemongrass-crust sea bass comes in a green coconut-curry sauce. Short ribs get the Szechuan treatment and a ginger-orange gremolata, while a veal burger benefits from caramelized onions and Gruyère cheese. Save room for desserts, like the mini cupcake sampler or the mint-chip ice cream sandwich. The bar scene is lively, especially during happy hour (4:30 to 6:30 p.m., Monday through Friday). Bottles from the wine list can be purchased from the Elements website.

## ENOTECA TOSCANA WINE BISTRO

2088 E. Ventura Blvd.  
Camarillo, 805-445-1433  
www.enotecatoscanawinebistro.com  
Mediterranean  
Small Plates \$8–\$18; Entrées \$22–\$39  
*Live Music*

The emphasis is on the wine at this intimate space in Camarillo's downtown district. Owner/chef Antonio Anderson personally selects all the bottles to showcase wines from Spain, Italy, and California. Anderson puts together a different flight of wines every day. Every Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. there's a wine-tasting session that includes a cheese plate (\$14). The menu of small plates—like the wine list—skews to Spain and Italy, with dishes like shrimp in olive oil with lemon and garlic, or marinara meatballs. The large plates appear as nightly "Bodega specials." You might see braised short ribs or Tuscan chicken. At lunchtime, panini sandwiches are available. Enoteca Toscana is open for lunch and dinner Tuesday through Sunday.

## ERIC'S RESTAURANT & BAR

495 N. Ventu Park Road  
Thousand Oaks, 805-716-4100  
www.palmgardenhotel.com  
Californian  
Entrées \$15–\$36

The minimalist decor and the slate water wall lend a peaceful ambience to this large space. A wraparound patio fills up when the weather is nice. The service is polished, making this a fine spot for a business meeting at lunch or dinner. Chef Robin Nishizaki's plates are all well-executed; we haven't found any clunkers on the seasonal menu. Salads, sandwiches, pizzas, and pasta dishes dominate the lunch menu; chicken penne with kalamata olives and a chardonnay sauce is particularly nice. At dinner, there is grilled salmon in a basil sauce as well as steaks and chops. The full bar features a long martini list and its own tantalizing small-plates menu with beef and taters and a lobster quesadilla. Such nibbles can be paired with 20 wines by the glass, many from California vintners. Eric's serves lunch and dinner daily with happy hour specials Monday through Saturday from 4 to 7 p.m. Check the website for weeknight dinner specials on items like prime rib and lobster.

## FINS CREEKSIDE

23504 Calabasas Road  
Calabasas, 818-223-3467  
and FINS SEAFOOD GRILL  
982 S. Westlake Blvd.  
Westlake Village, 805-494-6494  
www.finsinc.com  
Seafood  
Entrées \$12–\$32  
*Live Music*

The creekside patio is the draw at the Calabasas location. The owner and chef also run Moz Buddha Lounge. The menu features interesting takes on seafood like macadamia-crust halibut, oven-roasted seafood over yakisoba noodles, and a lazy-man's bouillabaisse in which the shellfish are removed from their homes for you. You can also choose your cut of steak and its preparation.

## FLEMING'S PRIME STEAKHOUSE & WINE BAR

6373 Topanga Canyon Blvd.  
Woodland Hills, 818-346-1005  
www.flemingssteakhouse.com  
Steakhouse  
Entrées \$24–\$40  
*Romantic*

This snazzy steakhouse keeps the prices relatively low while maintaining high energy levels, especially in the bar, which has its own appetizer menu. Big salads, prime meats, and seafood dishes rule the dining room, though, and sides are meant to be shared (read: big), so order accordingly. Desserts are large and come with a huge bowl of freshly whipped cream. The wine list is encyclopedic and award-winning. Almost every style is represented, from sparkling whites to petite sirahs to deep cabernets. There are also 100 selections by the glass available nightly. Check the website for special-event wine dinners and seasonal prix-fixe menus. Fleming's is open for dinner nightly.

## GEOFFREY'S MALIBU

27400 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, 310-457-1519  
www.geoffreysmalibu.com  
Cal-Eclectic  
Entrées \$25–\$77

### *Great View, Saturday & Sunday Brunch*

The al fresco dining and the panoramic ocean views from every table make this a spectacular dining venue. You can't help but feel like a Malibu socialite when sipping a glass of gewürztraminer with your lobster Cobb salad at lunch or brunch under the umbrellas. For dinner, there's ahi tuna, Chilean sea bass, seasonal oyster selections, and the Kobe New York steak. Service is always polished and polite, beginning and ending with the efficient valet parking.

## GIANNFRANCO'S TRATTORIA

666 Linden Ave.  
Carpinteria, 805-684-0720  
Italian  
Entrées \$13–\$28  
*Great Patio*

The family of owners welcomes you here with open arms. In good weather, opt for a seat on the back patio with its garden setting. Some customers always start dinner with a glass of wine and the calamari appetizer, which comes with perfectly grilled baby squid and shrimp next to a crock of slightly spicy dipping sauce. It's a great idea. Salads are also quite nice and take advantage of the local growers. The pastas are lightly sauced and there's a daily fresh risotto. Meats include grass-fed free-range lamb chops and rib-eye steaks as well as farm-raised chicken. Giannfranco's is open for lunch and dinner Wednesday through Monday.

## THE GRILL ON THE ALLEY

120 E. Promenade Way  
Westlake Village, 805-418-1760  
www.thegrill.com  
American  
Entrées \$19–\$42  
*Sunday Brunch*

The glass-walled kitchen and the low partitions between booths keep the energy level of the room high while the dark wood floors against white walls and the marble-bedecked bar area add a bit of refinement to the mix. Expect to see some TV stars chowing down here, and for good reason. The chicken potpie is one of the best items on the menu. Steaks and lamb chops are popular, especially if you're indulging in an old-fashioned cocktail like a whiskey sour or sidecar martini. The Grill also offers lobster bisque and calf's liver with onion. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

## NEW GRISSINI RISTORANTE ITALIANO

30125 Agoura Road  
Agoura Hills, 818-735-9711  
www.grissiniristoranteitaliano.com  
Italian  
Entrées \$10–\$32

The name means "breadsticks" in Italian and you'll find one of two kinds on your table: either long and crunchy or rectangular and soft, depending on the day. The pretty rooms are lit by chandelier and candlelight, making it a sweet spot for romance. Host and owner Giuseppe Bellisario works the room like a master, making guests feel special. The large menu offers good versions of Italian standbys plus a few new twists. The salads are fresh with zingy dressings. There are multiple shapes of pasta and ravioli with fillings like mushroom, walnut, and lobster. Mix and match any pasta with sauces like pesto, puttanesca, carbonara, Alfredo, or limoncello with cream. The wine list offers many reasonably priced bottles and glasses.

## HAMPTON'S AT THE FOUR SEASONS HOTEL WESTLAKE VILLAGE

2 Dole Drive  
Westlake Village, 818-575-3000  
www.fourseasons.com/westlakevillage/dining.html  
Californian  
Entrées \$23–\$50

### *Romantic, Great View, Sunday Brunch*

The view of the rock waterfall is soothing and beautiful, whether you sit outside on the back patio or inside the posh main dining room. Service is Four Seasons spectacular with waitstaff nearby for all the right moments and none of the wrong ones. Chef Jelle Vandembroucke's cooking is well-thought-out. He uses foams intelligently: piquing the palate, not confusing it. Dishes are spa-light on cream and butter but rich with texture and flavor. His cooking technique is magnificent so don't be afraid to order lobster or pork loin. The menu here is seasonal so dishes will change, but all of the ingredients are top-notch. Salads are dressed with interesting vinaigrettes, often employing fine aged balsamic vinegar. Black truffles might show up to wonderful effect in mashed potatoes or under dabs of goat cheese. Meats are organic whenever possible. Desserts follow the fresh and light philosophy, too.



### HOLDREN'S STEAKS & SEAFOOD

1714 Newbury Road  
Newbury Park, 805-498-1314  
and 512 State St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-965-3363  
and 6920 Marketplace Drive  
Goleta, 805-685-8900  
www.holdrens.com

American

Entrées \$19-\$41 (more for surf-and-turf combos)

*Romantic*

The decor here is masculine enough for business, while the lighting is low enough for romance. The comfy seating and the friendly servers encourage lingering. The cheese-heavy menu is not for the faint of artery, but the food sure is good. Appetizers—like the cream-cheese-laden spicy crab-and-artichoke dip, and bacon-wrapped prawns stuffed with feta—are hearty enough to be main courses. The grilled Castroville artichoke has a nice smoky flavor to it. Steaks are well-marbled, tender, and seasoned right. The signature Cowboy Cut is huge and sits atop a pile of onion rings. All steaks come with a crock of sauce, a side dish, plus soup or salad. Check the website for dinner specials Monday through Wednesday. Holdren's is open for lunch Monday through Friday, and for dinner nightly. The original Santa Barbara location serves brunch on Sunday.

### MASTRO'S STEAKHOUSE

2087 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Thousand Oaks, 805-418-1811  
www.mastrossteakhouse.com

American

Entrées \$26-\$76

*Live Music*

For an extravagant night out, try this expensive and posh steakhouse. The cocktails are huge and potent. The salads serve at least two (unless you ask for a half-portion) and the seafood tower starter is a showstopper. For your entrée, stick with the meats unless you want to eye your date's dinner with envy. The veal porterhouse is fantastic. All the cuts are thick and oversized. Sides are à la carte, and the list of potatoes and veggies is long but unremarkable. Resist ordering more than one so that you can indulge in a giant dessert, which will be ferried out with a bowl of freshly whipped cream. The wine list features local vintners as well as highly rated wines from France and Italy.

### MEDITERRANEO

32037 Agoura Road  
Westlake Village, 818-889-9105  
www.med-rest.com

Mediterranean

Entrées \$14-\$33

*Kid-Friendly, Great View, Sunday Brunch*

A marble bar, wrought-iron screens with glowing candles, and jet-black crystal chandeliers lend a luxurious feel to this dining venue on the grounds of the beautiful Westlake Village Inn. Roomy booths and large tables inside and out make for a comfortable night. Chef Alberto Vazquez cooks with style. His dishes will change seasonally but look for a wonderful calamari salad with crispy fried squid tentacles and grilled rings over warm potatoes with a mustard vinaigrette. The shrimp Brindisi appetizer has sautéed shrimp on a square of grilled bread, which soaks up the white-wine-caper sauce. You can always count on fresh fish dishes in zesty sauces with interesting accompaniments. Amongst the pasta dishes, the *orecchiette* (little pig's ears) with sausage and Swiss chard is already a classic. Steaks, pork, lamb, and occasional game dishes round out the menu. Sunday brunch is served buffet-style with lots of wonderful pastries, salads, and egg dishes to choose from.

### MOZ BUDDHA LOUNGE

30105 W. Agoura Road  
Agoura Hills, 818-735-0091  
www.mozbar.com

Pan-Asian

Entrées \$17-\$36

*Live Music*

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Westlake Village, 3065 Thousand Oaks Blvd., #3, Westlake Village, CA 91362, 805.777.7070

7 Days a week: 11AM - 6PM www.TheClosetSB.net

The crowds come for the cover-free live music in the lounge, but the large plates of pan-Asian cuisine hold their own in the dining room. Tiger prawns are tossed with *yakisoba* noodles and a ginger-garlic sauce; mahi-mahi comes with coconut rice and tropical fruits; chicken is stuffed with crab and asparagus. Though dishes can be ordered in individual portions, the menu suggests family-style servings for sharing, so bring some friends. If your friends are energetic and hip—all the better. In warm weather, the patio with expansive views is a nice place to be.

## NOBU

3835 Cross Creek Road  
Malibu, 310-317-9140  
[www.nobumatsuhisa.com](http://www.nobumatsuhisa.com)

Asian-Fusion

Entrées \$8–\$32 or Omakase menu \$80–\$120

The stars love to come to Nobu Matsuhisa's small sushi bar and Asian fusion restaurant for the *omakase* (chef's choice) menu, the yellowtail with jalapeño, the lobster salad with lemon dressing, and the black cod. The rest of us like to go to see the culinary stars, for the rock shrimp tempura, and for the bento box of desserts (you have to ask for that one), but be prepared to pay the price.

## ONYX AT THE FOUR SEASONS HOTEL WESTLAKE VILLAGE

2 Dole Drive  
Westlake Village, 818-575-3000  
[www.fourseasons.com/westlakevillage/dining.html](http://www.fourseasons.com/westlakevillage/dining.html)

Japanese

Entrées \$10–\$45

*Romantic, Great View*

This lovely Japanese restaurant inside the Four Seasons offers salmon skin rolls and crunchy shrimp with jalapeños as a hand or cut roll. Amber jack, tuna belly, and sea bream are sliced into sashimi. Hot dishes include asparagus tempura, wok-fried Manila clams, and a whole fish of the day. The room is adorned with thinly sliced onyx and other semiprecious stones that are lit from behind, giving it a gorgeous glow. The seats on the patio and some spaces at the main bar and sushi bar overlook an outdoor rock waterfall. Onyx serves dinner nightly.

## P6 RESTAURANT & LOUNGE

2809 Agoura Road  
Westlake Village, 805-778-0123  
[www.678dine.com](http://www.678dine.com)

New American

Entrées \$12–\$35

*DJ & Dancing, Sunday Brunch*

This mid-century modern nightclub offers music, dancing, and mingling on the ultra-cool patio with a fire pit and water wall. It also offers lots of dining options from brunch to lunch to dinner to bar snacks. The menu changes with the seasons. The dishes are New American and as highly polished as the zebra-wood accents on the booths and in the private dining room. A full bar offers cocktails as well as a deep wine list.

## PADRI CUCINA ITALIANA & MARTINI BAR

29008 Agoura Road  
Agoura Hills, 818-865-3700  
[www.padrirestaurant.net](http://www.padrirestaurant.net)

Cal-Italian

Entrées \$11–\$26

*Live Music*

Chef and owner Saverio Posarelli also shares a partner interest in Cafe Fiore on California Street in Ventura. The spirits flow freely at the Martini Bar's happy hour from 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday through Friday. The outdoor patio is great for smoking cigars or tucking yourself away in a private cabana and listening to live music Wednesday through Saturday nights. Inside, get cozy with a Cal-Italian menu of beef carpaccio, crab cakes, *burrata* cheese with arugula and pine nuts, lobster and leek ravioli, seafood risotto, osso buco (braised veal shank), and coconut crème brûlée with caramelized bananas.

## PIATTI RISTORANTE & BAR

101 S. Westlake Blvd.  
Thousand Oaks, 805-371-5600  
and 516 San Ysidro Road  
Montecito, 805-969-7520  
[www.piatti.com](http://www.piatti.com)

Italian

Entrées \$11–\$24.50

*Kid-Friendly, Sunday Brunch*

This pair of easy Italians is part of a chain with locations all over California, but each Piatti has its own chef and personality. Both restaurants offer a nice range of items: salad, soup, pizza, pasta, fish, lamb, chicken, and veal, but each place puts its own stamp on the menu. For instance, where the Thousand Oaks location offers polenta fries with roasted tomato sauce, the Montecito location makes soft polenta with mascarpone cheese. Thousand Oaks also has added a *crema Catalana* to its dessert list along with a caramel-balsamic gelato topped with balsamic-macerated strawberries. Nice patios and fireplaces can be found at both locations.

## RIVIERA RESTAURANT & LOUNGE

23683 Calabasas Road  
Calabasas, 818-224-2163  
[www.rivieracalabasas.com](http://www.rivieracalabasas.com)

Continental

Entrées \$14–\$39

Beautiful glass doors open into a cozy lounge offering a full range of cocktails and about 30 wines by the glass. At dinner, Chef Maurizio Ronzoni serves Northern Italian dishes with a twist like *fritto misto* with sand dabs, veal parmigiana, or *bucatini* pasta topped with strips of filet mignon. He also adds California dishes like tuna tartare with cucumber, sweet carrot and ginger soup, or Sonoma County rack of lamb in a mustard crust. European classics show up, too. Witness the five-spice crispy duck with port-cherry sauce or the salmon fillet with lobster sauce and a potato crust. At lunch a panini sandwich of lamb and bell pepper and the chopped Cobb salad are standouts.

## ROY'S

6363 Topanga Canyon Blvd.  
Woodland Hills, 818-888-4801  
[www.roysrestaurant.com](http://www.roysrestaurant.com)

Hawaiian Fusion

Entrées \$21–\$33

*Romantic*

Blazing tiki torches greet you as you enter this lovely homage to the islands created by Roy Yamaguchi, the father of Hawaiian-fusion cuisine. It's basically Pacific Rim cooking using products like macadamia nuts, Maui onions, and Kona coffee. The fish is always fresh and the menu is mostly seasonal, but some classics are always available like the Aloha Roll (spicy tuna topped with *hamachi*, salmon, avocado, and a ginger-ponzu sauce), lobster potstickers, Maui Wowie shrimp salad, macadamia-crusted mahimahi, and a hot chocolate soufflé cake. On special occasions, drummers and hula dancers perform in the restaurant.

## SCOTCH & SIRLOIN

1510 Anchors Way  
Ventura, 805-644-5566  
[www.scotchventura.com](http://www.scotchventura.com)

Steakhouse

Entrées \$15–\$40

*Great Views*

The Ventura Harbor provides wonderful views through the windows of this venerable place, especially at sunset. Every night chef Rick Myatt grills up prime steaks that go well with the scotch whiskeys and cocktails the bar pours. Myatt also riffs on fresh seafood, creating weekly specials with white sea bass, halibut, scallops, and other piscatorial wonders. Crab cakes, shrimp, and lobster are on the regular menu. Value-seekers can come in during happy hour, nightly from 4 to 6 p.m., or on Sunday through Thursday nights for a \$19 prix-fixe three-course meal.

## LOOK SEAGRASS

30 E. Ortega St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-963-1012  
[www.seagrassrestaurant.com](http://www.seagrassrestaurant.com)

Seafood

Entrées \$25–\$36

*Romantic*

A charter member of the Sustainable Seafood Program through Santa Barbara's Ty Warner Sea Center, Seagrass serves local seafood without promoting overfishing or taxing the ocean. Owner Mitchell Sjerven and his wife, Amy, also own Bouchon in Santa Barbara, so the atmosphere is classy and the wine list deep. Chef John Pettitt does everything imaginable to fish and shellfish. On any given evening, his seasonal menu offers appetizers like chilled oysters, and fresh seafood such as sashimi, carpaccio, or in a bisque. Scallops might be seared or suspended in a panna cotta. Santa Barbara halibut, salmon, and sea bass serve as main courses. There are also meat dishes, like the veal duo (rack and belly with sweet potato puree, turnips, pink lady apples, and caramelized shallot jus), a Kobe beef rib eye with a bordelaise sauce, or a rack of lamb with its braised shank in a rosemary sauce.

## THE SIDECAR RESTAURANT

3029 E. Main St.  
Ventura, 805-653-7433  
[www.thesidecarrestaurant.com](http://www.thesidecarrestaurant.com)

Continental

Entrées \$10–\$25

*Sunday Brunch, Live Music*

Set in a 1910 Pullman train car, this restaurant has been around since 1933. The current owners have a devotion to fresh, locally grown produce; artisanal cheeses; and farm-fresh eggs. Chef Tim Kilcoyne turns out beautiful steaks, creamy polenta, and a build-your-own salad with options like organic greens, niçoise olives, roasted butternut squash, English cucumber, Point Reyes blue cheese, smoked salmon, focaccia croutons, and spiced hazelnuts. At brunch, the hollandaise is tangy and the house-made lemon curd is irresistible. Tuesday night is grilled cheese and jazz night. Look for purveyor dinners and murder mystery theatre nights.

## SPARK WOODFIRE GRILL

1555 Simi Town Center Way  
Simi Valley, 805-823-4756  
[www.sparkredfish.com](http://www.sparkredfish.com)

Seafood

Entrées \$14–\$28

*Live Music*

Value is the unexpected pleasure at this good-looking grill in the Simi Town Center. The open floor plan lets you scan the whole room as well as the kitchen for interesting action. At lunch, one page of the menu is devoted to 10 items under \$10, and they're all high-quality. The pub burger is thick and flavorful; the fish-and-chips moist on the inside and crispy where it counts. At dinner the prime pepper-crusted sirloin steak is only \$14. The smashed new potatoes are creamy and laced with butter and chives. In the lounge (and sometimes on the patio) live music plays Wednesday through Saturday nights. You might hear classic rock, jazz, or blues while noshing on addictive fried artichoke hearts, crispy hot chicken wings, or zingy baby back ribs.

## SUZANNE'S CUISINE

502 W. Ojai Ave.  
Ojai, 805-640-1961  
[www.suzannescuisine.com](http://www.suzannescuisine.com)

Cal-Med

Entrées \$15–\$28

*Romantic*

Travelers to Ojai make Suzanne's a part of their itinerary so they can explore what she's up to in any given season. Relying heavily on the produce around her, Suzanne Roll turns out lunch and dinner dishes that are interesting and handcrafted. Breads for the sandwiches are made by a local bakery; soups change daily. You might see a rainbow trout grilled with rosemary and lemon or a stuffed Cornish game hen with an apricot-marsala sauce. The atmosphere



is casual with seats on the back patio next to the garden and a most pleasant gurgling fountain and outdoor fireplace. For cooler weather, there's also an enclosed patio. Note: The restaurant is closed on Tuesdays.

**TIERRA SUR RESTAURANT  
AT HERZOG WINE CELLARS**

3201 Camino Del Sol  
Oxnard, 805-983-1560  
www.herzogwinecellars.com

Kosher Californian  
Entrées \$25-\$44

Kosher food is complex and flavorful here at this restaurant inside Herzog Winery. Chef Todd Aarons employs local ingredients for his seasonal dishes. You might see butternut squash soup with lemon oil, ahi tuna carpaccio with an avocado gelato, or a spicy venison and bison sausage with a potato croquette. Desserts include a flourless Mexican chocolate cake with caramel frozen custard and an orange-almond flan. Aarons puts together three-course menus paired with wines for easy ordering. Reservations are required on Sundays. On Fridays, only lunch is served. The restaurant is closed on Saturdays in observance of the Sabbath.

**TRATTORIA FARFALLA**

160 Promenade Way  
Westlake Village, 805-497-2283  
www.farfallawestlakevillage.com

Italian  
Entrées \$10-\$20

*Romantic*

The warm and sexy environs here make this a superb spot for a date. The lighting is flattering at the high pub tables in the lounge, at the brown leather booths running the length of the restaurant along the open kitchen, and on the tented patio. The cooking from chef-owner Santino Coccia is good enough to swoon over. Any selection from the fresh Mozzarella Bar will be wonderful. Add some prosciutto to the cheese selection to create a light meal. The mushroom risotto is scooped out of a giant wheel of Parmesan onto your plate. Flavorful skirt steak comes as a main course or on the Piemontese salad. The popular dessert, Torta della Nonna (grandmother's cake), is a warm and sweet ricotta cake with lemon zest and pine nuts.

**TUSCANY IL RISTORANTE**

968 S. Westlake Blvd.  
Westlake Village, 805-495-2768

Italian  
Entrées \$18-\$32

*Romantic*

Village dwellers pack this beautiful space for its warm, friendly service and top-notch food. The menu is small, but the nightly specials are worth investigating. High rollers and celebs consider this their neighborhood boîte. Others come just for special occasions. The lobster and shrimp martini salad has hearts of palm, avocado, and pink grapefruit segments; the baby greens salad has shaved fennel and toasted pine nuts; the whole Dover sole is topped with a lemon-chervil sauce; and the chicken breast comes under a sun-dried tomato pesto.

**NEW VINEYARD HOUSE**

3631 Sagunto St.  
Santa Ynez, 805-688-2886  
www.thevineyardhouse.com

Eclectic  
Entrées \$11-\$28

*Sunday Brunch, Kid-Friendly*

The large, wooden, wraparound deck allows diners to gaze upon the rolling hills of Santa Ynez Valley—whether enjoying the fruits of its vines or teetotaling with the Bleeding Heart spritzer (ginger ale, grape juice, and lime). A wide range of cuisine styles share the menu space. Sandwiches are filled with pesto chicken, Virginia pulled pork, or the catch of the day with wasabi mayonnaise. Burgers, pizzas, and pastas compete for your attention with the spicy venison chili verde with tomatillos and green chiles. The crispy chicken salad and the crab cake spinach salad are also crowd pleasers. At night, choose from a 12-ounce

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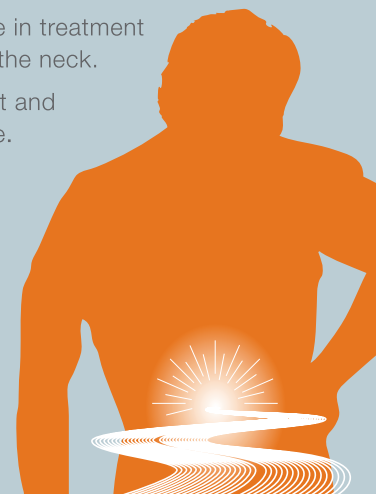


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## >> 805 DINING GUIDE

rib eye, rack of lamb, chicken “three ways,” or butternut squash ravioli (among other things). Sweet endings include a warm, chewy, chocolate-walnut brownie topped with McConnell’s vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce.

### WATERMARK

598 Main St.  
Ventura, 805-643-6800  
www.watermarkonmain.com  
New American  
Entrées \$23–\$45

#### Romantic

Gorgeous Art Deco surroundings make for a “swellegant” evening at this posh downtown Ventura landmark. Large tables and oversized booths plus friendly service keep the atmosphere comfortable and inviting, not stuffy or snooty. Drag out the vintage duds and you’ll enjoy the evening even more. The menu isn’t inexpensive but the cuts of meat are excellent, especially the 18-ounce bone-in rib eye and the herb-crust rack of lamb with mint hollandaise. Most of the items are rich, like the braised short ribs, lobster pot-pie, and ono drizzled with green curry coconut sauce—so go easy on the appetizers. The Watermark Signature Salad is a refreshing start that won’t fill you up. Taking dessert and after-dinner drinks up on the third-floor lounge allows you to cap the night by soaking up the views of downtown Ventura and the ocean.

### ZIN BISTRO AMERICANA

32131 Lindero Canyon Road  
Westlake Village, 818-865-0095  
www.zinbistroamericana.com  
American  
Entrées \$15–\$35

#### Great View, Romantic

Right on the lake in Westlake Village, Zin takes advantage of the gorgeous view with floor-to-ceiling windows that double as doors; the small patio is cozy with a fire pit. The tables inside without a water view let you focus on your date in the romantic booths. Executive Chef Roberto Leyva (also of FINS and Moz Buddha Lounge) turns out comfort food like chicken-fried lobster, braised short ribs, an Angus beef hamburger, and the cioppino from FINS. Lots of little starters like fried oysters and cheese fondue make tasting different wines easy.

### FOODIE

Restaurants whose cuisine shines—regardless of decor, service, ambience, or even views—to make food lovers swoon time and time again.

### BROOKS

545 E. Thompson Blvd.  
Ventura, 805-652-7070  
www.restaurantbrooks.com  
New American  
Entrées \$17–\$28

Part of the upscale dining scene in downtown Ventura, Brooks has a classy vibe without being too fancy. Chef-owner Andy Brooks gets lots of inspiration for his seasonal menu from local farmers. You can depend on seeing plenty of seafood including some form of oysters coated in cornmeal and fried just until crispy on the outside. There’s usually a flavorful cut of steak or two. Desserts are fun, including parfaits, chocolate pound cake, crème brûlée, and cinnamon roll bread pudding. Bottles on the deep wine list go for half-price on Wednesdays. Every night Andy offers a three-course menu for a bargain price of around \$35, and his signature five-course menu (for the entire table) for around \$60 (\$90 with wine pairings).

### CAFÉ 14

30315 Canwood St.  
Agoura Hills, 818-991-9560  
www.cafe-14.com  
Eclectic  
Entrées \$24–\$34

Chefs and co-owners Neil Kramer and Claudine Bernard turn out very nice eclectic cuisine in this small space,

tucked in the corner of the Reyes Adobe Plaza. The patio feels a bit more expansive than the main dining room if you like a little elbow room around your table. The menu changes frequently but you’ll always be treated to a mélange of flavors and styles from around the world. A steak au poivre might be listed next to short ribs in hoisin sauce with sticky rice; or seasonal fish might vie for your attention with a bouillabaisse or Parisian chicken fricassee. Desserts tend toward hearty American crumbles and dense flourless cakes with ice creams made daily. The full bar mixes cocktails with fresh fruits and herbs. Café 14 is open for dinner Wednesday through Sunday nights.

### LOOK CAFÉ FIRENZE

563 W. Los Angeles Ave.  
Moorpark, 805-532-0048  
www.cafefirenze.net  
Italian  
Entrées \$15–\$39

#### Romantic, Live Music

Dramatically high ceilings and beautiful chandeliers make this an elegant spot for dinner. Seating is broken up into many different spaces, like the bustling bar area, a main dining room with a long family table, a quieter wine room, and the pretty back patio with a gurgling fountain. Classic Italian dishes rule the menu: There are wonderful pastas, pizza, antipasti, and salads. If that’s not enough, check out the main courses like a dry-aged rib eye, chicken marsala, and lamb shanks.

### DOWNEY’S

1305 State St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-966-5006  
www.downeyssb.com  
Cal-French  
Entrées \$29–\$37

#### Romantic

Chef and owner John Downey sources ingredients like meat, seafood, and organic vegetables locally and prepares them in imaginative, but not overwrought, ways. His wife Liz runs the front of the house, which is dotted with her own paintings of local scenes. The menu, which changes daily, might include a porcini soup with crème fraîche and chives; squab salad with a garlic-mustard dressing; or a boneless veal chop with chanterelles, marjoram, and fettuccine with spinach.

### THE HUNGRY CAT

1134 Chapala St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-884-4701  
www.thehungrycat.com  
Seafood  
Entrées \$16–28

A tiny raw bar and seafood house that specializes in New England-style food and cocktails, this Santa Barbara twin of the Hollywood original celebrates the purity of oysters, clams, lobster, Santa Barbara spot prawns, and fresh vegetables. Preparations from chef and owner David Lentz are sometimes simple, sometimes complex, but always spot-on delicious. The Maine lobster roll is smeared with a Meyer-lemon aioli instead of standard mayo. Baltimore crab cakes sit on frisée with pancetta and a coddled quail egg. The space is small and reservations aren’t taken, so some waiting may be involved, but an East Coast cocktail with muddled fruit ought to take the edge off. Open for dinner nightly.

### LEILA’S RESTAURANT & WINE BAR

752 Lindero Canyon Road  
Oak Park, 818-707-6939  
www.leilasrestaurant.com  
Cal-Eclectic  
Entrées \$15–\$30

An exhibition kitchen dominates this little but lovely space so diners can watch chef Richard De Mane turn out his Peking duck confit pancake, port-roasted pear salad, and Moroccan spiced salmon. There’s also a communal table up front for more social dining. The adjoining wine bar and patio expand the space nicely for comfortable dining everywhere.

### MANDARIN EXPRESS

5015 Kanan Road  
Agoura Hills, 818-991-9831  
www.mandarinexpressagourahills.com  
Chinese Fusion  
Entrées \$10–\$27

It’s not much to look at (think Formica tables and mirrored walls) but the owners of this tiny storefront are dedicated to keeping Chinese food interesting, fresh, and as organic as possible. Chef Dan Chang creates fusion dishes like filet mignon in a bourbon, basil, and black bean sauce and shrimp with nuts and balsamic vinegar over rice. The food isn’t cheap by any stretch, but you’ve never had Chinese takeout like this before. The choices are almost endless considering the chef will pair just about any sauce you like with any meat, fish, vegetable, or mock meat (made of tofu or seitan) you want. He’ll also adjust the heat (as in spice) level to your liking. When you want something different and delicious and delivered, this is definitely the place to get it.

### MARCELLO RISTORANTE

140 W. Hillcrest Drive  
Thousand Oaks, 805-371-4367  
www.marcelloristorante.com  
Italian  
Entrées \$13–\$29

Whether you’re at a table inside or out on the front patio, the service here is snappy and professional. Owner and chef Tino Di Marcello doesn’t speak much English (only Italian and Spanish) but what he lacks in words he gives to his customers in flavor. The specials are always interesting and he’s not afraid to put salt cod or tripe on the regular menu. The olive oil is first-rate and many of the pasta shapes are handmade. The *cappellacci* sheets, folded around ricotta and spinach then splashed with a tomato-cream sauce, are wonderful. For dessert, don’t miss the chocolate crème brûlée with a hint of lemon. The wine list is long with plenty of pinot noir, chianti, and a few barbaresco choices, not to mention a nice assortment of pinot grigio (and friends).

### LOOK OLIO E LIMONE

17 W. Victoria St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-899-2699  
www.olioelimon.com  
Sicilian  
Entrées \$16–\$34

#### Romantic

Husband and wife Alberto and Elaine Morello treat this gem of a restaurant like a precious stone. No ingredient is too good to employ. The olive oil (from a family grove in Sicily) is so fantastic, people take home bottles of the stuff. Chef Alberto’s salads are fresh, his pastas are handmade, and his sauces are excellent. If you do veer from the pasta or risotto (which is hard to do), you won’t be disappointed with the fresh fish or tender veal. There’s also fantastic roasted chicken or rib-eye steak at dinner. Lunch has a nice range of salads, pastas, and a couple of panini sandwiches. Cocktails and spirits now accompany the award-winning wine list, too.

### ROOT 246

420 Alisal Road  
Solvang, 805-686-8681  
www.root-246.com  
New American  
Entrées \$14–\$35

#### Romantic, Sunday Brunch

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians tapped celebrity chef Bradley Ogden to create this temple to New American dining in downtown Solvang. The decor is modern and whimsical with oversized armchairs in one of the bar areas, lounge furniture on the outdoor patio, flat-screen televisions in a subdued interior lounge, a mixture of sleek booths and tables in the main dining room, and a glass-walled chef’s table adjoining the huge kitchen. Executive chef Jonny Hall collaborates with Ogden on the seasonal menu, which changes ever so slightly each day. Fresh vegetables are the stars of the show here, along with artisanal cheeses and sustainably raised meats. The New American creations aren’t exotic, but they do bring together familiar



tastes in new ways. For example, a Maytag blue cheese soufflé is paired with Bing cherries while ahi tuna gets a companion five-bean salad, olive tapenade, and a quail egg on the plate. Everything from the small collection of breads that hit the table at the start of the meal to the diminutive desserts is top-notch. The entire menu is available in all of the different seating areas. The collection of wines is impressive, with 90 percent coming from California. Every Wednesday night a different local vintner plays guest sommelier. Root 246 is open for dinner nightly, for lunch on Saturday, and for brunch on Sunday.

#### SADDLE PEAK LODGE

419 Cold Canyon Road  
Calabasas, 818-222-3888  
www.saddlepeaklodge.com

New American  
Entrées \$37–\$47, Tasting Menus \$80–\$200  
*Romantic, Sunday Brunch*

Step through the wooden doors into another world where the elk is delicious and buffalo heads serve as decoration. You'll feel like a 19th-century gourmand dining on a game reserve in Alaska or Africa. Chef Adam Horton creates wonderful seasonal tasting menus with either four or seven courses using produce from the farmers' market and the best game from all over the world. That elk tenderloin grown in New Zealand benefits immensely from the accompaniment of *griottines* (morello cherries macerated in a French liqueur). A warm lobster salad includes matchsticks of green papaya and leaves of sweet basil. At brunch a duck confit hash is plated between a fried egg and rye toast. The wine list has increased dramatically so be sure to ask for suggestions.

#### SAFIRE

4850 Santa Rosa Road  
Camarillo, 805-389-1227  
www.safirebistro.com

New American  
Entrées \$12–\$40  
*Romantic*

A New American menu by chef and co-owner Michael Muirhead (who worked under chef Lee Heffer at Spago) includes wood-fired pizzas, short ribs with mascarpone polenta, scallops in a red Thai curry sauce, double-cut pork chops with a green-apple slaw, and a roasted Tuscan *branzino*. The classy setting matches the quality of the food, which should bring a smile to Camarillo residents looking for more fine-dining options in their neck of the woods. A glass-walled wine cellar holds a table for eight. Safire is open for lunch and dinner daily.

#### SLY'S

686 Linden Ave.  
Carpinteria, 805-684-6666  
www.slysonline.com

American  
Entrées \$12–\$55  
*Saturday & Sunday Brunch*

Sort of casual, sort of stylish, this Carpinteria gem is a must-visit. With its Vespa hanging over the bar, glass-wall wine room, and polished wood accents, it's great for formal occasions. But the service is super-friendly and most of the patrons are comfortably dressed, so there's nothing stuffy about an evening here, either. Chef and owner James Sly has been cooking for more than 40 years, and his cuisine tastes like it. You really can't go wrong with anything on this American menu of steaks and seafood, but the abalone is a real treat. Unlike most chophouses, Sly's offers a list of pastas as well as sandwiches and small cuts of steak for those who don't have a huge appetite. Desserts are wonderful, too. Sly's is open for lunch Monday through Friday, dinner nightly, and lunch and brunch on Saturday and Sunday.

#### A GOOD BET

Not too fancy, not too expensive, and a good experience all around—these are the qualities you'll find at the restaurants in this section.

#### BELLA TERRAZA RESTAURANT AT THE HYATT WESTLAKE PLAZA

880 S. Westlake Blvd.  
Westlake Village, 805-557-4710  
www.hyattwestlakeplaza.com

Californian  
Entrées \$10–\$28  
*Kid-Friendly*

Open for breakfast and lunch daily, this airy, classy space is great for meeting friends or conducting a business conversation. Try to get a table near the windows or on the patio for a view of the green lawn and waterfall. Breakfast items include smoothies, steel-cut oatmeal with roasted fruits, and the California Benedict with artichokes, avocado, and roasted red pepper. At lunch, a roasted tomato soup comes with crème fraîche and croutons. The Cobb salad gets a light lemon-Dijon dressing. The pressed turkey panini is topped with smoked Gouda and pepperoncini. The half-sandwich, half-salad lunch deal is a steal at \$10.

#### BODEE'S

3304 Maricopa Highway  
Ojai, 805-646-5300  
www.bodees.net

Californian  
Entrées \$18–\$34

This small indoor dining room with its dark wood and low-beamed ceiling has been around since the late 1940s; the sprawling patio area with its sculpted stream and waterfall was revamped in 2005. Tables are set up on terraces under trees and a large canopy. In the winter months, a huge stone fireplace keeps everyone warm. The peaceful environs go together with relaxed service, so meals can take a while. Chef Myk Aviles turns out seasonal Cal cuisine like lollipop lamb chops with cherry mint sauce in the spring or spinach salad with strawberries in the summer. Main dinner courses tend toward the exotic: Aviles stuffs chicken with spinach and sun-dried tomato pesto, then wraps it in prosciutto and serves it over a Gorgonzola-basil risotto. Filet mignon gets wrapped in pepper bacon and topped with a crab butter. Just off the main drag of Ojai, it's a quiet place to while away an evening or weekend.

#### BRENT'S DELI

2799 Townsgate Road  
Westlake Village, 805-557-1882  
www.brentsdeli.com

Deli  
Entrées \$6–\$20  
*Kid-Friendly*

For amazingly good Reuben sandwiches on rye bread piled high with pastrami or corned beef, sauerkraut, and Thousand Island dressing, you can't beat this slick deli. The booths are cushy and roomy, leaving space for your tummy to expand as you down a four-layer slice of chocolate cake or a plate full of stuffed cabbage rolls. A separate bar also offers the full menu. The patio out back allows for even more seating. A counter up front expedites take-out orders. Brent's Deli is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily.

#### CHOLADA THAI CUISINE

1282 Newbury Road  
Newbury Park, 805-498-7801  
www.choladathaicuisine.com

Thai  
Entrées \$9–\$17  
*Kid-Friendly*

The Malibu location has been a well-kept secret for years. The second location, in Newbury Park, is equally unassuming; the attention goes into the food. Thick juicy chicken strips are grilled on skewers and served with very tasty peanut sauce and cucumber relish as the satay appetizer. The fried spring rolls are sliced and given a fancy presentation. You can find curries and steamed fish dishes here alongside unusual offerings like roasted duck salad and fried rice with pumpkin and Chinese broccoli. Most entrée prices are around \$10. Beer, wine, and soju cocktails are available.

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## THE COUNTER

30990 Russell Ranch Road  
Westlake Village, 818-889-0080  
www.thecounterburger.com  
American  
Entrées \$7–\$14  
*Kid-Friendly*

It's mod and hip at this burger bar, where you can build your own creation for lunch or dinner. Start with a menu on a clipboard and begin checking off preferences for your patty, cheese, toppings, sauce, and bun. It's a control freak's dream. Those who want a little less decision-making in their life can simply opt for one of the signature burgers (the Old School is quite good). The fried pickle chips are way too tasty, as are the thick milkshakes.

## C-STREET RESTAURANT

450 E. Harbor Blvd.  
Ventura, 805-652-5151  
www.cpventura.com/dining.html  
Californian  
Entrées \$15–\$45  
*Kid-Friendly*

If you sit close to the windows of this dining room in the Crowne Plaza Ventura Beach hotel, you can just make out the surfers riding the waves here where the ocean meets California Street. Chef Nic Manocchio honors the sea and its bounty along with the local farmers in his seasonal cooking. The fish tacos taste as fresh as Baja. The lobster—in a club sandwich layered with flatbread and bacon at lunchtime or simply served with drawn butter and asparagus at dinner—is perfectly cooked. Entrée salads are ferried out in huge bowls, and any salad can also be made into a wrap using a spinach tortilla (a nice option) upon request. At dinner, salmon is planked on cedar wood and topped with a balsamic reduction. Lamb chops get a pistachio crust and cherry compote. Desserts are presented to you on a tray for optimum choosing conditions.

## DARBAND GRILL

868 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Thousand Oaks, 805-449-1323  
and 19337 Ventura Blvd.  
Tarzana, 818-654-9918  
Middle Eastern  
Entrées \$10–\$19  
*Live Music*

Both locations of this Persian eatery have a slightly lush look thanks to nice fabrics. The service is quick and the patrons are usually large families or groups of friends having a nice time together. If you like crispy rice, the *tadig* won't disappoint. Plenty of delicious soups and stews are made daily, sounding more exotic than they taste—don't be afraid to try them. The kabobs are more straightforward, threaded with fish, chicken, beef, or lamb and set on a bed of basmati rice. Turkish coffee and baklava make a nice finish to a large meal. Look for guitarists and singers on weekends and belly dancers on Friday nights.

## ELADIO'S

1 State St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-963-4466  
www.harborviewinnsb.com  
Italian  
Entrées \$10–\$20  
*Great View, Sunday Brunch*

The outdoor patio here is wonderful for people-watching since the restaurant is at the beginning of State Street near the beach. Since it's on the ground floor of the Harbor View Inn, a lot of tourists congregate here, but locals love it, especially for breakfast. Sunday brunch offers brioche French toast filled with mascarpone cheese; eggs Florentine over English muffins; and smoked salmon and red onion scrambled with eggs and crème fraîche.

## LOOK EXOTIC THAI CAFÉ

29045 W. Agoura Road  
Agoura Hills, 818-991-8147  
and at 1145 Lindero Canyon Road  
Westlake Village, 818-575-3248

and at 2705 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Thousand Oaks, 805-373-9231  
and at 2205 Michael Drive  
Newbury Park, 805-375-0272  
and at 1145 S. Victoria Ave.  
Ventura, 805-658-4861  
and at 22776 Ventura Blvd.  
Woodland Hills, 818-225-0789  
and at 1555 Simi Town Center Way  
Simi Valley, 805-306-1255  
and at 849 E. Ojai Ave.  
Ojai, 805-646-6618  
Thai  
Entrées \$10–\$16

Curries are the standout dishes at this small, casual Thai chain. You can't go wrong with Thai basil and coconut milk, so the curries are all fragrant and full of flavor. They can each be spiced to diners' heat tolerance. The "exotic" in the name can apply to the wide range of seafood items available all over the menu (scallops, squid, mussels) or even to the dishes made with duck. The shrimp rolls on the appetizer list are a fun way to start a culinary journey.

## FEAST BISTRO

254 E. Ojai Ave.  
Ojai, 805-640-9260  
www.feastofojai.com  
New American  
Entrées \$12–\$20  
*Romantic*

This small bistro in Ojai's arcade has a long open kitchen near the front with counter seating. At it, patrons can partake of espresso and pastries, taste wine or beer, and eat a full lunch or dinner. Tables scattered inside and out back on the patio provide more seating options. Chef and owner Susan Coulter turns out seasonal New American eats like crispy oysters on polenta cakes, shrimp Louis salad, five-spice duck, and flatiron steak with mission fig butter. At lunch there's an organic beef burger, a frittata of the day, and an oyster po'boy. Check the website for occasional winemaker dinners.

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## GINO'S BISTRO

1620 Newbury Road  
Newbury Park, 805-498-3188  
www.ginosbistro.net  
Italian  
Entrées \$13–\$29  
*Kid-Friendly*

Gino DeFelice and his family run this friendly *cucina*. No salt is added to any dish and many options are quite heart-healthy. The pastas are plated in large portions, enough to serve as main courses. The lasagna Bolognese is rich, meaty, and filling. Meat dishes are made from high quality veal, lamb, beef, and chicken. The veal à la Gino is pounded, breaded, pan-fried, and layered with eggplant, tomato, and cheese. (A nice twist on the usual veal Milanese or Parmigiano, which he also serves). For dessert, the cannoli gets a dash of banana liqueur for that extra zing. Gino's bistro is open for lunch Monday through Friday and for dinner nightly. Happy hour runs from 4:30 to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday.

## KING'S FISH HOUSE

4798 Commons Way  
Calabasas, 818-225-1979  
Seafood  
Entrées \$10–\$39  
(and up to \$72 for a 3-pound lobster)  
*Kid-Friendly*

Huge dining room, large menu, well-executed. Part of the King's Seafood Company (Water Grill, I Cugini), so the fish is always fresh. The menu is printed daily; expect the best picks to be sold out by the end of the evening. The fried oysters and the clam chowder are reliable favorites. This place is big enough to handle energetic kids and good enough to satisfy adult tastes.

## KUMO SUSHI

860 Hampshire Road  
Westlake Village, 805-494-5250  
Japanese  
Entrées \$13–\$26; Sushi \$3–\$13 per roll  
*Kid-Friendly*

Set downstairs in the Water Court office building, this somewhat secluded sushi bar has a loyal following. Most diners just eye the specials board hoping for live scallop, Japanese snapper, or mackerel, but plenty of options can be found on the printed menu. The owners like to emphasize healthful eating, so any dish with rice can be served with brown rice. Alternately, rolls can be made riceless and wrapped in thin sheets of cucumber for a carb-free experience. Tofu salad and grilled sea bass will also satisfy health-conscious eaters. Full bar with Japanese beer and sake. Open for lunch Tuesday through Friday, dinner Tuesday through Sunday.

## THE LANDING GRILL AND SUSHI BAR

32123 W. Lindero Canyon Road  
Westlake Village, 818-706-8887  
www.thelandinggrill.com  
Californian/Sushi  
Entrées \$8–\$21; Sushi \$3–\$11 per roll  
*Great View, Kid-Friendly*

The buzzword for The Landing is "flexibility." There's a sushi bar, tables inside for those who prefer milder temperatures, tables outside with great views of the lake, grassy areas for kids to run around on, and a menu so diverse that no one can complain. Choose from sushi, sashimi, Japanese bento boxes, seafood chowder, seared albacore, Greek salad, a burger with bacon and avocado, pasta dishes, or stir-fries. It's all there and all well-executed.

## MARMALADE CAFE

4783 Commons Way  
Calabasas, 818-225-9092  
and 3894 Cross Creek Road  
Malibu, 310-317-4242  
and 3825 State St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-682-5246  
and 140 Promenade Way  
Westlake Village, 805-370-1331  
www.marmaladecafe.com  
American  
Entrées \$8–\$24

If you like Country French decor, this is a cozy lunch spot and a perfect wedding- or baby-shower location. Breakfast and lunch are more popular than dinner due to the great sandwiches like the Reuben, turkey with cranberry sauce, and New York steak on garlic bread. Portions are big enough for two, so don't be afraid to doggy bag it or order the half-portion of the many pasta dishes.

## MI PIACE ITALIAN KITCHEN

4799 Commons Way  
Calabasas, 818-591-8822  
Italian  
Entrées \$8–\$20  
*Sunday Brunch, Kid-Friendly*

We love the pumpkin ravioli in the butter and sage sauce and all of the freshly baked breads. There's also a great chicken piccata and shrimp scampi. Baked goods and sweets are displayed in a glass counter that beckons you as you walk by it to your table. Smart.



### MY FLORIST CAFÉ & BAKERY

76 S. Oak St.  
Ventura, 805-653-0003  
www.myfloristcafe.com  
American  
Entrées \$10–\$14  
*Live Music*

The name of this chain is confusing, but it hearkens back to the Phoenix location that opened in a historic building originally housing a florist. Here in Ventura there aren't any flowers for sale but there are freshly baked breads and pastries (not on display—only on the menu). The menu is casual with breakfast dishes like baked oatmeal or two poached eggs on ciabatta (available from 8 to 11 a.m. Monday through Friday and until noon on the weekends). The delicious pastries sell out fast. The lunch/dinner menu is served from 11 a.m. to midnight daily. It features an assortment of fresh and large salads like the Caprese with pesto dressing and roasted garlic cloves or The Asparagus with its namesake plus feta cheese and artichoke hearts. Each salad gets its own two slices of toasted bread so carbaholics don't have to be jealous of the sandwiches. On Saturday nights, take advantage of the full bar and live piano music while snacking on a cheese plate or mini tuna melt.

### THE NATURAL CAFE

508 State St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-962-9494  
and 361 Hitchcock Way  
Santa Barbara, 805-563-1163  
and 968-12 Westlake Blvd.  
Westlake Village, 805-449-0099  
and 840 New Los Angeles Ave.  
Moorpark, 805-523-2016  
and 1714 Newbury Road  
Newbury Park, 805-498-0493  
www.thenaturalcafe.com  
Healthy  
Entrées \$5–\$9

#### *Kid-Friendly*

The Santa Barbara State Street location launched all the others. Lots of vegetarian and vegan options make this a magnet for the health-conscious. The same casual menu is available for lunch or dinner with extremely reasonable prices. At night there are soup, pasta, and fish specials. Fresh vegetables abound in the Buddha Burrito wrapped in a whole-wheat chapati. The Zen Burger is a Gardenburger done right. The Ranch Salad is a favorite with grilled chicken breast over baby greens with carrot, jicama, and feta cheese.

### PIERRE LAFOND WINE BISTRO

516 State St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-962-1455  
www.pierrelafond.com  
Californian  
Entrées \$13–\$21

A modernist setting in downtown Santa Barbara with plate-glass windows and exposed ductwork displays bottles from the Lafond Winery in refrigerated cases and on racks. Tourists and locals pop in with their kids for breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily. The bistro menu from chef Nathan Heil offers classics like French onion soup, a Kobe beef burger, a half-roasted chicken with crispy fingerling potatoes, and a hanger steak with spoon bread. An artisan cheese plate is available all day with selections changing regularly.

### POOKIE'S THAI CUISINE

900 Hampshire Road  
Westlake Village, 805-381-0094  
Thai  
Entrées \$7–\$13  
*Kid-Friendly*

Downstairs in the Water Court Plaza office complex, owner Pookie creates delicious Thai dishes for lunch and dinner daily. Lunch specials are a steal at \$7 to \$8 each. She also has a wide selection of interesting salads like the Outrageous Beef Salad with a spicy lime dressing and the protein-rich Yam Yai salad with shrimp, chicken, egg, and peanuts in a sweet-and-sour dressing. Noodle dishes are

generously sized and include the classic pad thai and the interesting Hi Yo Silver with fried noodles, shrimp, and bean sprouts. Curries, vegetarian options, and fish dishes (such as the crispy sole with tamarind and chili sauce) give diners lots of great choices not found elsewhere.

### THE RANCH CATERING

30843 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Westlake Village, 818-575-9033  
www.theranchwestlake.com  
American  
Entrées \$4–\$10

#### *Kid-Friendly*

A catering company decided to create a small dining room for its biggest fans, who wanted to be able to chow down on amazing sandwiches at lunchtime. This is the result. A few pub tables provide seating. Order at the counter and the staff will bring out your sandwich or burger in a foil carrying case. The buns are a kind of brioche with mondo caps that look silly but taste fabulous. You'll need a fork to get through the Philly with cheese spread. It's juicy with tender meat inside. The staff recommends trying the whole-wheat bun on the chicken salad sandwiches. Sides, like the pasta salad, are quite tasty. So are the homemade sweets. The Ranch is open daily for lunch and early dinners.

### STELLA'S RESTAURANT

2385 Michael Drive  
Newbury Park, 805-498-0989  
American  
Entrées \$10–\$21

#### *Kid-Friendly*

Stella Scholle has been charming her customers for more than 25 years with eggs with creamed spinach and artichokes over an English muffin, stacks of pancakes, and omelettes. Since breakfast is her most popular meal, she offers it seven days a week, from opening to closing. At lunch, the burgers are named after stars, the sandwich selections are extensive, and the salads move fast. Try stopping in for dinner—served Tuesday through Saturday—when it's less crowded. Look for specials like clam chowder, reasonably priced steaks, chicken with chardonnay-cream sauce, and the amazing apple pie.

### THE SUNSET RESTAURANT

6800 Westward Beach Road  
Malibu, 310-589-1007  
www.thesunsetrestaurant.com  
American Bistro  
Entrées \$13–\$20

#### *Great View, Saturday & Sunday Brunch*

Sitting on the sands of Zuma Beach, this casual bistro feeds much of Malibu. Start with fresh oysters, shrimp cocktail, bruschetta, baked flatbreads, a cheese plate, or salads made with farm-fresh greens. Main courses run from fish tacos with spicy aioli and Napa cabbage slaw to baked trout with an heirloom tomato, olive, and cucumber *tzatziki* to seasonal specials with fresh ingredients. There's also grilled hanger steak, a chicken BLT, and a burger with caramelized onions that can be customized with bacon and/or aged cheddar cheese. Live music plays in the bar area Tuesday through Friday nights. The upstairs rooms can be booked for private events.

### SUSHI AGOURA

5015 Cornell Road  
Agoura Hills, 818-991-0245  
Japanese  
Entrées \$11–\$14

Unusual ingredients like soft-shell crab, lobster, quail eggs, and giant clams (when in season) in their sushi rolls keep diners devoted to this intimate space with an army of sushi chefs. Easy-to-order dinner combinations and reasonable prices also put this spot on the top of most lists.

### TERRI'S CAFÉ

30135 Agoura Road  
Agoura Hills, 818-707-1934  
American-Italian  
Entrées \$8–\$15

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Huge café lattes, addictive lemon-ricotta pancakes, and delicious eggs Benedict over crab cakes draw fans of breakfast (served until 3 p.m.) to this charming spot. Tables on the patio outside or inside the cheery dining room have equally friendly service. Lunch, also served daily, offers plenty of salads (like tuna), sandwiches (turkey), and wraps (chopped barbecued chicken). Chili, tortilla soup, and a soup of the day can stand on their own or come alongside sandwiches and salads. Dinner, with entrées like meatloaf and grilled vegetable pasta, is served Thursday through Saturday nights.

## TRA DI NOI

Malibu Country Mart  
3835 Cross Creek Road  
Malibu, 310-456-0169  
Italian  
Entrées \$12–\$29

The patio is the draw in good weather (warm or cold) for this great people-watching scene packed with Malibu locals, which means low-key millionaires, power players, celebrities, and good-looking soccer moms. They're all chowing down on the thin-crust pizzas and creative salads. Try prosciutto and cantaloupe over arugula for an appetizer or add grilled skirt steak to the spinach salad with figs and dates for a healthy main course. Pastas, fish, veal, and chicken complete the menu.

## TUTTI'S OFF MAIN

34 N. Palm St.  
Ventura, 805-643-0880  
www.tuttisoffmain.com  
Mediterranean  
Entrées \$13–\$33

*Kid-Friendly, Saturday & Sunday Brunch*

About a half-block off of Main Street in downtown Ventura, this bustling restaurant has a courtyard covered with a vine-laced pergola. The eats are solid, if a bit on the mild side. Pizzas are blistered in a wood-burning oven, which makes for a chewy crust. The mushroom pizza is topped by cremini, shiitake, and portobello 'shrooms plus Gorgonzola cheese, then drizzled with balsamic vinegar. At lunch, salads and sandwiches (open-faced or deli-style) both get plated with crunchy house-made potato chips. At dinner, large plates offer seafood choices (cioppino, grilled ahi tuna), pasta (penne with mushrooms and asparagus, capellini with shrimp and tomatoes), and meat (pork chop with whipped sweet potatoes, grilled rib-eye steak, braised lamb shank). A full bar offers plenty of local wines.

## VIVOLI CAFÉ & TRATTORIA

3825 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Westlake Village, 805-373-6060  
www.vivolicafe.com

Italian  
Entrées \$10–\$24

### Kid-Friendly

A cute, casual little spot for lunch and dinner any day of the week, Vivoli Café makes its own pastas, daily breads from scratch, and desserts (tiramisu, cannoli). The healthy salads (19 of them for lunch, seven for dinner) made with low-fat dressings and grilled fish are hugely popular. Pastas like the spaghetti in a veal and mushroom sauce can be ordered as appetizer or half-portions at lunch. The main meat dishes are plentiful, ranging from chicken breast with artichoke hearts and white wine to pork medallions in a strawberry-balsamic vinegar sauce to veal parmigiana. The small area off of the bar is great for private parties or business gatherings. Look for live entertainment on the weekends in the future.

## THE WHALE'S TAIL

3950 Bluefin Circle  
Oxnard, 805-985-2511  
www.thewhalestail.com

Seafood  
Entrées \$10–\$43

### Great View, Sunday Brunch

Set in the Channel Islands Harbor in Oxnard, this wooden seafooder affords fantastic views of the harbor with its boats and surrounding mountains. Sit in the Shellfish Bar upstairs for drinks and live entertainment (although in the afternoons it's a quiet spot to watch the water). The main dining room downstairs also has great views, so don't fret over where to sit. The bar mixes up martinis, mojitos, and mai tais. Lunch and dinner is served daily; brunch on Sunday. The owners are dedicated to natural foods, buying organic when possible, and only using sustainably raised or wild-caught fish. The menu lists the origin of each fish whether it swam in local waters (swordfish, red snapper, halibut), Alaskan waters (cod), or Scottish seas (salmon). Lunch has lots of sandwich and salad options while dinner has more pasta and steak choices.

## WILLY'S SMOKEHOUSE

28434 Roadside Drive  
Agoura Hills, 818-991-7227  
Barbecue

Entrées \$9–\$24

### Kid-Friendly

The meat is smoked for hours and hours over hardwoods using a formula from a former USO chef named Willy, who served this authentic 'cue to Bob Hope, among others. The pulled pork is very popular, but the tri-tip is great, too, as are the baby back ribs. If you want to venture outside the world of barbecue, you could opt for the prime rib, Atlantic salmon fillet, ahi-tuna-topped salad, shrimp scampi, or New York strip steak.

## WOLFGANG PUCK L.A. BISTRO

30990 Russell Ranch Road West  
Westlake Village, 818-597-1902  
www.wolfgangpuck.com/bistro

Californian  
Entrées \$9–\$15

### Kid-Friendly, Sunday Brunch

This hot restaurant has delicious pizzas, focaccia sandwiches, and fresh salads that hit your table less than 10

minutes after ordering. Heartier dishes include meatloaf, rotisserie chicken, and teriyaki salmon. Some menu items change seasonally (with Puck himself vetting every dish). The look is smart and sleek with indoor dining plus two outdoor patios. Wine bottles hanging on the wall suggest good drinking options; by day there are GuS sparkling sodas. Brunch gets the addition of egg dishes and waffles. It's tasty; it's fast; it's crowded; so go at off-peak hours if possible. Curbside pickup is a handy alternative to dining in.

## THE CHAIN GANG

Chain restaurants run the gamut from casual to very elegant, but the main component of any chain is consistency. You know what you're getting when you walk into a chain. There are no star chefs, but if you find the listing here, you will get good food, good service, and clean environs. We've left out those places with interminable waits and mediocre fare.

## CALIFORNIA PIZZA KITCHEN

2200 Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Thousand Oaks, 805-777-1778  
and in Westfield Topanga  
6606 Topanga Canyon Blvd.  
Canoga Park, 818-884-8858  
www.cpk.com

Cal-Italian  
Entrées \$9–\$15

CPK has so much more than pizza these days. Take the sautéed salmon, for instance, which comes with asparagus and pasta in a lemon-caper sauce. Or the Thai Linguini with a spicy peanut-ginger sauce to which you can add shrimp or chicken. Even the surroundings have changed dramatically since this chain's beginnings. The Lakes location features a large dining room decorated nicely with stone walls and wine displays plus a separate bar and lounge area. You can still get huge salads like the original chopped version that helped propel this restaurant to fame. And there are definitely pizzas—more than 30 of them with interesting toppings like pear and Gorgonzola, BBQ chicken, steak and chiles, and goat cheese and roasted red peppers. A call-ahead seating list plus curbside service makes the Westfield Topanga location a bit more user-friendly.

## CHAMPAGNE FRENCH BAKERY CAFÉ

180 Promenade Way  
Westlake Village, 805-379-5911  
www.champagnebakery.com

French  
Entrées \$7–\$9

A quaint bakery that harkens back to France with chalkboard menus and large mirrors, this outpost of the chain is a welcoming place. Nice sandwiches, quiches, crêpes, and salads vie for your attention with an array of delicious baked goods including croissants, madeleines, custard brioche, and crispy *palmier* cookies.

## THE CHEESECAKE FACTORY

442 W. Hillcrest Drive  
Thousand Oaks, 805-371-9705  
www.thecheesecakefactory.com

American  
Entrées \$9–\$32

### Kid-Friendly, Sunday Brunch

Still going strong after all these years, The Cheesecake Factory excels in offering generous portions of stylish food in a casual setting. This branch of the chain that began in 1978, set in The Oaks, has a slightly Egyptian-movie-set look. On the encyclopedic menu you'll find everything from a Kobe hamburger to Cajun Jambalaya Pasta to orange chicken to chicken marsala. Really, there's a bit of every cuisine imaginable. Most folks come here with one dish in mind: cheesecake. Look for flavors like Godiva chocolate, Kahlua-cocoa-coffee, chocolate-chip cookie dough, lemon-raspberry cream, key lime, Oreo, low-carb cheesecake made with Splenda, or The Original cheesecake topped with fresh strawberries.

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### CLAIM JUMPER

2150 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Thousand Oaks, 805-494-9656  
www.claimjumper.com

American  
Entrées \$10–\$31  
Kid-Friendly

You would never know this casual dining spot with Craftsman-inspired architecture (stone walls, fireplaces) began life as a gold-miner-themed chain restaurant. There are still huge portions of ribs, steaks, and rotisserie chicken, but there are also daintier dishes like cedar plank grilled salmon, personal pizzas, and a veggie burger. The adjoining saloon celebrates happy hour (Monday to Friday, 3 to 7 p.m.) with small bites of food and deals on cocktails, craft beers, and wine. Open for lunch and dinner daily.

### DAMON & PYTHIAS

4719 Commons Way  
Calabasas, 818-224-1555  
www.damonandpythias.com

American  
Entrées \$8–\$13

Create your own salad or sandwich using their gourmet ingredients or choose from the regular menu, which features items like Cuban black bean soup and smoked turkey and chicken habañero sausage. A long list of salads includes Southwest Steak Salad and a spinach and bacon salad. Sandwiches can be healthy like the California Garden Sandwich. Dinners include teriyaki salmon or turkey with all the trimmings. Beer and wine help make this an upscale quick-food experience.

### P.F. CHANG'S CHINA BISTRO

2250 Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Thousand Oaks, 805-277-5915  
www.pfchangs.com

Chinese-American  
Entrées \$6–\$18

Two huge Ming horses guard the entrance to this Chinese-American temple at The Lakes where you can sip up-to-date cocktails and down large portions of minced chicken in lettuce cups, double-pan-fried noodles, Cantonese roasted duck, salmon steamed with ginger, wok-seared lamb, and New York-style cheesecake or the The Great Wall of Chocolate (cake). Big round tables make gathering in groups a treat.

### WOOD RANCH BBQ & GRILL

5050 Cornell Road  
Agoura Hills, 818-597-8900  
and 540 New Los Angeles Ave.  
Moorpark, 805-523-7253

and 1101 E. Daily Drive  
Camarillo, 805-482-1202  
and 3449 E. Main St.  
Ventura, 805-620-4500  
www.woodranch.com

Barbecue  
Entrées \$11–\$27

Kid-Friendly

Many find it worth waiting in line for the slowly roasted meats and grilled steaks at this beloved local chain. The barbecue-sauced ribs, chicken, and tri-tip are tender and flavorful. The Original BBQ Chopped Salad with black beans, crunchy tortilla strips, and ranch dressing is perfect when topped with tri-tip. The turkey sliders on the appetizer menu make a satisfying meal for a low price, especially at happy hour when the full bar offers drink specials (except in the Ventura location, which offers half-priced appetizers). They will soon add lily coffee to the dessert menu to make the end of your meal even more satisfying.

### FUN, FUN, FUN

Whether they have crazy food, a festive atmosphere, or high-energy servers, these are the places to go if you're looking for a good time.

### ADOBE CANTINA

29100 W. Agoura Road  
Agoura Hills, 818-991-3474

Mexican

Entrées \$9–\$17

Kid-Friendly

This wide-open cantina has all-outdoor seating for a festive atmosphere. Don't worry, there are heaters on the many patios for the winter months. Choose from 40 premium tequilas to wash down achiote pork fajitas, crab enchiladas, shrimp in a tequila-cream sauce, fish tacos, or even baby back ribs or a pulled-pork plate.

### ALOHA STEAKHOUSE

5800 Santa Rosa Road  
Camarillo, 805-484-1422  
www.alohasteakhouse.com

Steakhouse  
Entrées \$8–\$29

Kid-Friendly

The surf theme is displayed on the walls and in the attitude of the owners, who would love it if all diners wore deck shoes and floral shirts. The food is mainly American with lots of burgers, steaks that come with potatoes and salad, and seafood like macadamia-crusted mahimahi or Coconut Shrimp. Desserts are eye-popping. Hot chocolatey goodness flows from the Volcano Soufflé, topped with McConnell's ice cream. The Hula Pie is stuffed with macadamia-nut ice cream, hot fudge, and whipped cream.

### AZU

457 E. Ojai Ave.  
Ojai, 805-640-7987  
www.azuojai.com

Mediterranean

Tapas \$6–\$17; Entrées \$24–\$31

A long, dark-wooden bar is the focal point of this popular lunch, dinner, and tapas spot. Happy hour stretches from 4 to 7 p.m. nightly. A long list of cold and hot tapas are offered, like olives, a cheese plate, stuffed dates, lamb kebabs, and fried calamari. Larger entrées cast a wider Mediterranean net and might include Moroccan chicken cooked in a tagine, veggie paella, or filet mignon with a cabernet reduction sauce. Eat in the lounge area or at one of the many tables inside or on the sidewalk out front. Cocktails and homemade gelato help keep everyone happy.

### BANDITS' GRILL & BAR

589 N. Moorpark Road  
Thousand Oaks, 805-497-7427  
and 1980 Ventura Blvd.

Camarillo, 805-445-4742

www.banditsbbq.com

American  
Entrées \$10–\$20

Kid-Friendly

Barbecue goes high-tech here, where the meat is slow-cooked in gleaming stainless steel smokers and slow cookers kept at the perfect temperature for 24 hours at a time. The decor is Frank Lloyd Wright meets the Old West and it works. The bar is hopping and so is lunch, so come early if you have limited time. The potato skins topped with ranch-style beans and cheese are a meal in themselves. Jalapeños stuffed with crab and cream cheese are a unique touch. But the real draw is the barbecue, of course. The tri-tip sandwich and the beef ribs move fast. On Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights go for the prime rib. The burgers and salads are satisfying lunch options.

### THE BEACHCOMBER MALIBU PIER

23000 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, 310-456-9800  
www.thebeachcombercafe.com

American  
Entrées \$19–\$45

Great View, Kid-Friendly

The fantastic decor here celebrates seaside life in the 1940s when tiki bars were first trendy. Waiters deliver old-fashioned wide-mouthed bottles of purified water to set the tone. Wooden tables keep things casual. Jazz and swing music on the sound system is low enough to hear the waves crashing below. Food here, like in the forties, is decadent—rich with flavor and calories but new in style and ingredients. Clam chowder is creamy. The velvety



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mac and cheese has flecks of black truffle along with a touch of white truffle oil. The lobster potpie has chunks of tender seafood in a fantastic brandy sauce with a slice of crust sticking out. The s'mores dessert is brilliant: scoops of vanilla ice cream pierced with graham crackers and drenched in hardening chocolate and a torched marshmallow. It's hard not to have fun here, and a walk on the pier or the beach after a meal makes it even better.

## BELLA VICTORIAN VINEYARD WINERY & BISTRO

2135 Ventura Blvd.  
Camarillo, 805-383-8800  
www.bellavictorianvineyard.com  
California

Entrées \$9–\$12; Specials \$17–\$35

Part tasting room for the Bella Victorian Winery, part lingerie boutique (tastefully done), and part bistro. Chef Gâel Lecolley works the tiny open kitchen to create small plates like sushi and thin-crust pizzas to go with flights of wine. If you stop by at lunchtime, there are a few tables on the sidewalk out front to settle into for dishes like Chinese chicken salad and roasted leg of lamb sandwich topped with caramelized onions and feta cheese. The bistro is open Wednesday through Saturday from 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Tuesday and Sunday from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

## BOGIES NIGHTCLUB AND LOUNGE

32001 Agoura Road  
Westlake Village, 818-889-2394  
www.bogies-bar.com  
American

Small plates \$8–\$15

### Live Music

This mostly outdoor bar is a beautiful place to relax—what with all the surrounding greenery and water. Grab a cabana or a spot on one of the couches near the outside fireplace. Entertainment in the form of bands or DJs happens Thursday through Saturday nights. On Friday and Saturday nights there is a cover charge. Nibble on small bites of food like chicken lettuce cups, flatbread pizzas, Southern fried chicken, or a cheese plate.

## BROPHY BROS. CLAM BAR & RESTAURANT

119 Harbor Way  
Santa Barbara, 805-966-4418  
and 1559 Spinnaker Drive  
Ventura, 805-693-0865  
www.brophybros.com  
Seafood

Entrées \$10–\$21

### Great View

Both locations are strategically located on harbors with wonderful views of water and sailboats. The outdoor tables are the most sought-after, but the indoor seating near the bar can be just as fun. Lacquered wood tables hold bottles of Heinz malt vinegar (a must for fish). The seafood is always fresh and simply prepared. Main courses include classics like shrimp scampi, blackened mahimahi, and seafood pasta. Daily specials might include local thresher shark marinated in olive oil and citrus juices, or local swordfish with a mango-papaya salsa. All meals come with coleslaw, clam chowder, and fries or rice. A clam bar menu has seafood nibbles that go well with beer and cocktails.

## CAFÉ FIORE RESTAURANT & MARTINI LOUNGE

66 S. California St.  
Ventura, 805-653-1266  
www.fiorerestaurant.net  
Italian

Entrées \$14–\$28

### Romantic, Live Music

Lively and loud, this martini bar and restaurant is beautifully decorated. A tall, dark-wood bar dominates the room in which it stands and showcases the bartenders mixing up cucumber martinis and blueberry cosmos. Booths and tables are usually crowded with friends enjoying themselves either indoors or out on the patio. The kitchen turns out many flavorful Italian dishes like pizza with pesto sauce, grilled chicken, mozzarella, and sun-dried tomatoes; or ravioli filled with lobster and braised leeks then doused in a tomato-cream sauce. A classic osso buco is served over

saffron risotto, as it should be. Whole-wheat pasta makes an appearance on the spa menu, which is geared towards lighter fare. The dessert list offers plenty to smile about including a chocolate trio with molten-chocolate cake, bittersweet chocolate pot de crème, and a frozen custard with pistachios and white chocolate. Live music plays in the lounge area Tuesday through Saturday nights.

## CHAR FASL

5843 Kanan Road  
Agoura Hills, 818-889-9495  
Persian

Entrées \$13–\$20

A handmade Persian backgammon set beckons patrons to linger over tea and a friendly game. Kabobs of filet mignon, lamb, chicken breast, or ground beef are served over heaps of fluffy basmati rice. The *tahdig* appetizer is the crispy crust of the rice from the bottom of the pan topped with your choice of stew. It's crunchy and addictive. Try the pomegranate juice; it's a great source of antioxidants. On Friday and Saturday nights there's singing and belly dancing after 8 p.m.

## COSMOS GRILL

23663 Calabasas Road  
Calabasas, 818-591-2211  
www.cosmosgrill.com  
Eclectic

Entrées \$10–\$20

Cozy and cute, this neighborhood café is packed on the weekends. The casual menu has lots of salads like the warm spinach chicken version, a Cobb, spicy Thai chicken, and seared ahi salad. Sandwiches run the gamut from a triple-decker club to a turkey meatball sub, to burgers, wraps, and even a po'boy made with ahi tuna. Pastas include heart-healthy options like the asparagus and mushrooms in pesto or the whole-wheat fettuccine with artichokes and sun-dried tomatoes. There's also fish-and-chips, liver and onions, and roasted rosemary chicken. Open for lunch and dinner daily.

## DON CUCO MEXICAN RESTAURANT

254 W. Los Angeles Ave.  
Moorpark, 805-523-2261  
www.doncucorestaurants.com  
Mexican

Entrées \$8–\$19

### Kid-Friendly, Sunday Brunch

The Yucatan style of cooking prevails in this appealing Mexican restaurant with stained-glass depictions of what look like Aztec pyramids. Inside, booths are styled in tan-and-green striped fabric while lanterns and an iron candelabra hang from the ceiling. On the covered patio, wooden tables and chairs are comfortably spaced. The food enlivens your palate with zesty flavors, starting with the spicy salsa. An intense mole sauce blankets a chicken enchilada. The long bar pours plenty of tequilas and mixes large margaritas.

## DUKE'S MALIBU

21150 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, 310-317-0777  
www.dukesmalibu.com  
Hawaiian/Seafood

Entrées \$17–\$30

### Great View

The gorgeous ocean views are maximized in the dining rooms and bars of this large Hawaiian-themed seafood and steak house. Every staff member sports a laid-back smile and friendly demeanor. Skip the starters and go straight for the main courses. The seasonal fish choices are prepared six different ways—the Parmesan-crust version with macadamia nuts and a lemon-caper sauce rules. For dessert, the Mile-High Hula Pie is stuffed with macadamia-nut ice cream and topped with fudge. Check the website for happy-hour specials and hula dance performances on the patio.

## FIAMME

3731 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Thousand Oaks, 805-497-9444  
www.fiammerestaurant.com  
Italian/American

Entrées \$12–\$26

## Live Music

Red is a major accent of this restaurant, whose name means "flames" in Italian. The fire theme carries through to some of the grilled menu items, like the baby back ribs and the spicy heat of the *peperonata* sauce on the pork chops. Along with those American dishes, you'll find Italian specialties like thin-crust pizzas, pastas, veal marsala, and tiramisu. The large and attractive space, complete with its own bar/lounge area and tented patio, can handle a crowd. A small stage in the main dining room offers live music and there are plans for other forms of entertainment. If that's not enough, rides in a Simcraft racing car simulator can be had for \$5 a pop (about five laps). Fiamme is open for lunch and dinner daily with a short breakfast menu available until 4 p.m. Happy hour in the lounge runs from 4 to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday.

## NEW FOX SPORTS GRILL

30970 Russell Ranch Road  
Westlake Village, 818-338-7080  
www.foxsportsgrill.com/westlake  
American

Entrées \$6–\$27

### Sports on 20 screens

Say hello to the modern sports bar: a sophisticated environment with more than 20 plasma and projection televisions, which all broadcast different channels. A full bar mixes up martinis, frozen drinks, margaritas, beer, and wine—even beer cocktails. The most fun way to eat is to grub on all the appetizers while your eyes are glued to the tennis match or football game. The spinach-artichoke dip comes with toasty crostini for dipping; the blue cheese-covered potato chips are absolutely addictive. Jumbo lump crab cakes have a bit of a Cajun kick; the build-your-own pizzas have a nice chewy crust.

## GALLETTO BAR & GRILL

982 S. Westlake Blvd.  
Westlake Village, 805-449-4300  
www.gallettobarandgrill.com  
Italian/Brazilian

Entrées \$10–\$17

### Live Music

During the week a live guitarist keeps things interesting while on the weekends the crowd can dance to bands playing bossa nova, rhythm and blues, classic rock, and jazz. Nibbles of an Italian or Brazilian bent go well with the mixed drinks like the caipirinha (lime and Brazilian rum). Apps include cheese plates, fried calamari, crab cakes, chicken empanadas, and quesadillas. Light eaters can stick with the Italian pasta dishes for their main course or fish prepared with Brazilian sauces. Heartier appetites will want steak, chicken, or sausage from the grill.

## GINO'S TRATTORIA

720 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Thousand Oaks, 805-494-7743  
Italian

Entrées \$10–\$17

### Kid-Friendly

Owner Gino Setola likes to be very personal with his patrons. Instead of writing menu specials on a board, he prefers to give them out to the whole room verbally. It's casual, it's friendly, and the menu has classic Italian dishes like veal picatta, fettuccine Bolognese, pizza, and Caprese salad. Don't miss the gelato trifles for dessert.

## KABUKI JAPANESE RESTAURANT

20940 Ventura Blvd.  
Woodland Hills, 818-704-8700  
www.kabukirestaurants.com  
Japanese

Entrées \$10–\$18

### Kid-Friendly

Groups of coworkers and friends gather here for reasonably priced sushi and cocktails, delivered with a smile in a boisterous room. Some of the special rolls are a bit unusual but tasty, like the Ana-Kyu Garlic Roll with sea eel tempura and cucumber with garlic chips on top. Most of the rolls and cooked dishes are more traditional. There's tempura, teriyaki, ramen, and miso-marinated black cod. The hot appetizers are fun to explore and share, especially the ginger shrimp



on crispy rice, the fried soft-shell crab with ponzu, and the garlicky but mild grilled *shisito* peppers. Non-alcoholic drinks—like the green-tea smoothie and the “Karate Punch” with cranberry, peach nectar, and cherry syrup—should satisfy any designated driver. Open for lunch and dinner daily; happy hour 3 to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

#### LAZY DOG CAFÉ

172 W. Hillcrest Drive  
Thousand Oaks, 805-449-5206  
www.lazydogcafe.com

American  
Entrées \$8–\$24

#### Saturday & Sunday Brunch

Who loves puppies? Everyone, right? So a café decorated with fire hydrants, puppy photos, paw-print fabrics, and bone-shaped door handles has to be fun. The inexpensive eats represent what Americans love, from pizza and pasta to burgers and grilled cheese. Salads are topped with items like roasted veggies, the fish of the day, or even chicken tenders. Bigger meals include meatloaf, flatiron steak, chicken potpie with a cap of puff pastry, and Idaho trout baked in a cast-iron skillet. For dessert, a hot fudge sundae comes to the table in a porcelain dog bowl. Lazy Dog Café, located at The Oaks mall, is open for lunch and dinner daily.

#### LIMÓN LATIN GRILL

1555 Simi Town Center Way  
Simi Valley, 805-955-9277  
www.limongrill.com

Pan-Latin

Entrées \$8–\$20 (some steaks up to \$40)

#### Live Music

The flat-screen TVs above the bar make this a great spot to catch a sporting event, while the area around the fireplace on the patio near the cabanas is great for listening to live music. Chef Ron Tavakoli features flavors from all over Central and South America as well as Cuba and Puerto Rico. His preparation of yucca (sliced, fried, and drizzled with a garlicky mojo sauce) makes you actually yearn for this normally bland root vegetable. The chicken *alcaparado* with olives and capers is sensational. At lunchtime there are American-style sandwiches like a California wrap and a hamburger. If you see the pulled-pork special, go for it. The servers are knowledgeable about the cuisine and can help you deconstruct the long menu, which also offers salads, pastas, seafood, and steaks. Limón Latin Grill is open for lunch and dinner daily. Musicians play on Sundays from 2 to 9 p.m. and at different times during the rest of the week (except Mondays). Call for the schedule of artists. There's also a DJ spinning tunes late in the evening on Friday and Saturday nights.

#### THE MELTING POT

3685 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.  
Thousand Oaks, 805-370-8802  
www.meltingpot.com

Fondue

Entrées \$18–\$23 individually or \$59 for two

#### Kid-Friendly

Swirl, swish, and dip your way through cheese fondue, hot broth fondue, and chocolate fondue for an interactive meal that will keep even your kids interested. For the adults, a full bar and a large wine list make the night fun. The sauces, salads, and sides round out the meal nicely.

#### MOONSHADOWS

20356 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, 310-456-3010  
www.moonshadowsmalibu.com

Cal-Asian

Entrées \$19–\$30

#### Great View, Saturday & Sunday Brunch

The owners got serious about this former surfer hangout a couple of years ago when they remodeled a bit and hired chef Joachim Weitz to create a menu worthy of destination dining. He flies in sweet quahog hard-shell clams for his chowder and buys American Kobe beef for his braised short ribs. His menu changes four times a year to follow the seasons, but you can always count on really fresh seafood with Asian touches, a pasta or risotto, homemade fruit cobblers, and a cheese plate. Views of the Pacific are great from every table, indoors or on the party deck outside. Brunch is always crowded.

#### NEW OLD PLACE RESTAURANT

29983 Mulholland Hwy.  
Agoura Hills, 818-706-9001  
www.oldplacecornell.com

American

Entrées \$11–\$34

Typically, the gals get the one fish dish on the menu (whatever it happens to be that night) and dudes get the sirloin grilled over oak at this Old-West-style saloon that serves a few microbrews on tap and local wines by the glass or bottle. Swing open the spring-loaded wooden door and squeeze through the crowd to the bench at the bar. Or rustle up a group of four or six or eight and call ahead to reserve a narrow wooden booth. It's a one-of-a-kind experience. Cornell Winery & Tasting Room sits right next door. The Old Place is open for dinner Thursday through Sunday nights and for breakfast on the weekends.

#### SHECK & SHAY'S ROCKIN' DINER

3907 Cochran St.  
Simi Valley, 805-306-9566  
www.simidiner.com

American

Entrées \$7–\$12

#### Kid-Friendly

Styled like a 1950s diner with plenty of chrome, formica, and vinyl, this homage to car-hop culture offers vintage foods with updated flare. Don't miss the Rednecks and Rings appetizer (fried pickles and onion rings) on a cute cast-iron stand with three good dipping sauces. Burgers go from big (Just a Burger with a half-pound of meat) to generous (Da Bomb piled with avocado, bacon, onion rings, and double the cheese). The chicken-fried steak gets homemade country gravy. The premium sides include fire-roasted creamed corn, or pasta salad loaded with artichoke hearts and kalamata olives. Shakes, malts, and floats ensure you won't leave hungry.

#### LOOK SHEILA'S PLACE WINE BAR & RESTAURANT

330 N. Lantana St.  
Camarillo, 805-987-9800  
www.sheilaswinebar.com

Californian

Entrées \$10–\$24

#### Live Music

It's a long wine bar with quite a few cozy tables available next to the wine racks lining the walls. The lighting is low and romantic, the music is mostly acoustic and jazzy. Plenty of small plates are on offer, the better to snack on with a bottle or two of wine. The Boursin cheese ravioli comes with a scattering of sweet-vermouth-soaked mushrooms. The combination is delightful. The Mediterranean olive pizza utilizes both green and black olives to nice effect. The angel hair pasta with tomatoes and basil could be a primer on how to make this ubiquitous Italian dish.

#### TAVERNA TONY

23410 Civic Center Way  
Malibu, 310-317-9667  
www.tavernatony.com

Greek

Entrées \$11–\$29

#### Live Music

Owner Tony Koursaris is a solicitous host, overseeing your good time either inside by the fireplace or outside on the patio. Weekends bring live Greek music, dancing waiters, and belly dancers. Eat your flaming cheese, moussaka, and grilled lamb family-style if in a big party (which is the best way to experience the fun here). If you can't save room for the baklava (and you probably can't due to the huge portions), take it home.

#### TUPELO JUNCTION CAFE

1218 State St.  
Santa Barbara, 805-899-3100  
www.tupelojunction.com


Southern

Entrées \$14–\$33

#### Kid-Friendly, Live Music


It's always crowded at this friendly brick-walled café where the cute waitresses don white T-shirts and jeans

and the drinks arrive in mason jars. Chef Amy Scott lets loose with bacon in her Southern-inflected dishes. It's in the spinach and Gouda scramble on the breakfast menu (served until 2 p.m. every day); cooked in with the collard greens accompanying the rich mac and cheese; and scattered on top of the slightly sweet coleslaw that sits next to two pan-fried crab cakes made from fresh Dungeness. The fried green tomatoes will remind any Southerner of home, although they're elevated by a dill-and-lemon dipping sauce that mom (probably) never made (at lunch) or stacked between rounds of goat cheese (at dinner). Even the seafood sticks to your ribs here. The shrimp and scallops come with cheddar jalapeño grits and Creole lobster butter. On Thursday nights, stop in for live music and happy hour specials from 5 to 7 p.m. ■



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Interview by Anthony Head Photograph by Gary Moss

## MEET MADISON HILDEBRAND



Despite the fact that he's been in the Malibu real estate business for only five years, Madison Hildebrand enjoys a higher profile than the usual realtor. Sure, he's starred in three seasons of *Million Dollar Listing* on Bravo, but he also wrote *Activate Your Passion, Create Your Career* and holds a degree from Pepperdine. Here's his appraisal of life so far.

It's been a constant journey of real estate because we moved so much for my father's job when I was a kid. We lived in five states, 10 cities, and three countries. Every time my parents announced we were moving again, I always wanted to ride in the car on the home search.

I'm most excited about the new contacts and relationships, and networking and negotiating, and the psychology of real estate. I love the architecture and design elements, but my main priority is people.

Malibu reflects the reality of what's going on in the country. There are a lot of short sales and foreclosures. When the economy took a shift, we were not prepared, just like everyone else.

Brand building and brand awareness is critical to success. My lifestyle is my brand. And my brand is my net for capturing clients. I take it very seriously.

I don't think it's embarrassing to say you watch reality TV anymore. It's what America talks about.

If I'm being compared to the other two [agents on the show] I guess I'm a lot more easy-going and laid back. I don't like to get tangled up in the drama. I don't sweat the small stuff. Malibu is the kind of energy I live in and the kind I practice.

I have no regrets. I'm just being me on television. I'm an open book. It's liberating.

This is the bottom line: I don't care if I'm a reality TV star or not. My first priority is real estate and my brand.

Guilty pleasures? I have many. I do like to shop, sometimes when I shouldn't. I have ice cream every single day. Ben and Jerry's Mint Chocolate Cookie is *the* flavor. ■

For more information on Madison Hildebrand visit [www.themalibulife.com](http://www.themalibulife.com).



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