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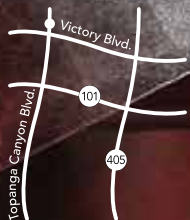
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GARY MOSS

Following Your Passions

We all love feeling a sense of accomplishment. Getting the task done, on time and beyond others' expectations, seems to always propel us forward. It cultivates within us the enthusiasm, confidence, and pride to keep going (even in those not-so-good times). I think those types of personal qualities are going to become even more important in the year ahead, when there are so many possibilities to accomplish something new.

An accomplishment can take many forms in our daily lives, whether it's unveiling an artistic side for the whole world to see (*Arts & Culture*, page 40), using a little elbow grease to enliven our homes (we've got some great design trend ideas to inspire you in our *Upgrades* department on page 46), or cooking something new and delicious for dinner (if you don't already love Swiss chard, you will after reading "Eat Your Greens" on page 70). Every *805 Living* issue is filled with not-so-everyday feats like these, but Cynthia House Nooney's feature "A Change for the Better" (page 56) gives a special nod to some of those who followed their inner inspirations all the way to the attainment of more fulfilling careers. No matter how it's approached, starting over is an achievement to be admired.

That inner inspiration—that passion—makes our lives what we want them to be. It also has the power to touch the lives of others. Every year, I'm amazed at how philanthropy is a true passion in our communities. We've helped make things a little better for those around us, and I have no doubt that will continue throughout the next 12 months.

To the staff of *805 Living*, our readers, and our advertisers, I want to wish you all a happy 2011. Let it be your year of accomplishment.

Cheers,

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

*Lynne Andujar, Editor in Chief
and Associate Publisher
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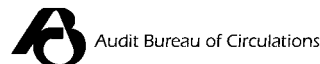
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Behind the Scenes

FOLLOWING YOUR PASSION

This issue is devoted to following passions, so we asked our contributors how they pursue theirs. In addition to having an inner drive, many of them gain inspiration from their families. From a new intern to some veteran photographers, here's advice on how to chase a dream.

Executive editor **ANTHONY HEAD** (*Mind/Body/Soul*, page 38; “¡Viva Playa Viva!,” page 52; *Taste/Wine*, page 74; *Armchair Oenophile*, page 77; and *P.S.*, page 96) says, *I follow my passions with the same enthusiasm that I approach anything else. Advancing age, I find, confirms what the Roman philosopher Seneca observed: Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.* For more lucky stories, visit anthonyheadworks.com.



Photographer **ELIZABETH MESSINA** (cover image and “Just Married,” page 63) claims this important connection: *My passion is photography, It feeds my soul. I feel compelled to create images, and the best part about it is the more I follow my passion and embrace my dreams the more energy I have for my most important passions—my husband and three beautiful children.* To see more of her work, visit elizabethmessina.com.

Photographer **JOY HARMON PROUTY** (“Just Married,” page 63) says she has lots of passions—but she easily settled on the most important one to share. *My children are my passion: They fuel me. I do my best to make time to explore with them and use our imaginations. There’s something beautiful about forgetting I’m a grown-up and letting go that helps me embrace life fully.* To see more of her work, visit wildflowersphotos.com.



Photographer **JOSE VILLA** (“Just Married,” page 63) goes great distances to follow his passion. *Travel is a big part of my life and career: New light, new faces, and new places inspire me to continue to do what I do. I love Mexico. I know it has such a bad rap at the moment, but there are so many locations people don’t know about. Villa is currently working on a fine art book about Mexico.* To see more of his photography, visit josevillaphoto.com.



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VISION DRIVE TEAMWORK

Intern LILY WALBRIDGE (*Finds/Style*, page 24) is a college student who is following her passion while also following in her (wardrobe stylist) mother's footsteps. I am finishing up college, and all I know for sure is that I love fashion. I haven't yet decided which fashion career path I want to go down, but when I was given the chance to do the *Finds/Style* page for this month's issue, I jumped on the opportunity. It may take many of these chances, but I know if I continue to follow my passion, I will be happy.

Gary's Outtake

By Gary Moss, Photo Editor



I enjoy quirky portraits, and this is definitely one of them. It's a fun shot from our "A Change for the Better" (page 56) shoot. Pictured is Marta Sala-Rothwell, owner of Baby Bella Maya. I had her wave a length of baby fabric while she spun around, but after multiple takes—even as an ex-commercial pilot—Marta was getting dizzy from this kind of turbulence. The photo captures the energy from a moment between takes.

Gary Moss teaches *Camera Whisperer Photographic Workshops* on a variety of topics. Visit camerawhisperer.com. ■

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TRACKING THE BEAT OF THE 805 | JAN/FEB 2011



Ben and Lyndee Rothbard's nuptials not only signified the beginning of a new life together, it also launched a new wedding design business for the bride.

Last year, Lyndee Rothbard had a certain vision in mind when she began planning her fall wedding: "But I couldn't find what I was looking for, so I purchased many of my own accessories, like dishes, planters, vases, candlesticks, and votives." Along with friend and florist Maria Azzaro of The Bashful Rose, the two designed rustic-themed tablescapes to match Rothbard's natural style. The bride-to-be also took time before >>



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her big day to find the perfect tables, chairs, and linens, and also make a handmade version of Almond Roca for the wedding guests. “It all came together beautifully,” says Rothbard, the in-house designer and assistant buyer at À la Maison in Westlake Village.

With the launch of her new wedding design business À la Maison Weddings (alamaisonweddings.com), Rothbard is now poised to help other brides and grooms bring their wedding-day dreams to life. Her access to resources and countless ideas regarding table decor and design elements provides for complete customization for all wedding styles and themes, she says—from country-inspired to contemporary.

Creating unique and intimate events is a natural fit, according to Rothbard: “I’m all about the details. I tell brides not to sweat the small stuff. That’s what we’re here for.”

—Cynthia House Nooney

A Fresh Look at the 805 Area

For those planning a weekend getaway or short break close to home, a comprehensive new travel guide in the Moon Handbooks series, *Santa Barbara & the Central Coast*, comes at just the right time.



Author Michael Cervin covers the area from Ventura to Paso Robles—picking the best things to see and do, where to stay, and places to eat and drink—and rolls all that info into 356 information-packed pages. Cervin, who’s also a food and wine writer, pays special attention to the area’s wine country, where his suggestions include an eco-winery tour.

Besides the usual must-sees along the Central Coast, Cervin provides insight on the 805’s lesser-known attractions, like Bubblegum Alley in San Luis Obispo, the Frog Wall in Santa Barbara, Ojai’s Pink Moment, and Morro Bay’s Black Hill. And if you want to know where to taste Santa Maria’s famous tri-tip barbecue, you’ll find that here, too. —Frank Nelson ■

SOLUTION-ORIENTED



Years ago, when conventional cleaning products failed to remove stains from her children’s clothes, Patricia Spencer mixed up a few batches of homemade detergent. Not only did her formulas prove to be more effective, they were free of toxic ingredients,

which made Spencer doubly happy. It wasn’t until her daughters began leaving the nest that Spencer realized her products might appeal to others. Working with organic chemists, she developed an array of eco-friendly household cleansers, including laundry detergent, liquid dish soap, and all-purpose degreaser.

“My vision isn’t just about healthier homes, it’s about making chores easier,” says the founder of Camarillo-based GrabGreen (grabgreenhome.com). Her popular three-in-one laundry detergent comes in premeasured concentrated pods that are tossed directly into the drums of washing machines.

The no-mess, no-waste approach has retailers and customers across the country turning green. Some even share cleaning stories with Spencer: “Apparently my degreaser, which I designed to clean cabinet tops after cooking, has been used to remove car and bike-chain grease from clothes. I love hearing about multiple uses. My customers give me great ideas.”

—C.H.N.

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Finds

By Lynne Andujar

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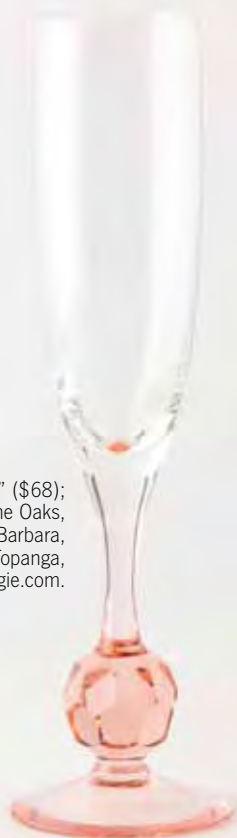


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Creed "Cocktail de Pivoines" candle (\$95); Neiman Marcus at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park, neimanmarcus.com.



Montblanc "Meisterstück Solitaire Rose-Gold Barley Ballpoint Pen" (price available upon request); Dejaun Jewelers at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, and Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park; dejaun.com.



"Boule Flute" (\$68); Anthropologie at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, Santa Barbara, and Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park; anthropologie.com.

"GG Twins" medium hobo with interlocking G details (\$980); Gucci, gucci.com.



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"Exploded Check Earmuff" (\$175); Burberry at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park, burberry.com.

BDG "Snowflake" sweater (\$59); Urban Outfitters at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park, and Santa Barbara; urbanoutfitters.com.

"Lacross Palm Warmer" fingerless glove (\$28); Free People at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park, and Santa Barbara; freepeople.com.

"Luxe Faux Fur Daydreamer" handbag (\$428); Juicy Couture at Malibu Country Mart, Malibu, and Santa Barbara; juicycouture.com.

UGG "Leona" wedge boot (\$225); Nordstrom at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, and Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park; uggaustralia.com.

"Cable-Knit Infinity Scarf" (\$250); James Perse at Malibu Lumber Yard, Malibu, jamesperse.com.

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LEFT: Originally opened in 1959, the recently renovated Palm Springs Riviera brings the era of glamour and high-style back to the desert. **BELOW:** Four Seasons Denver's third-floor rooftop terrace is landscaped with trees indigenous to Colorado; guest rooms sport sleek sophistication, and each is made unique with paintings by local artists.

DOWNTOWN DENVER

The 45-story **Four Seasons** that opened last fall in Denver (fourseasons.com/denver) is still offering a few specials to celebrate:

- The “Introductory Offer” has low weekend rates starting at \$180 through January 31.
- The “Experience More” package includes one night in a superior room plus a \$25 credit for EDGE Restaurant & Bar or the Spa; from \$335 through January 31.
- The “Second Night and Companion on Us” package includes a complimentary second night and all companion charges (dining or spa) when made with the primary guest; from \$198 through February 28.

The hotel has 239 rooms; interiors are inspired by local natural beauty, using warm earth tones, richly grained woods, and stone. Nearly 1,200 paintings and sculptures created mostly by contemporary Colorado artists fill common spaces; a 10-treatment-room spa with signature high-altitude treatments, a rooftop pool, and EDGE steak house are also available on-site.

Going Mod in Palm Springs

The sixth annual Modernism Week (modernismweek.com) takes place in Palm Springs February 17 through 27, with a new lineup of midcentury modern design events. As in past years, the celebration will include celebrity home tours, architect panel discussions, a double-decker bus tour, and an exhibit of vintage Airstream trailers. New this year: an interior design tour of local homes and a show of vintage Braniff Airlines uniforms designed by Pucci and Halston. Catch *The Architecture of Donald Wexler* exhibit at the delightful Palm Springs Art Museum (psmuseum.org), and visit the Palm Springs Uptown Design District to shop for furnishing finds. Shops like Trina Turk Residential (trinaturk.com), Christopher Anthony Ltd. (christopheranthonyltd.com), Asylum (asylumhomestore.com), and House 849 (house849.com) carry unique new and vintage decor, everything from Herman Miller pieces to steel fabrications to religious relics. All will ship large purchases, and all offer great pricing compared to LA's inflated finds.

In keeping with the spirit of Modernism Week, book a room at the recently refurbished **Riviera Palm Springs** (from \$360, promo code “MODERN”; psriviera.com). Its über-design aesthetic is a nod to Hollywood Regency, Rat-Pack glam (it was a favorite haunt of Frank Sinatra), and midcentury modern design. The renovation kept the original buildings and layout from architect Irwin Schuman, who initially designed the Riviera (opened in 1959) to mimic Las Vegas hotels like The Flamingo and The Stardust. It still feels like Vegas, but better—with two pools, tennis courts, a gorgeous spa, and a swank dining and bar scene.





before



after

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LEFT: Stroll through San Miguel de Allende to experience the history and culture of Mexico's oldest town; the colonial-style guest rooms at The Rosewood San Miguel de Allende are spacious yet charming.

Nuevo in Mexico

San Miguel de Allende attracts visitors interested in arts and culture: It's been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site by the United Nations and was named the number-one city in Latin America and the number-four city in the world by *Travel + Leisure* in its "World's Best" awards for 2010. Two new hotels offer unique boutique accommodations:

- The **Rosewood San Miguel de Allende** (rosewoodsanmiguel.com) is set to open on January 20 and begins accepting reservations on February 1. The downtown property has 67 rooms and suites with wood-beam ceilings and Mexican furnishings; all rooms have living areas and terraces or balconies; most have fireplaces. Pools and gardens, a spa and fitness room, indoor and outdoor dining options, and a rooftop lounge are also on-site. The "Opening Offer" package (from \$295 through April 20) includes breakfast for two at 1826 Restaurant, a 25-percent discount on all spa treatments, and complimentary valet parking.
- The 32-room **Hotel Matilda** (from \$319; hotelmotilda.com) opened last fall with a design aesthetic that's different from other Old World-style hotels in the area. The space was designed to feel like an art gallery, with both rotating and permanent collections of mostly Mexican contemporary art. In fact, the name of the hotel comes from the subject of a famous 1940s portrait of Matilda Stream by Mexican artist Diego Rivera (a copy of which hangs in the hotel). Indigenous landscaping and green initiatives (solar and photovoltaic panels, composting, and recycling) complement the restaurant, bar, infinity pool, and spa. Guest rooms and suites feature artwork by Mexico City photographer Eduardo Zaylan, and most have a balcony or terrace.



ABOVE: Hotel Matilda's very private pool and lounge area exudes a contemporary ambience.
LEFT: Private patios offer dramatic views on warm Mexican nights.



DOWNHILL DEAL

Schussers can take advantage of the "Skier's Escape Package" (from \$1,395) at **Capella Telluride** (capellatelluride.com; see "Taken by Telluride" on page 54 for more information), which includes a free fourth night, daily breakfast for two, a pair of two-day lift tickets, and a \$100 spa credit at the slope-side resort. Standard king rooms start at \$295 per night throughout ski season.

Hot Tip:

Yosemite's Ahwahnee hotel is offering its Chefs' Holidays (yosemitepark.com/chefs), where famous chefs from around the country cook for and interact with guests. Two- and three-night packages (from \$695; through February 4) are available at the Ahwahnee and Yosemite Lodge at the Falls and include a "Meet the Chefs" reception, cooking demonstrations and tastings, a behind-the-scenes kitchen tour, and a five-course Chefs' Holidays Gala Dinner.

DON'T MISS:

San Luis Obispo County Restaurant Month, January 2 through 31, restaurants throughout San Luis Obispo County offer three courses for \$30; sanluisobispocounty.com/restaurantmonth.

San Diego Restaurant Week, January 16 through 21, prix-fixe, three-course dinners for \$20, \$30, or \$40 per person; sandiegorestaurantweek.com.

San Diego Mardi Gras in the Gaslamp Quarter, March 8, two parades, an outdoor block party, live music. Tickets required; gaslamp.org/mardi-gras.

Napa River Inn's "Dinner's On Us!" package, through March 31, book a room and receive a \$100 gift certificate per night to nearby restaurants Morimoto Napa, Tyler Florence's Rotisserie and Wine, Angele, or Fish Story; napariverinn.com. ■

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By Mark Langton

THROUGH 2/13

Through February 13: NATURE'S PALETTE: THE ART OF MEREDITH BROOKS ABBOTT

Ventura Museum. The solo exhibit features works by the California Impressionist, which include atmospheric landscapes and garden paintings derived from the Central Coast's vast array of natural beauty. (venturamuseum.org)

Through April 3: ROY LICHTENSTEIN: IN PROCESS

The Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art at Pepperdine University. This exhibit of contemporary artist Roy Lichtenstein—who's also the co-creator of Pop-Art style—features 60 works created from 1973 to 1997. The exhibition also provides a rare chance to see the artist's step-by-step working method. (arts.pepperdine.edu)

January 27–February 6: SANTA BARBARA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Various locations. One of the more star-studded U.S. film festivals, the event returns for its 26th year. In addition to a wide array of screenings at The Arlington Theatre, there are celebrity seminars and panels open to the public. (sbfilmfestival.org)

February 3: LUCKY DRAGONS

Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum. Performance artists Luke Fischbeck and Sarah Rara are masters of using audience participation to create their art, then publishing their work inexpensively and providing it to the public. (sbcaf.org)

February 4–6: CONJUNTO DE ARPA GRANDE DE MICHOACAN

Isla Vista School, Isla Vista, and Marjorie Luke Theatre, Santa Barbara. Music of Tierra Caliente, the western region of the Mexican state of Michoacan, is performed by musicians on violin, *vihuela*, and harp. Presented by ¡Viva el Arte de Santa Barbara! (luketheatre.org)

February 11–12: NORDIC SPIRIT SYMPOSIUM

California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks. Past and present Nordic explorers are featured. Roald Amundsen, the first to reach the South Pole in 1911, will be discussed; and Liv Arnesen, the first woman to ski solo unsupported to the South Pole, will share her plans to follow Amundsen's route on the centennial of his expedition. (scandinaviancenter.org)

February 13: FOOD & WINE LOVERS' FESTIVAL

Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village. Ventura County Wine Trail presents a food and wine festival featuring shopping, music, fine chocolate and cigars, and more, followed by a winemaker's dinner at Hampton's Restaurant. Proceeds benefit Ventura County food bank FOOD Share. (venturacountywinetrail.com)

February 24: THE SECOND CITY

Campbell Hall, University of California, Santa Barbara. The improv troupe that launched some of the greatest comedians of our time appears for the first time in Santa Barbara. (artsandlectures.sa.ucsb.edu)



Here's an idea:

SANTA BARBARA WITHOUT THE CROWDS: Join an Architectural Foundation of Santa Barbara walking tour every Saturday and Sunday. Trained docents lead small groups to well-known historical landmarks as well as into hidden courtyards with secret fountains that showcase the city's unique heritage (afsb.org). Or check out the Santa Barbara Fisherman's Market at the Santa Barbara Harbor every Saturday when the day's freshest catches are being sold right from the boats that caught them. (santabarbaraca.gov)

EXPRESSIVE TREES. OIL: MEREDITH BROOKS ABBOTT

Family Fun

THROUGH 2/28

Through February 28: BUTTERFLIES BY THE BEACH

Pismo Beach Monarch Grove. More than 25,000 colorful monarch butterflies—one of the largest colonies in the United States—make this Pismo Beach location their winter home. Free lectures daily. (monarchbutterfly.org)

January 23: JACK HANNA'S INTO THE WILD LIVE

Performing Arts Center San Luis Obispo. Bringing exotic culture to the small screen for decades, Hanna's live show features interesting animals, humorous stories, and footage from his global adventures. (pacsl.org)

January 29: GALUMPHA

Bank of America Performing Arts Center's Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. This talented trio combines acrobatics, physical comedy, modern dance, and amazing athletic grace with music and visual effects for a stunning sensory performance. (toaks.org/cap)

February 6: FREE AIRPLANE RIDES

Aviation Museum of Santa Paula. Kids ages 7 to 17 can enjoy a free ride in a private plane courtesy of the Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 723. Several privately owned hangars feature a variety of vintage aircraft, cars, and antique memorabilia. (amszp.org)

February 8: LULA WASHINGTON DANCE THEATRE

Center for the Arts, Pepperdine University, Malibu. Contemporary dance innovator Lula Washington (whose choreography is performed by the Na'vi aliens in *Avatar*) presents an eclectic show that includes the "Little Rock Nine Suite," a tribute to the students who integrated Little Rock Central High School. (arts.pepperdine.edu/performances)

February 12: SCRAPARTSMUSIC

A high-energy mix of athleticism and intricate musical rhythm defies traditional performance art. Nearly 150 unique handmade instruments are played by five musicians to create a unique live experience. (arts.pepperdine.edu/performances)

March 4–6: BRAZILIAN CARNAVAL CULTURAL

Various locations, Santa Barbara. Brazilian culture is highlighted through lectures, art, cinema, dance, and music. (sbbraziliancarnaval.com) ■



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JANUARY

January 20: THE PEKING ACROBATS bring their 2,000-year-old feats of physical artistry to The Granada in Santa Barbara. These incredible athletes seemingly defy the laws of physics. (granadasb.org)

January 22: The Center for the Arts at Pepperdine University presents jazz, pop, and R&B singing legend **AL JARREAU**. With five Grammy Awards, Jarreau has a vocal style that is truly unique. (arts.pepperdine.edu)

January 22–23: The Santa Barbara Symphony presents its first collaboration with Santa Barbara's preeminent ballet company, State Street Ballet, to perform Aaron Copland's **APPALACHIAN SPRING**. The program also features Stravinsky's playful *Pulcinella* suite and Schubert's Symphony No. 5. (thesymphony.org)

January 25: JACKSON BROWNE'S SOLO ACOUSTIC TOUR comes to The Arlington Theatre in Santa Barbara. Browne performs songs on guitar and piano from his vast repertoire. The tour stresses green initiatives, utilizing a biodiesel bus and truck fleet, all-LED lighting, and a plastic-free backstage. (thearlingtontheatre.com)

January 27–February 6: As one of the more star-studded U.S. film festivals, the **SANTA BARBARA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL** returns for its 26th year. In addition to an array of screenings at The Arlington Theatre, there are celebrity seminars and panels open to the public. (sbfilmfestival.org)

FEBRUARY

February 2: Camerata Pacifica's **SPEAKEASY** features award-winning pianist Warren Jones at the Wine Cask in Santa Barbara. The interactive format allows the audience to enjoy classical music with good food and wine while they listen to and discuss the music with performers. (cameratapacifica.org)



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February 11–13: Three different locations in San Luis Obispo play host to **WINTERMEZZO**, Festival Mozaic's second winter concert. The program features violinist Caroline Campbell and Festival Mozaic's music director and international performer Scott Yoo performing duet and trio sonatas accompanied by cello, organ, and piano. (festivalmozaic.com)

February 12: Jazz guitar impresarios **BILL FRISELL AND JOHN SCOFIELD** perform innovative songs ranging from standards to fusion to soul at the Lobero Theatre in Santa Barbara. These artists rank among the top jazz musicians today. (lobero.com)

February 12: Latin-jazz trumpet legend and four-time Grammy Award winner **ARTURO SANDOVAL** leads up to the 2011 Ventura Music Festival at Seaside Park in Ventura. Dancing strongly encouraged. (venturamusicfestival.org)

February 21: Based on the classic movie **THE WIZARD OF OZ**, this musical must-see comes to The Arlington Theatre in Santa Barbara and features fabulous costumes and fantastic sets. (thearlingtontheatre.com)

February 28: **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT** comes to the Performing Arts Center San Luis Obispo. Based on the uproarious film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, this musical follows King Arthur and his knights of Camelot on their search for the Holy Grail. (calpolyarts.org)

MARCH

March 6: Now in its 54th year, **IT'S MAGIC** features six of the world's top magic and variety acts, which have performed in Europe and Las Vegas, as well as at the Magic Castle in Hollywood. (toaks.org/cap)

March 8: Few artists have shaped modern jazz like five-time Grammy Award winner **McCOY TYNER**. From his days with the John Coltrane Quartet to his current groundbreaking piano compositions, Tyner continues to push musical boundaries. He performs at the Lobero Theatre with the Brubeck Institute Jazz Quintet. (lobero.com)



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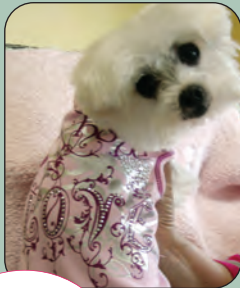
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March 18: Jason Mewes and Kevin Smith bring their movie alter egos **JAY AND SILENT BOB** to the stage at the Majestic Ventura Theatre. The duo first made the characters famous in Smith's film comedy *Clerks*. (venturatheatre.net)

March 19: House of Floyd performs its nationally acclaimed show **PINK FLOYD LASER EXTRAVAGANZA** at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Pink Floyd classics played live include "Dark Side of the Moon," "The Wall," and "Wish You Were Here" backed by a laser light show, video graphics, and special effects. (toaks.org/cap)

March 19–20: Internationally renowned violinist **GILLES APAP** performs the world premiere of Robin Frost's Concertino for Violin with the Santa Barbara Symphony at the Granada Theatre. Sunday's concert is preceded by a one-hour lecture with the artists. (thesymphony.org)

March 20: The Los Robles Master Chorale and Los Robles Children's Choir present **ETERNAL LOVE** at Ascension Lutheran Church in Thousand Oaks. The performance features the world premiere of *Five Texts* by Hans Christian Andersen, as well as John Rutter's *Mass of the Children*. (losroblesmasterchorale.org)

March 22–27: The Theater League, dedicated to bringing live Broadway shows to local theaters, presents one of the most endearing and successful plays in Broadway history, **FIDDLER ON THE ROOF**, at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Young and old alike will enjoy the music, dance, and humor of this classic. (toaks.org/cap)

APRIL

April 8–17: From the brilliant (some say twisted) mind of comedic genius Mel Brooks comes **THE PRODUCERS**, performed by Cabrillo Music Theatre at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza's Bank of America Performing Arts Center. Winner of a record 12 Tony Awards, this show is intended for mature audiences. (toaks.org/cap)

April 9: Upright Cabaret, a blend of Hollywood hip and Broadway chic, presents **COUNTRY**

ROADS, the third in its "American Icons" series at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza's Bank of America Performing Arts Center. The show features the songs of Dolly Parton, Willie Nelson, and Johnny Cash. (toaks.org/cap)

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JANUARY

January 15: The Thousand Oaks High School Lancer Band Boosters host its **BAND ON A RUN** fundraiser at Los Cerritos Middle School in Thousand Oaks. The event begins with a 5K run/walk, followed by a post-race vendor expo. (tohsband.org)

January 19: The Los Angeles Art Show (laartshow.com) kicks off its five-day event with a **VERNISSAGE AND CHARITY BENEFIT** (preview showing) at the Los Angeles Convention Center. Proceeds benefit The Art of Elysium, a nonprofit group dedicated to bringing actors, artists, and musicians together with children who suffer from serious medical conditions. (theartofelysium.org)

FEBRUARY

February 5: The Family School in Los Olivos hosts the **BLACK AND WHITE GALA** fundraiser at The Hotel Corque, which starts with wine tasting and includes dinner prepared by James Beard Award-winning chef Bradley Ogden of Solvang's Root 246. (syvfamilyschool.org)

February 13: The Sylvia White Gallery presents **BE A SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY BENEFIT**. Local Ventura juried artists will be the recipients of cash prizes raised at this event. (artadvice.com)

February 19: Community Conscience "Under One Roof" human services center holds its annual **MARDI GRAS BALL** at the Hyatt Westlake Plaza in Westlake Village. The event includes champagne and hors d'oeuvres, gourmet dinner with wine, silent and live auctions, live entertainment, and dancing. Community Conscience grants nonprofit groups in the greater Conejo Valley rent-free administrative offices. (communityconscience.org)

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Insider

February 24: Celebrating the importance of caring for local seniors, the Garden Court Endowment hosts **HOME GROWN** at the Canary Hotel in Santa Barbara. The event features cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, a gourmet buffet, auction items, and more. The Garden Court Endowment helps low-income seniors live independently for as long as possible. (gardencourt.org)

February 26: Casa Pacifica's **ANGELS BALL** takes place at Sherwood Country Club in Thousand Oaks with cocktails, dinner, dancing, and a live auction. Proceeds benefit programs supporting neglected and emotionally disturbed children in the tri-counties area. (casapacifica.org)

MARCH

March 4-5: **FASHION WEEK VENTURA** brings together local artists, entertainers, designers, and merchants in support of AIDS Project Ventura. Held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, the event is themed "Faerie Tales." (fashionweekventura.com)

March 6: Help the hungry and disadvantaged around the world by taking a little stroll around the Conejo Valley. The 33rd **CONEJO VALLEY CROP WALK** raises funds to help with relief, development, and refugee assistance in 80 countries. Additionally, 25 percent of the money raised benefits MANNA Conejo Valley Food Bank, Meals on Wheels, and Lutheran Social Services. (Sherrill Hyink, 805-492-3674)

March 18: The Thousand Oaks Woman's Club celebrates more than 45 years of service in the Conejo Valley with its fundraiser luncheon and fashion show, **MAKING MAGIC IN THE CONEJO VALLEY**, at Los Robles Greens in Thousand Oaks. The organization chooses one charity to donate to: This year's recipient is Westminster Free Clinic that provides free and low-cost care to families in the Conejo Valley. (thousandoakswomansclub.org)

March 21: Sherwood Country Club in Thousand Oaks is the site of the Bogart Pediatric Cancer Research Program at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles' annual **PROVIDENT FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT GOLF CLASSIC**. Along with play on the Jack Nicklaus-designed championship course, entry fee for this fundraiser includes a barbecue, cocktails, and dinner at the clubhouse. (bogartfoundation.org/events.html)



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APRIL

April 18: The Meadowlark Service League (MSL) hosts its annual **CHARITY TENNIS TOURNAMENT AND LUNCHEON**. The event kicks off with a women's doubles round-robin tournament at various locations around Camarillo including Las Posas Country Club and Spanish Hills Country Club. Following the tournament 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 as well as provides a scholarship fund for graduates of Adolfo Camarillo and Rio Mesa high schools. (meadowlarkserviceleague.com)

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GREY MUZZLE: Photographer and author Mark J. Asher (markjasher.com), who has published several photo books and calendars featuring man's best friend, recently informed us of a national nonprofit, The Grey Muzzle Organization, which envisions a world where no old dog dies alone and afraid. It strives to improve the lives of at-risk, homeless senior dogs by providing funding and resources to animal shelters, rescue organizations, sanctuaries, and other nonprofit groups. (greymuzzle.org)

DOLLAR A DOZEN FOUNDATION (DODF): Local Gen Y'er-turned-philanthropist Brendon Ghaderi has created a foundation to make donating to charities in the world easier. Each quarter, DODF identifies a list of 12 charities that contributors can find on its website. Contributors choose which charities to donate to, and DODF splits the donations equally among them. (dollaradozen.org) ■

If you would like to submit your event or organization for possible inclusion in Insider, please email the information and a contact number/ email to 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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THE STUFF OF DREAMS

What's behind those nightly enchantments that everyone experiences but only one person can see?

ONE MORNING, near the very beginning of our species' timeline, a caveman woke up and nudged his cavewoman wife until she opened her heavy cavewoman eyes. He told her about the bizarre, possibly frightening, possibly invigorating events he'd just experienced while sleeping. Amazingly, she knew what he was talking about because she had experienced something kind of like that, too. From that moment to this very day, our species has tried, mostly in vain, to unravel the mysteries of what dreams are and what they tell us about ourselves. There remains a great many questions to be answered.

Throughout the ages—depending on who was being asked—dreams were said to originate from either divine sources or evil inspirations, from a vast pool of human instinctual knowledge or from an individual's deepest, most repressed desires. Dreams told of things to come and of things that had already occurred. And so, when studied collectively, dreams may reveal a great deal about what entire societies think of their waking world. (What a pity that we'll never know what those first humans dreamed about millions of years ago. Just imagine what *prehistoric* nightmares must have been like.)

While the act of dreaming is universal, it undoubtedly ranks among the most personal of endeavors. After all, no one can see, much less *experience*, another person's dreams. Science has not settled what, if anything, is significant about our dreams, but researchers from Carnegie Mellon, Harvard, and Notre Dame, among many, many others, have concluded the obvious: Dreams influence our waking lives. And there's no doubt that dreams impact art, literature, poetry, music, and film. (Chances are, you know someone who received an *Inception* DVD for the holidays.)

Yet, in the end, and perhaps because *real* dreams come solely from a single dreamer, they remain befuddling. Their meanings, if any, remain elusive.



"Dreams have so much in them," says Kathleen Barry, PhD, MFT, a licensed psychotherapist in Montecito. In addition to cognitive behavioral approaches to counseling, Barry uses in her practice a form of therapy known as "dream tending," which encourages something of a dialogue between the dreamer and the dream. This theoretical orientation is based on research that points to dreams as being open channels to our emotional and mental underpinnings.

"I ask for clients to note their dreams, but I don't lead the witness," Barry says. "I don't interpret dreams. I simply ask questions about associations, and help the person to amplify the images, and find out what is going on behind those images."

These "images" Barry refers to are not just the characters in dreams, but also the locations, the background colors, and other nonhuman components. Everything in one's dreams, she believes, is intimately connected to one's psyche, which is an important aspect in the field of depth psychology. The aim of this approach is to access the subconscious and the unconscious mind; and it is built

upon the pioneering research of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and many others in the field of psychoanalysis.

“The images are alive. They’re not just static little things that we dream about,” Barry says. “There is life and vitality in those images and that’s why you want to tap into them—because they’re the crux of what you’re going to work on in therapy.”

Currently, there is a heightened awareness of dreams within our American culture, Barry believes, and she says there is an eagerness within her field to harness that interest for therapeutic benefits: “If you get people’s imaginations going and flourishing, they begin to problem-solve more creatively. It’s all related. Our inner psychic world gives us symbols, and those symbols lead us to those [relevant inner-] issues, and the issues lead us to possible resolutions.”

Deeper still within the realm of psychodynamic therapy is “lucid” dreaming. In a lucid dream the sleeping person becomes aware that he is dreaming and can participate in, and, to some degree, manipulate various aspects of the dream. As a role-rehearsal technique, lucid dreaming has been effective in treating Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome and other anxiety disorders.

To underscore an earlier point, none of this is settled science. There are many therapeutic and academic professionals who completely dismiss dreams, relegating their pursuit as something of relevance to the same pseudo-science bin as astrology and the daily horoscope. (Asked to comment for this story, a psychology professor at Cal State Lutheran responded in an email, in effect, that dreams are merely biological events that have little to do with mental health or emotional well-being, and went on to state a firm conviction that dreams represent—only—random physiological activity produced in the cortical and subcortical regions of the brain.)

If you get people’s **imagination**s going and flourishing, they begin to **problem-solve** more creatively.

There’s simply no consensus about what dreams are and why they appear when we fall asleep. In fact, science can’t determine the exact reasons why we need to sleep in the first place, so it’s no wonder that whatever our minds are doing when the rest of the body is checked out remains so mysterious. But for anyone who explores their dreams to gain emotional well-being, or to find ways of managing expectations for daily living, or to locate an origin for an undercurrent of anxiety, the images they see at night become more than just captivating theater of the mind. For them, the phrase “follow your dreams” just might be advice that is best taken literally. ■

Editor’s note: Anthony Head’s debut novel Lucid (H2H Publishing, 2010) is a psychological thriller that explores the thin line separating dreams from reality. For more information go to lucidthenovel.com.



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Arts & Culture

By Frank Nelson



Painter Art Kraft takes inspiration from the world around him in his abstract-realist works (left to right): *Green Zone*, acrylic on canvas (2010) and *The Pool*, acrylic on canvas (2008). The artist (below) in his home studio in Thousand Oaks.



TESTING THE ARTISTIC WATERS

For this local painter, to fully embrace his passion took a little time.



ART KRAFT CERTAINLY HAS THE NAME TO BE A PAINTER, and it turns out that the Thousand Oaks resident also has the ability and the passion to make it as one. But that wasn't always the case. Though he showed glimpses of artistic promise as a kid, and was later good enough to take art classes as an elective at college, his true calling and talents lay dormant for many more years.

After majoring in broadcast journalism at San Diego State University, Kraft kicked around for a few years waiting tables before putting that degree to use as a radio reporter in Tahoe. Three years later he was back in San Diego at a television station before taking a job as executive producer and newscaster at a radio station.

Then, in 1998, he moved to Thousand Oaks to help care for his ailing elderly parents. That move proved to be a turning point in more ways than one. Although he still worked in radio for another five years, Kraft, who's now 58, overcame a serious drinking problem and began to focus intently on his art.

"I just couldn't help it," he says, describing that time as a kind of awakening. "I just would not stop. I was out there painting whatever I could come up with. It wasn't much good, but as far as I was concerned it was what I needed to do."

He spent two years as news director at KCLU ("one of the best jobs I ever had") and three more producing special assignments for National Public Radio, winning a Golden

ALLYSON BARNES

Mike Award for his work. He says the stories basically set the stage for the type of art he wanted to do, which is largely inspired by what he reads, thinks, and sees in the world around him.

Kraft describes himself as an “abstract-realist” painter: “I use recognizable images, like a human form, but I still turn it around.” He also points to themes like isolation and loneliness in his work, though says he has increasingly “lightened up somewhat.”

After both of his parents died about nine months apart from one another, he was able to take a trip to Europe and spent several months in Paris. He didn't paint during that time, but when he returned to the French capital on a study grant in June 2008, he painted there for a month.

“This time I was really ready to look, and I saw some terrific art,” says Kraft, who works with acrylic paints. He took classes at the Paris American Academy and exhibited some of his work there in the Pavilion du Val de Grace. That same year one of his paintings entitled *The Pool* was chosen from approximately 1,000 entries for inclusion in the annual Tarfest music, film, and art exhibition in Los Angeles. “That was kind of my first real professional recognition,” Kraft says.

“I just would not stop. I was out there painting whatever I could come up with.”

In 2009, *The Pool* was selected for an exhibition at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, and last year the momentum continued when his works began appearing on the exclusive online site, ArtSlant. His painting *Green Zone* was chosen for ArtSlant's 2010 showcase, a selection of work based upon the considered potential of the painters to become serious professional artists.

Kraft, who's emphatically uninterested in simply painting pretty pictures, has a studio and gallery at his home, while his work is also for sale in the CSU Channel Islands gallery in downtown Ventura. His 30-inch-by-40-inch paintings fetch around \$2,000; he has sold several to a collector in Canada and others to buyers as far away as Boston and as close as Thousand Oaks.

Though Kraft says he's still not yet selling enough to earn a living, he hopes that may change following an approach from ArtSlant to make limited-edition original prints of some of his paintings to sell online.

Kraft believes his work is changing and advancing all the time. “That's the thing that has really kept me going; the fact that I keep improving. I've been getting better in the last 10 years. I've outgrown stuff that I've done in the past. That's the most important thing. My strokes and colors are getting much stronger and more confident. I think that's the biggest hurdle for me and a lot of artists ... just having the confidence.” ■

For more information on Art Kraft and to see some of his work, go to artkraftart.com.

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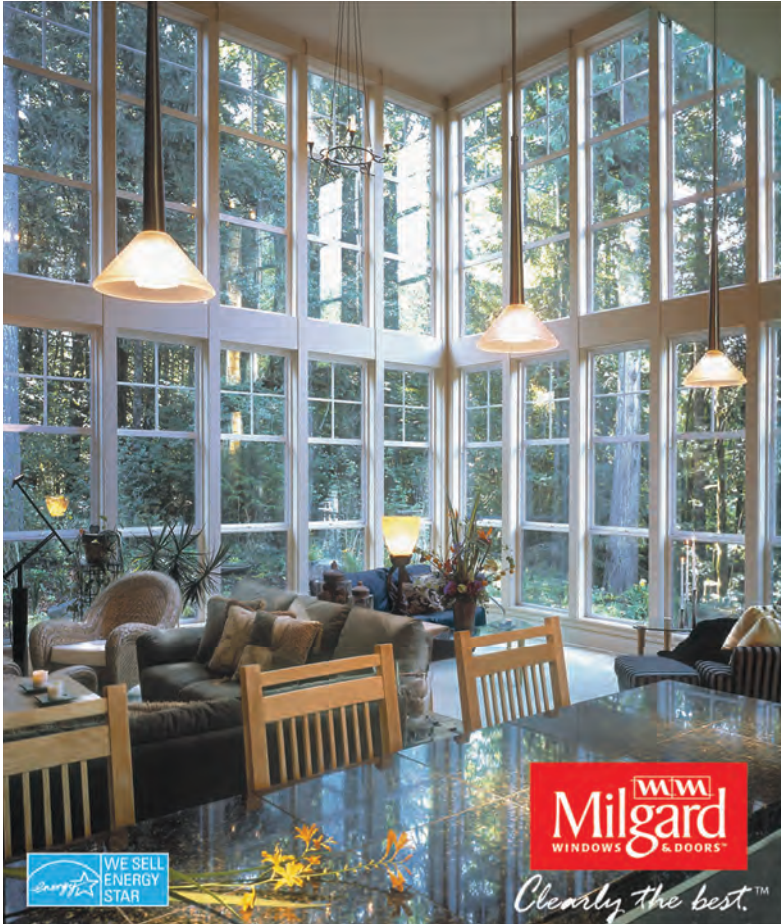
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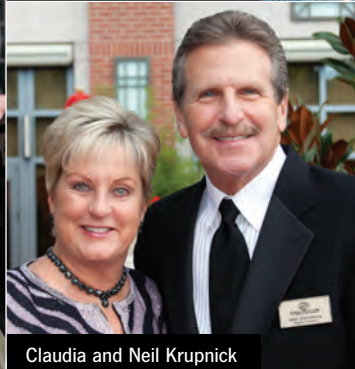
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STAND UP FOR KIDS

On October 23, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Conejo & Las Virgenes (bgcconejo.org) held its annual gala at the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village. Boys & Girls Clubs of Conejo & Las Virgenes operate five campuses in the Conejo Valley and in Calabasas to provide before- and after-school programs for youngsters from fifth through eighth grade, and weekend activities for those ages 3 to 14. The curriculum focuses on character and leadership development, education, health and life skills, the arts, fitness, and recreation. ■

—Photographs by Judi Bumstead

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TRENDS: 2011

Furnishing fads for the new year.

Pro Picks

Natural finishes, organic elements

“The Belgian design community was instrumental in bringing natural design to the forefront in 2009,” says Nina Elo-Piacquad, owner/designer of Nina at Home interior design (ninaathome.com). “It has taken hold in the United States and worked its way into fabrics, furnishings, paints, and decorative objects for the home. The trend will continue for 2011 with an emphasis on reclaimed woods, natural finishes, and textural, organic elements in furnishings, fabrics, and wall coverings.”

Don't let “natural” be misinterpreted for “bland,” however. Elo-Piacquad says, “I still adhere to the principle that there be something sparkling in the room; better to show off all the organic elements.”

Dovetail Furniture reclaimed elm **JULIAN DINING TABLE** (\$2,390) and **AUGUSTINE CHAIRS** (\$450 each) available through Nina at Home, Westlake Village, ninaathome.com.



Coastal elegance

“The coastal look has taken a bit of a twist and will be seen in 2011 with a contemporary sophistication that balances the breezy simplicity of shore life with the understated elegance of a five-star hotel,” says Karen Shoener, president of Designs of the Interior (interiordesignwestlake.com). “This photo shows the expected linen fabric of a typical coastal setting, [but] it is not applied in the more relaxed ‘unpressed’ manner. The sleek upholstery is elegantly tailored with an updated style that is old and new, laid-back and sophisticated, casual and elegant. The breezy window treatments in this photo evoke feelings of a comfortable beach house. The end result, if done correctly, is a perfect blend of casual elegance shown.”

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Our Picks

Vive la France

The love affair with French style is expected to continue in home design. Look for reproductions of French designs as well as French wording and images on upholstery and fabrics.

From French Heritage, the **D'ARTAGNAN SETTEE** with medallion-stamped fabric (\$5,160); Cabana Home, Santa Barbara, cabanahome.com.

Global Views overscaled an antique style from the turn-of-the-17th century and made it new in the **FRENCH KEY SECRETARY** (\$4,498), complete with a hidden drawer; Cabana Home, Santa Barbara, cabanahome.com.

Bold color and pattern

Let a neutral palette serve as the base with large pieces in a room, then infuse color and pattern in fun accents. Orange is hot for 2011, in shades like tangerine and pumpkin.

Nourison **FANTASY RUG** (\$269, for 6x9 feet); NW Rugs, Agoura Hills, nwrugs.com.

Palecek's **LYON ORANGE MEDALLION ARMCHAIR** in Porch Blue (\$1,319) adds interest wherever it rests; Pacific Rim Home, Westlake Village, pacificrimhome.com.

The **QUINCY SETTEE** (from \$1,440) from Rowe Furniture is built from solid hardwoods with eco-friendly cushions in more than 500 custom fabrics; Plummers Furniture, Thousand Oaks, plummers.com; or Reed's Furniture, Agoura Hills, reedsfurniture.com.



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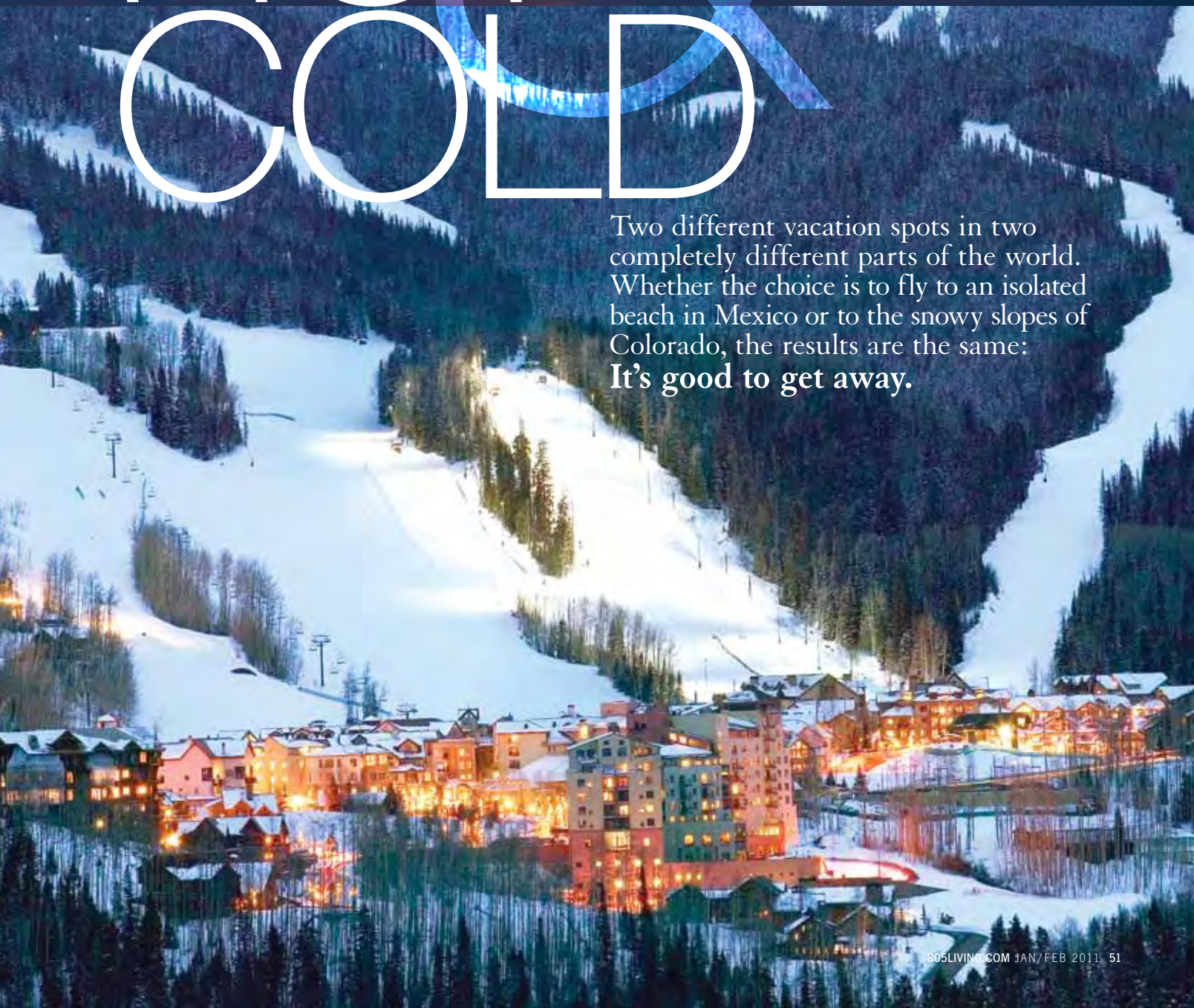
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¡Viva Playa Viva!

THIS BOUTIQUE ECO-RESORT'S REMOTENESS IS JUST THE FIRST OF ITS CHARMS.

By Anthony Head

The short walk across the tarmac into the terminal of Zihuatanejo-Ixtapa International Airport felt interminably hot and sticky. Thirty minutes later, however, after driving down Mexico's southwestern coast, where the country begins its final slope toward Central America, the air had become redolent of coconut groves and other tropical aromas. Shortly after that, my van arrived in Juluchuca, a tiny town north of Acapulco that has one speed bump as its only traffic control. It's also the portal to Playa Viva Sustainable Boutique Hotel, nearly 200 acres of coastal forest, agricultural plots, estuary tracts, and a wide-open beach.

Playa Viva (the accommodations) sits within 200 yards of the warm Pacific Ocean and features beautiful isolation stretching away in every direction. When I visited last November I couldn't help marveling at how eco-resorts often manage to locate themselves in the most spectacular of settings. (I don't mean this as an insult, but I also thought "resort" might have overplayed the property's definition—because Playa Viva immediately felt much more cozy and friendly than any resort I've stayed in south of the border.) There are five guest rooms with plans to expand, but I almost hope they don't because the size feels just right as is. Each casita is constructed from bamboo and other local and sustainable materials, like woven palm fronds for the roofs, and the open floor plans take full advantage of the persistent coastal breezes.

I'll admit that, at first, seeing mosquito nets draped over the beds was disconcerting; but when the sun went down and the bugs came out in force (leaving me to wonder if I'd wake up a pint short of O-positive) I changed my tune. That first night, in the near-total darkness, with the rolling of the ocean lulling me quickly to sleep, I felt remote, snug, and exhilarated at the same time.

Because the beds and linens were very comfortable, I woke up thoroughly refreshed. With the sun rising over the waves, I sat down with co-owner David Leventhal, who explained that he and his wife, Sandra Kahn, acquired the land four years ago and had opened Playa Viva one year ago, nearly to the day. From the beginning, they'd worked with the local community to ensure the property was an integrative component of the region. They learned how to get beyond "green" and "sustainable" in order to build "regeneratively" and enhance the natural surroundings.

"My wife is the visionary," Leventhal said, halting briefly to point out a dolphin playing a hundred yards from the shore. "She's the one who has the ideas of what it should be like, and I'm the one who executes upon her vision."

They both were guided by passions to promote biodiversity, produce more energy than they consumed, and respect the indigenous agricultural practices. But the project wasn't just about restoring and protecting the land, it was also about empowering their employees and the nearby landowners; and rather than isolating the resort, the aim was always to interact with the community.

"It's sort of like 'social architecture' and I think it's been taking hold here in a meaningful way," Leventhal said.

Playa Viva's diminutive footprint in the sand certainly helps form friendly vacation relationships: It's easy to get to know everyone (guests and staff) through low-key interactions. "We want it to be a transformative experience, whatever that may be," Leventhal said, adding, "So much of what happens on a daily basis is related to the people who come here."

In fact, I had two transformative experiences that day. The first was enjoying an amazing breakfast of huevos rancheros; and while



OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT TO RIGHT: From Playa Viva's Observatory is a view of the private casita/honeymoon suite where there is nothing but uninterrupted sand and private beach as far as the eye can see; La Tortuga Viva, the on-site turtle sanctuary, released more than 100,000 baby sea turtles into the ocean last year. THIS PAGE, TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: Sound sleeping is guaranteed in a Playa Viva studio, complete with netting that offers secure protection from mosquitoes; interiors are eco-friendly with sustainable woods and materials harvested from the regions. ABOVE: The mermaid is part of a hand-painted map of the property's 200 acres of private land. BOTTOM RIGHT: The main building features two deluxe suites and two studios and can accompany up to 12 guests. Each room features unobstructed ocean views and private balconies.

I'm not the least bit romantic when it comes to food, it is my highest compliment to say every delicious dish during my stay was cooked to be eaten rather than photographed. Still, I noted that the cameras were typically clicking away from the other guests sitting around the dining table at each meal while I kept eating.

The second amazing experience was helping to preserve native populations of sea turtles. After breakfast, guests were invited to the shoreline to release Olive Ridleys and Leatherbacks just hours after emerging from their shells. The babies scampered by the hundreds across the sand toward the open ocean and I found myself fretting like a worried parent about their futures as their tiny heads bobbed away in the surf.

It's a very popular activity for guests, who can volunteer more of their time at the nearby turtle sanctuary during their stay. There are also opportunities to commune with butterflies, lizards, and insects of dramatic coloring; there is an on-site Aztec archeological project underway; and you can go into Juluchuca for just-toasted coconut candy. (The warm-from-the-oven flavors are worth the trip, but please remember to cross the street in town at the speed bump.)

What I kept wanting to do most of all was to *relax* with a good book and a hammock, and that was okay too because there was no agenda—no built-in itinerary for guests. And at no time did the ocean cease its timeless, low rolling. The sounds of its gentle rhythms were a constant reminder that there was no other place so important to get to, and I soon felt no inclination whatsoever to leave.

Each night, as the stars bloomed again in the darkening skies, I enjoyed local mezcal and tequila at Marty's, the bar named in honor of Leventhal's father, while other guests went mad for Playa Viva's signature basil margaritas.

Then one afternoon the van arrived to drive us back to the airport. With some trepidation, I slipped on my watch (blissfully absent from my wrist the whole time) and began to pack. During my final meal, I met a young couple from Chicago that had just arrived to begin their stay, and my knowledge of what lay ahead for them somewhat abated my own sorrow for having to depart. I took one last look at the ocean, and wondered where my baby turtles were swimming.

JUST THE FACTS

Depending on the season, room rates range from \$195 to \$795 and include airport transportation, meals, and activities; playaviva.com.





BRETT SCHRECKENGOST

Taken by Telluride

A WINTER WONDERLAND OF LUXURY HOTELS, FABULOUS DINING, AND UNCROWDED DOWNHILL SKIING.

By Mallory McCreary

After years of resolving to return to a sport I'd loved as a kid, I finally made the commitment last January. Forget the crowds at Mammoth, the scene at Aspen, the schlep to Park City—I was going to schuss down the ski slopes in Telluride, Colorado.

It was already snowing when I arrived at Capella Telluride at Mountain Village, and once inside my sleek yet comfy room, I was torn between the view of the slopes and the deep soaking tub in the bathroom—anxious to hit the slopes, anxious to relax, yet mindful of the time it takes to acclimate to high altitude (the town of Mountain Village, where the primary chairlift starts, is at 9,540 feet). I opted for total relaxation with the transcendent Spirit of the Mountains massage (80 minutes; \$190) at The Spa at Capella

Telluride. Using a poultice of herbs (jasmine, sweet basil, mountain lavender), the masseuse detoxified and prepared my muscles for the onslaught ahead.

Morning dawned clear and bright, with 9 inches of fresh snow and more predicted, and I was ready. I picked up the rental ski equipment I had preordered online at Capella's Nordic Lounge; the ski valet then carted my gear to the base of the lift for me.

I'd like to say that my skiing prowess came right back to me. And if a deep face plant in fresh powder counts as prowess, then I was a master. (There's this thing about powder: It's fluffy. When I fell, my skis dug straight down, so deep that a kindly passerby had to snap them off so I could get up.) Embarrassing, yes—but buoyed by my

THIS PAGE: The rugged terrain at Telluride Ski Resort attracts ardent locals but still remains a secret to visitors from our area. OPPOSITE PAGE: Telluride is a former copper-mining town, and still retains much of its original brick Victorian architecture; rooms at Capella Telluride offer stylish comfort and plenty of extra storage (large closets, hidden drawers under the bed) for ski gear; the town of Telluride lies at the base of a box canyon; The Spa at Capella Telluride is a welcome après-ski retreat for sore muscles.



COURTESY OF CAPELLA



JON HICKS

relaxing night before, all I could do was laugh. Determined not to let the mountain get the better of me, I stopped in at the charming Alpino Vino (at nearly 12,000 feet, the highest wine bar in the country) for soup, a sandwich, and wine tasting; it *almost* made the trek worthwhile. (This year visitors can stop at the Alpine hut without skis; an enclosed snowcat shuttles diners back and forth.)

Surely I'd burned enough calories to warrant a decadent dinner, so I took the gondola to Allred's (allredsrestaurant.com) for regional, organic cuisine. The food (buffalo tenderloin, elk short loin, Rocky Mountain trout) is enough reason to go, but equally impressive are the panoramic views at 10,551 feet, especially at sunset.

Despite direct flights from LAX, Telluride remains a hidden gem. I never had to wait more

than a minute in lift lines, even when the sudden snowstorm brought in snow bunnies from near and far. Before I knew it, the weekend was over. I had barely explored the town of Telluride, located in a box canyon surrounded by gorgeous mountain vistas. There are charming shops, authentically local watering holes, and casual dining spots in the 8-by-12 block area, but no big-box stores—not even the ubiquitous green-logoed coffee shop has made an inroad here.

But who needs caffeine when there's views and dining and outdoor activity enough to sustain the most adventurous of souls? Which brings me to this year's resolution: Go back to Telluride for the peace, the escape—and maybe even a ski run or two. ■

HOW TO GET THERE

Weekend direct flights from LAX to Montrose via United Express; connecting flights on other carriers. Shuttle service from Montrose to Telluride via Telluride Express (\$96 roundtrip; tellurideexpress.com).

WHERE TO STAY*

Best bet for romance: Inn at Lost Creek; 32 lodge-style suites with fireplaces and kitchenettes (innatlostcreek.com; from \$314)

For sophisticates: Capella Telluride; 96 sleek rooms, 12 condos, fabulous dining (capellatelluride.com; from \$295)

For families: Fairmont Heritage Place Franz Klammer Lodge; two- and three-bedroom residences (fairmont.com/klammerlodge; from \$750)

*All have ski-in/ski-out access and ski valets.

JUST THE FACTS

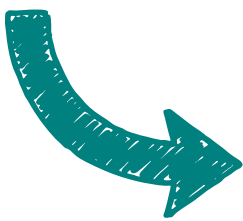
- 115 skiing trails: 24-percent beginner terrain, 38-percent intermediate, 38-percent expert
- 18 ski lifts
- 309 inches average annual snowfall
- visittelluride.com, tellurideskiresort.com



COURTESY OF CAPELLA



A Change for the Better



For some working professionals,
the career path has many turns to consider.

A new year often inspires new beginnings, but when it comes to changing careers, several factors should be considered before jumping ship, says Dr. Christine Cicone (drchristinecicone.com), a clinical psychologist in Westlake Village who's helped guide numerous clients through the process. Naturally, financial risk needs to be taken into account, including the cost (and time) for additional training or education, if required. Awareness that daily routines will change is another consideration; and to prevent future disillusionment or burnout, Cicone advises that "a career change should be about what you enjoy doing rather than just what you're good at."

It's also helpful to reframe negative thoughts: "Making a switch can be tough at first because you're basically starting over. But you're not going backward, you're going on a different path," Cicone says. Even positive change is *change*, she cautions: "Many feel a loss of the familiar and wonder why they aren't immediately happy. It's normal to feel that way, but focus on the new opportunities. Remind yourself that you're in a better place."

Switching careers midstream didn't necessarily come easy for any of the following people, but the risks they took and the obstacles they overcame have brought them to places they once only dreamed about.

By Cynthia House Nooney Photographs by Gary Moss

From Web Design Woodworking

Trevor Elliott puts it this way: “I stopped being fulfilled, so I had to take the plunge. For me there was no other option. I wanted to be able to hold something that I created in my hands. It was that simple.” He’s talking about a career switch from his decade with various West Coast ad agencies, where he designed and created “intangible” products for clients, including websites and online kiosks.

“We do it all here,” says Elliott, referring to his product-manufacturing development wood shop called Magnetic Grain that he and wife, Traci, opened in 2009 in Ventura. Making modular, magnetic wooden products for the home—completely from scratch—is the operation, and their first product, a wooden frame popular among parents, has been shipped around the world, including China: “I got a kick out of sending American-made items that direction.”

Newer products include pop-up tables and pallet chairs made from reclaimed and salvageable wood. “We’re a step beyond sustainable,” explains Elliott. “We’re big supporters of ‘upcycling’—taking discarded material and turning it into something of value through the act of invention, while preserving its former identity.”

Compared to wood recycling, upcycling uses a tiny fraction of the energy, says Elliott. He works with Bill Camarillo, CEO of Agromin, an Oxnard organics recycling operation, to obtain many of his materials and on various projects.

“I’m finally able to physically touch what I make,” says this inventor. “Wood is just plain fun. It sounds corny, but I’m following my joy.”

For more information visit magneticgrain.com.





From Airplanes Baby Carriers

For 10 years Marta Sala-Rothwell explored many far-flung locales as a pilot with United Airlines. After the birth of her first child, she was content to sew during layovers; the compliments she received about a slipcover she'd made for her daughter's baby carrier fueled her creative side. As her family grew, so too did Sala-Rothwell's passion for designing. Ultimately she turned her full-time energies toward developing a line of infant and toddler accessories.

"I'm not a natural seamstress," says Sala-Rothwell, the founder of Newbury Park-based Baby Bella Maya, "but I'm a natural salesperson." Fluency in Spanish helped Sala-Rothwell hire seamstresses from LA's garment district, and soon stores across the country lined up to carry her products when she won an innovation award for her slipcover design.

Today, the mom of four works long hours, primarily nights and weekends, but says she's right where she wants to be: "I love flying, but now I'm able to be home consistently with my children." (Her daughters range in age from 2 to 7.) "My oldest gets really excited when we see someone wearing a pair of booties or headband that I designed."

Proud of turning out quality products at affordable prices, Sala-Rothwell admits that she didn't know anything about retail when she started, but she firmly believed in her products from the beginning. "Just like in life, there's no second chance. You need to make it good the first time," she says.

For more information visit babybellamaya.com.

From Science Surfboard Skins

During his Irish Catholic upbringing in Philadelphia, Chuck Trunks' career expectations were made perfectly clear to him by his parents: "It was math or science—pick one." And so, even though he was known as an "art guy" in high school, Trunks went on to study molecular biology and wound up at Amgen as a genetic engineer and later, due to his skills in explaining complexities, he became a business analyst with the company. "I made flow charts, business models, even storyboards to break things down in an understandable manner."

After placing art on the back burner for 20 years, Trunks, now of Camarillo, finally decided it deserved priority and became a full-time artist in 2006. When he was dismissed by a number of art galleries during attempts to present his portfolio, Trunks sought out companies that use art on products. Soon he landed gigs designing skins for surfboards and cell phones. He also entered a tequila bottle-label contest that helped put his name on the map. "I quickly discovered you have to be willing to reinvent yourself when starting over."

Today, as the creator of colorful abstracts representing positive images, Trunks says he hasn't been able to get rid of his analytical side. "I'm compelled to build messages into my art about fundamental truths, like the difficulty of rebuilding relationships, careers, or life in general. Not everyone will notice the messages, but they're there."

For more information visit chucktrunks.com.



From Hollywood Page-Turners

While attending Haverford College in Pennsylvania, Robert Weibezahl imagined himself becoming the next William Butler Yeats. By the time he had graduated, though, it was obvious he'd also need a "real" job to pay bills. He landed a variety of film production stints in Hollywood after relocating from his home state of New York but never lost sight of his writing ambitions.

In his downtime Weibezahl penned *The Wicked and the Dead*, a crime thriller about a disillusioned screenwriter. "But I didn't get it published until 10 years later," he says humbly. In the meantime he co-authored *A Taste of Murder* cookbook, and its sequel, *A Second Helping of Murder*.

Weibezahl credits his wife with allowing him the flexibility to pursue his passions, which extend to music: He took piano lessons after a 25-year break, enrolled in Italian classes, and earned a degree in music at Moorpark College. He's also a member of Los Robles Master Chorale and performs with Conejo Players Theatre, Camarillo Community Theatre, and Ventura County Gilbert & Sullivan Repertoire Company.

"Growing up, getting a job with a pension was emphasized, but I've always loved the arts. I'm doing things now that I dreamed about when I was young, but then gave up on," says Weibezahl, who recently completed the second book of his crime series and is busy at work on a play.

His advice for his 15-year-old daughter, Katie: "Even though it can be difficult, do what you love. You never know where life's going to take you."

For more information visit robertweibezahl.com. ■



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Rosemary Allison
 2010 Volunteer of the Year

Rosemary Allison demonstrated exceptional leadership through direct voluntary service and coordination of groups of volunteers for the American Cancer Society Gala 2010.

Through her contributions of her personal time, effort and leadership, she influenced the success of the fundraising and organizational advancement.

"Doing our best in the world we share through charity, good works and a positive outlook. It's not a business obligation, it is a family one! My family inspires me to be a good role model, showing my children that each and every one of us has the ability, whether large or small, to contribute. I feel the most important legacy we can leave our future generations is teaching them that volunteering and "doing good" can build a sense of self-worth, and a true feeling of pride for their contribution to creating a better world." - Rosemary Allison, Century 21 America



2010 Honorees:
 Debra Brunetti, Tiesha Sell, **Rosemary Allison**, Barbara Meister, Jackie Inskeep, R. Stephen Wheatly



Rosemary receiving her award from Sandy Berg, Community Services Manager, CA American Cancer Society, Inc.



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Jaimie Hastings

Featured on TV's "Platinum Weddings" and in national & international magazines.

See another of my weddings featured in this issue: Kirsty Payne & Don Reilly

- Weddings - national & international
- Social events
- Mitzvahs
- Corporate



A full-page photograph of a bride and groom standing in a golden field with rolling hills in the background. The bride is wearing a white strapless gown with a long train and a veil, holding a bouquet. The groom is wearing a dark suit and a pink tie. The background shows rolling hills under a clear sky.

Just Married

Three couples, three outdoor settings, and three beautifully intimate weddings.

By Laura Samuel Meyn



They each felt drawn to a particular outdoor location in (or near) the 805. They each had fewer than 85 guests. And they each tapped into their personal know-how, the talents of their families and friends, and the expertise of vendors near and far to create beautiful and unique celebrations. Turn the page to see how three different couples' personal styles played out in weddings that shared the same basic premise but brought forth one-of-a-kind results.

Cathleen and Eric's special day took place at Figueroa Mountain Farmhouse near Los Olivos.



CATHLEEN & ERIC

FIGUEROA MOUNTAIN FARMHOUSE

Photographs by Jose Villa

Cathleen, from Texas, and Eric, from California, wanted to be married outside, and somewhere that felt like home to both of them. When they drove onto the property of Figueroa Mountain Farmhouse near Los Olivos—even though it was raining—they knew they had found the perfect spot. Wedding planner Rebecca Stone of Duet Weddings immediately connected with the couple, carrying out their vision of a family celebration that was intimate (80 guests) and personal (they wrote their own vows and did not share them until the ceremony), balancing understated elegance with casual comfort.

“One detail I loved was the way that we incorporated cherries into the decor. It was the very height of cherry season, and they were so gorgeous and abundant and delicious,” says Stone. “Another detail: I loved using hay bales as seating. Fitting for the farmhouse setting, and such a fun alternative to chairs, especially when covered in mismatched fabrics and quilts.”

Cathleen and Eric adapted the typical wedding lineup to reflect their own lives more closely: Instead of bridesmaids and groomsmen, they each had their sisters by their sides. Cathleen skipped the hairdresser in favor of help from her friends. And a special sweet ending made it even more personal: pecan pies, flown in from Texas.



CATHLEEN & ERIC'S WEDDING RESOURCES

WEDDING PLANNER AND EVENT DESIGN

Rebecca Stone, Duet Weddings
(duet-weddings.com)

WEDDING LOCATION

Figueroa Mountain Farmhouse
(figueroamountainfarmhouse.com)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Jose Villa (josevillaphoto.com)

BAND

Salt Martians Bluegrass Band
(saltmartians.com)

DJ

Tony Liebetrau, Red Shoe
Productions (redshoela.com)

FLORAL DESIGN

Juniper Designs (juniperfloraldesigns.com)

TABLETOP CALLIGRAPHY

Bianca Mascorro, Little Miss Press
(littlemisspress.com)

WEDDING CAKE

Decadence (decadenceweddingcakes.com)

PECAN PIES

Goode Co. (goodecompany.com)

CATERER

Santa Barbara Barbeque Gourmet
Catering (sbbgcg.com)

RENTALS

Classic Party Rentals
(classicpartyrentals.com)

LIGHTING

Bella Vista (bellavistadesigns.com)

WEDDING DRESS DESIGNER

Modern Trousseau
(moderntrousseau.com)

BRIDE'S SHOES

Christian Louboutin
(christianlouboutin.com)

GROOMSWEAR DESIGNER

Brooks Brothers (brooksbrothers.com)

HAIRSTYLIST

bride's friends

ENGAGEMENT RING AND WEDDING BANDS

Single Stone (singlestone.com)

TRANSPORTATION

Roadrunner Shuttle &
Limousine (rrshuttle.com)







KIRSTY & DON

HUMMINGBIRD NEST, SANTA SUSANA

Photographs by Elizabeth Messina

Following their Valentine's Day engagement, Kirsty and Don wanted to plan a wedding weekend in a relaxed setting to make the experience stress-free for their families and friends, many traveling from across the country and abroad. Hummingbird Nest in Santa Susana, with enough guesthouses to accommodate most of their 60 guests, proved to be the perfect spot to take over for the weekend.

Influenced by Kirsty's English roots and childhood in Holland, fanciful touches were present in a number of details, many of them contributed by family. Butterfly cookies (made by her aunt and two uncles) paid homage to Kirsty's lifelong connection with butterflies, which also showed up on the end of handmade swizzle sticks that her father created to serve with Pimm's Cup, an English cocktail. Kirsty and her mother also made Victorian paper cones to hold rose petals. "Our parents were a pillar of support," says Kirsty. "Without them we could not have created such a magical wedding."

The setting, with its sprawling lawns and mountain backdrop, lent its own magic to the rehearsal dinner, ceremony, reception—and beyond. "We watched the sunrise from the massive boulders the morning after our wedding," says Kirsty. "We stayed up all night like kids, hoping it wouldn't end."

KIRSTY & DON'S WEDDING RESOURCES

INVITATION ARTWORK

commissioned original drawing
by Ukrainian artist Denis
Chernov (chernov-art.com)

INVITATION PRINTING

Mimio (mimiopapers.com)

EVENT LOCATION

Hummingbird Nest
(hummingbirdnestranch.com)

WEDDING COORDINATOR

Jaimie Hastings, Churchill House
VIP Events (churchill-intl.com)

OFFICIANT

Kate Mrgudic, Next Steps Life
Coaching (katemrgudic.com)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Elizabeth Messina
(elizabethmessina.com)

STRING TRIO

Strings by Reiko (stringsbyreiko.com)

DJ

Nahchey Storer, Hey Mister DJ
(heymisterdj.com)

FLORAL DESIGN

Hoot & Heart Co. (hootandheart.com)

WEDDING CAKE

NancyKay's Confections
(nkconfections.com)

CAKE TOPPER

Fancy Flours (fancyflours.com)

CATERER

Someone's in the Kitchen (sitk.com)

RENTALS

A Rental Connection
(arentalconnection.com)

WEDDING DRESS DESIGNER

Melissa Sweet (priscillaofboston.com)

BRIDE'S SHOES

Pour La Victoire (zappos.com)

BRIDE'S EARRINGS

MMM Jewelry & Design
(mmmjewelry.com)

BRIDESMAID DRESS DESIGNER

BCBGMax Azria (bcbg.com)

HAIRSTYLIST

Natalie Joseph (luxelab.com)

MAKEUP ARTIST

Veronica Lane (veronicalane.com)

ENGAGEMENT RING

23rd St. Jewelers (23rdstreetjewelers.com)



LYNNETTE & JAMES

CHATEAU LE DOME AT SADDLEROCK RANCH

Photographs by Joy Harmon Prouty

Lynnette and James knew beforehand that their wedding would be outdoors and casual (“the feel of a vintage backyard picnic”), intimate (“we only had 75 guests”), and fun (“like a big family party”). Their plans were further inspired by the movie *Up*, with its telling of an enduring love story that celebrates the little things in life. Ultimately Lynnette and James were married at Saddlerock Ranch in Malibu, where they walked together down a grassy aisle flanked by quilts laid out for guest seating, and picnic baskets as aisle markers.

Lynnette and her mother, who together run Cupcakery in Thousand Oaks, created a dessert table full of freshly baked treats—a wedding cake and cupcakes, of course, but also cookies, tarts, petits fours, and French *macarons*. “People thought I was crazy for making my own desserts, but I think they would have been disappointed if the desserts weren’t from Cupcakery,” says Lynnette.

Guests especially loved the photo booth, where they posed for shots during the reception, in a nod to the couple’s engagement in a vintage photo booth in San Francisco. But Lynnette’s favorite moment—their vows—was even more personal. “I finally came up with the perfect thing to say,” she says. “His [words] were just as thoughtful—and he tied my ring to balloons.”



LYNNETTE & JAMES’ WEDDING RESOURCES

INVITATIONS

designed by the couple and
screen-printed by a friend

INVITATION SUPPLIES

Paper Source (paper-source.com)

WEDDING LOCATION

Chateau Le Dome at Saddlerock
Ranch (malibufamilywines.com)

PHOTOGRAPHER

Joy Harmon Prouty, Wildflowers
Photography (wildflowersphotos.com)

FLORAL DESIGN

Kate Holt, Flower Wild
(flowerwild.com)

WEDDING CAKE AND DESSERTS

Cupcakery (cupcakeryonline.com)

CATERER

Emily and Nick Brune, Eco Caters
(ecocaters.com)

RENTALS

Town & Country Event
Rentals & Services
(townandcountryeventrentals.com)

WEDDING DRESS DESIGNER

Melissa Sweet (priscillaofboston.com)

BRIDE’S SHOES

Charles David (charlesdavid.com)

GROOMSWEAR DESIGNER

J.Crew (jcrew.com)

BRIDESMAID DRESS DESIGNER

Anthropologie (anthropologie.com)

HAIR STYLIST

Jarrett Baker-Wilkinson
Euodia Salon (805-428-4876)

ENGAGEMENT RING

vintage 1920s

WEDDING BANDS

Gold N Heart (goldnheartjewelry.com)

CAKE TOPPER

Etsy/Lollipop Workshop
(etsy.com/shop/lollipopworkshop)

PHOTO BOOTH

Capital Photo Booth Co.
(capitalphotoboosth.com)



EAT YOUR GREENS

Perfect preparations that will have them asking for seconds.

HEARTY GREENS like collard, kale, and chard aren't limited to the long-simmering side dish so popular in the American South; greens show up in dishes from all over the world, including appetizers, soups, stews, stir-fries, savory tarts, and egg dishes. Their worldwide popularity stems from good reason: Greens aren't just delicious, they're incredibly nourishing, too.

Yet, in spite of all their attractive qualities, hearty greens are not something that many of us cook at home every week. Longtime vegetable enthusiast (and the former editor of *Fine Cooking* magazine) Susie Middleton thinks she knows why. "People know that greens are good for you, but they think they don't taste good—probably because they've eaten them over- or under-cooked, or under-seasoned," she says. "I knew there was a real need for a technique-based vegetable book." And so she wrote one: *Fast, Fresh & Green: More Than 90 Delicious Recipes for Veggie Lovers* (Chronicle Books, 2010; chroniclebooks.com).

While greens such as spinach and Swiss chard take no more than a quick sauté, Middleton points out that different varieties require more thorough cooking. "If you try to quickly wilt most kales, mustard greens, or dandelion greens, you will not be pleased with the chewy results," says Middleton. "I find that four or five minutes in boiling water—just until tender—is the best thing for hearty greens. From there, greens can be drained and squeezed dry, and used in sautés and gratins."

Seasoning them correctly is also key: "Greens love a touch of acid like lemon or vinegar and most all benefit from a little sweet, too; so a sweet-sour combination like balsamic vinegar and honey is a perfect finish for greens," Middleton says. "Once you learn to cook them—and learn what flavors to pair them with—you'll be so grateful for their bold flavors and satisfying texture. I really do feel good after eating greens."

At the Market

Underwood Family Farms in Moorpark and Somis (underwoodfamilyfarms.com) grows several varieties of hearty greens, which are sold at the farms and at local farmers' markets. They also have a year-round Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program: Sign up for a weekly box of produce, and you'll find yourself experimenting with various greens and other vegetables that might not be on your regular shopping list.

Here are a few of our favorite greens worth trying. Note that greens have a tendency to harbor grit, so swish them around in a bowl of water and rinse well before cooking.

Chard can often be used in place of spinach. It cooks more quickly than most hearty greens and often shows up in Italian frittatas and soups, and sautéed as a side dish. For visual interest, look for varieties such as Bright Lights or Rainbow chard, which have brightly colored stems.

Collard greens are known for being a soul-food staple. They are typically boiled with a ham hock or bacon and served as a side dish. Unlike chard, the tough leaves require boiling or marinating. These greens are a type of cabbage that doesn't form a head and can be used much like any other cabbage—in soups and slaws.

Kale, like collard greens, is a non-heading member of the cabbage family; it has a mild cabbage-like flavor. Kale cooks more slowly than spinach and can be blanched or steamed before stir-frying or sautéing. It is popular in Ireland, where it's mixed with mashed potatoes, and in Italy, where you'll find it in soups or atop crostini. It can also be roasted and made into chips for a healthful snack.

Spinach is probably the most common and versatile green on this list. It has a sweet flavor and relatively tender leaves, making it delicious when served raw in salads, sandwiches, and wraps. The raw leaves may also be used in place of part or all of the basil when making pesto. Cooked spinach is delicious as a side dish, whether sautéed or creamed, and in egg dishes, quesadillas, dips, soups, and stir-fries.



Bright Lights Swiss chard—sometimes called rainbow chard—makes this sauté as colorful as it is nourishing; pine nuts and balsamic butter make it downright delicious.



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» Taste^{FOOD}

IN THE KITCHEN

STIR-FRIED SWISS CHARD WITH PINE NUTS AND BALSAMIC BUTTER

This recipe comes courtesy of Fast, Fresh & Green by Susie Middleton (Chronicle Books, 2010; chroniclebooks.com). Middleton writes, "Often recipes will call just for the leaves of Swiss chard, but I think it's a shame to waste the stems. After separating them from the leaves, I slice the stems thinly. Then I cook them for about 5 minutes before adding the leaves, which only need a brief time in the pan. It makes me especially happy when those stems are the colorful orange, yellow, pink, and white ones of the Bright Lights variety of chard."

- 1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- ½ teaspoon dark brown sugar
- 12 ounces Bright Lights Swiss chard (do not trim)
- 1 tablespoon peanut oil
- 3 tablespoons pine nuts
- Kosher salt
- 2 teaspoons finely chopped garlic
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter

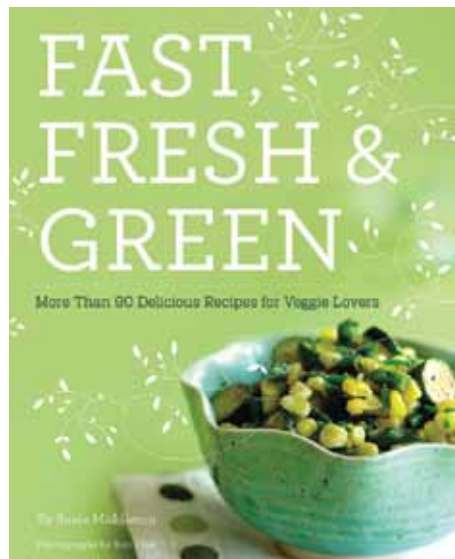
1. In a small bowl, combine the balsamic vinegar, soy sauce, and brown sugar.

2. Pull or cut the stems away from the chard leaves. Cut or rip the leaves into 2- to 3-inch pieces and wash and dry them well. Rinse the stems and slice them crosswise into ¼-inch pieces.

3. Heat the peanut oil in a large (12-inch) nonstick stir-fry pan over medium heat. When the oil is hot (it will loosen and spread out), add the pine nuts and cook, stirring almost constantly, until they're all lightly browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Watch carefully, because they brown quickly. Remove the pan from the heat and use a slotted spoon or spatula to transfer the pine nuts to a heat-proof plate or pan, leaving behind as much fat as possible.

4. Return the pan to the heat, add the chard stems and a pinch of salt, and cook, stirring occasionally, until shrunken and beginning to brown lightly, about 5 minutes. (They will begin to crackle in the pan as moisture evaporates.) Add the garlic and stir-fry just until fragrant, a few seconds. Add the chard leaves and ½ teaspoon salt and, using tongs, toss the chard leaves in the pan just until wilted (30 to 45 seconds). Scrape the balsamic mixture into the pan, stir, and remove the pan from the heat. Add the butter and toss and stir until it's melted. Fold in half of the pine nuts. Transfer the chard (including all the stems and liquid) to a small serving bowl and garnish with the remaining pine nuts. Serves 2 to 3. ■

Fast, Fresh & Green (Chronicle Books, 2010; chroniclebooks.com) by Susie Middleton is a technique-based book that shows cooks the best ways to prepare greens and other veggies.



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10 FOR 11

Use both hands to grab these regional releases for the year ahead.



Ortman Family Vineyards 2009 Chardonnay, Central Coast (\$18); ortmanwines.com

This refreshing new release from the Ortman's O2 series features much less oakiness and much more fruit. By allowing the varietal to come through clearly, Ortman has produced a chard with engaging brightness and minerality not usually associated with California chardonnay.



Peachy Canyon 2007 Westside Zinfandel, Paso Robles (\$19); peachycanyon.com

The state's best grape shines brightest in Paso Robles. This vintage, from perennial zin masters Peachy Canyon, was unfiltered and unfined before bottling. The result is round and slim at the same time; it's also balanced—a true oenophilical™ feat when a wine like this tops out at 14.8 percent alcohol.



Candor Zinfandel, Lot 2, California (\$20); candorwines.com

There is a revolution taking place, which may convince the public that knowing vintages and appellations aren't all that important to appreciate a wine. At the forefront of this movement is Candor. Its non-vintage, medium-bodied zinfandel is full of flavor, easily drinkable, and wonderfully affordable. With all that, who needs to see a year listed on the label?



Eberle 2008 Syrah, Steinbeck Vineyard, Paso Robles (\$21); eberlewinery.com

For a syrah that is lively from the first pour, Eberle's '08 also continues to warm up in the glass and exude hints of earth, oak, and dark berries. It features Old World lushness and New World liveliness from the same bottle. Try it with grilled white fish, duck breast, and aged cheddar cheese.



Stacked Stone 2007 Gem, Paso Robles (\$22); stackedstone.com

This blend of syrah, mourvèdre, and grenache demonstrates both finesse and power. Each Rhône varietal makes itself clearly known (and appreciated) through the wine's aromas and flavors; and the dry finish lingers—tasting of all three grapes—and makes something of a forceful request: Try another sip!



Lafond Winery 2008 SRH Syrah, Santa Rita Hills (\$23); lafondwinery.com

With a blend of grapes from the cooler, western vineyards of the Santa Ynez Valley, this syrah shows how deep and rich the varietal can become. The wine's concentration of dark cherry and floral notes makes it a great pairing for rack of lamb, mushroom ragout, and braised short ribs. (Just not all at once, please.)



Zaca Mesa 2007 Syrah, Santa Ynez Valley (\$25); zacamesa.com

I poured this Santa Barbara County red with a bright light in the background and the result looked like a glassful of jewels. Its beauty lies beyond its color, though, with earthy wild herb aromas and full-bodied dark, smoky flavors.



Vina Robles 2008 Petite Sirah, Jardine, Paso Robles (\$26); vinarobles.com

The deceptively named varietal, petite sirah, belies the rich, full-bodied wine that comes from within. The tannins start out firm and sturdy but relax the longer the wine sits. It's a beefy wine for a beefy dinner, but like most wines of this caliber, this cuvée of three vineyards should age for several years without losing any structure.



Foxen 2009 Pinot Noir, Santa Maria Valley (\$34); foxenvineyard.com

Here, there are the usual vanilla and berry notes that the Santa Maria Valley produces; and there is typical firmness in the body, too. But Foxen's pinot is a touch lighter than some (including its '08 vintage), especially in the finish, making it versatile even by pinot noir's standards. It will go nicely with a variety of foods—from grilled chicken to Camembert, to roast beef sandwiches.



Sea Smoke 2008 Ten Pinot Noir, Santa Barbara County (\$80); seasmokecellars.com

Despite Sea Smoke Cellars having vintages that only stretch back 10 years, there are few other California pinot producers who craft consistently excellent wines with every outing. So rounding out this list of 10 wonderful wines is Ten, a pinot noir that is dressed to impress. I'd strongly recommend an hour or so of decanting in order to allow this stunner enough time to open up. And if it's going into the cellar, this one will be ready to go for at least four solid years. ■

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CENTRAL COAST WINES MADE EASY.
By Anthony Head

There is an awful lot of coast that makes up our Central Coast, and there are more wine-grape varietals growing within it than I have space here to list. Donati's 2007 Claret gets just about as many of them into one bottle as I've ever tasted.



"Claret" is a British term dating back several centuries, and it traditionally referred to various rosé wines from Bordeaux. Today, in the United States, that word on a wine label usually indicates that some sort of "Bordeaux blend" lies within. Donati's warm, juicy cuvée includes five Bordeaux varietals (by volume: merlot, cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc, petit verdot, malbec) plus syrah, which, incidentally, is a very successful Rhône varietal from the Rhône-friendly Paso Robles AVA, which includes Templeton, where Donati's tasting room is located.

However, the Donati family's estate vineyards and winery are in the Paicines AVA, which is much closer to San Francisco than Templeton. But as I've said, it is indeed a big Central Coast, and I like the concept of viticultural mingling because that's how great ideas spread. I also like this wine. ■

Donati Family Vineyard 2007 Claret, Paicines (\$20)
donatifamilyvineyard.com

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Taste of the Town

By Angela Pettera



PETER VITALE

This page: There's no better prelude to warming up to that certain someone than dining near the fire pit at Bella Vista at Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara (left) on house-made pork sausage ravioli with aged balsamic, cherries, and sage (below). **Opposite page:** Rustic elegance at The Stonehouse at San Ysidro Ranch greatly increases the potential for a night of romance.



HAVE A BITE, STAY OVERNIGHT

Sexy Santa Barbara restaurants within resorts (and hotels) provide an excuse for a romantic interlude.

COLD WINTER DAYS CAN LEAD TO INCREASED SNUGLING among couples—it certainly does in my home. It might be because we don't have a central heating system, or it might be that January and February are particularly romantic months with all the Valentine paraphernalia around. Whatever it is, these days I'm looking around for cozy, quiet restaurants with candlelight or fireplaces. Santa Barbara seems to have a surfeit of sweet dining nooks, many of them located in posh resorts or darling hotels, which means the snuggling can last overnight and even carry on into brunch.

In the mood for a luxe getaway? Almost nothing tops **San Ysidro Ranch, A Rosewood Resort** (sanysidoranch.com). It's hard to find and *ka-ching* expensive. The rustic Stonehouse restaurant sits above the pub-like Plow & Angel in a building with stone walls, wooden floors and ceilings, Turkish rugs, and oil paintings. Chef John Trotta pan-sears foie gras, poaches Maine lobster in butter, grills up Delmonico steaks, and blackens red snapper at dinnertime. For brunch, the outdoor seating on the upstairs patio or in the first-floor courtyard is the way to go. Tables are surrounded by trees or hedges, and guests feel a million miles away from any city. A Dungeness crab omelet or macadamia-nut-crusted brioche French toast pairs well with a sparkling chardonnay brut.

Bella Vista in the **Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara** (fourseasons.com/santabarabara) has seen some changes lately. New chef Alessandro Cartumini brings a charming Italian accent to the beautiful dining room, with its wide-angle views of the ocean. In addition to Cal-Italian breakfasts and brunches, Cartumini creates a fully Italian buffet every Monday night; on Thursday nights he sets up an extravagant seafood buffet. But the most intimate dining happens on Friday and Saturday nights by the fire pit on the patio or inside near the fountain. Start with Kobe beef carpaccio or the roasted kabocha squash soup with amaretti crumbles. A main course can be the sausage ravioli with huckleberries and brown butter or the miso-roasted black cod with chickpeas and a mushroom-tomato ragout. For dessert there's a dark chocolate soufflé and a banana brownie sundae.

The best value of all the resorts in Santa Barbara just might be **Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort** (fessparkersantabarbarahotel.com) on 24 acres on East Cabrillo Boulevard across from the beach. The resort prides itself on caring service, which begins with complimentary warm cookies upon check-in. Fess Parker wines are stationed in each room for purchase and at the wine-tasting bar, which is open in the lobby on weekends. A glass or bottle of the



2008 Fess Parker Syrah pairs perfectly with the excellent steaks served at **Rodney's Steakhouse** (rodneyssteakhouse.com). Rodney's celebrated its 10th anniversary in June (having been created well after the hotel opened). The high-ceilinged dining room with two levels of seating is lovely in dark blues and pale yellows. My favorite table is just under the fireplace built into the high-curving marbled-tiled wall. Executive chef Kirk DeLong purchases 40 percent of his ingredients locally to make items such as Santa Barbara spot prawn scampi over basil linguine. Steaks, like the tender and delicious filet mignon, get seared in the 1,650-degree infrared broiler. Sauces—béarnaise, bordelaise, peppercorn—come on the side as do the large portions of vegetables. The crispy truffle-Parmesan french fries are “OMG” good; the sautéed mushrooms are close behind.

The **Canary Hotel** (canarysantabarbara.com) is an adorable place for lovebirds to perch. Canopied beds, colorful tiles everywhere, and a rooftop pool make this feel like an exotic locale. **Coast Restaurant & Bar**, just off the lobby, serves great chops and grilled trout at dinnertime. The “Big Easy Brunch” on Sunday is a real treat: Dames and gents can dress up and boogie to swing music played by Ulysses, the jazz band. Start with a swank shrimp cocktail or the piping-hot doughnuts. I usually go for breakfasty items at brunch, and the omelet with asparagus and Gruyère cheese is a nice choice. But the New Orleans-inspired specials like Eggs Sardou with Ham are hard to pass up, too. Even the cocktails have a Southern theme with the Mint Julep and the Creole Bloody Mary.

A darling Victorian house built in 1871 is now **The Upham Hotel** (uphamhotel.com). **Louie's** (louieusb.com), the California bistro on the first floor, is run by Anne Rizzoli and her partner, chef Trey Brooks. I gravitate toward the wraparound veranda during lunchtime and the table in the semiprivate nook at night. A huge slice of meatloaf, warmed on the grill and laid over garlic-mashed potatoes, is available at lunch and dinner; so is the fettuccine with tomatoes and basil in an herbed cream sauce. On Sunday and Monday nights, there's a two-course prix-fixe dinner for \$20 with entrée choices like the aforementioned meatloaf or a seafood cioppino. Fun desserts include a peanut-butter pie and the root beer float, perfect for sharing with that snuggly someone. ■



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DIALED IN

Must-have meals around the 805.

For more dining news, visit our blog, "Angie Eats," at blog.805living.com.

Dorn's Breakers Cafe (dornscafe.com) in Morro Bay has been a Dorn-family operation since 1948. The locals flock here for the view of the bay from the wraparound deck and the breakfast items like homemade muffins, green chile omelets, and petrale sole with eggs. I'm partial to the delicious **buckwheat pancakes** (plain \$7) with awesome mix-ins (\$10) like pecans, blueberries, chocolate chips, and bacon (which can be cooked into the waffles and buttermilk pancakes, too). I opt for the chewy bacon pieces mixed right into the healthful buckwheat batter. Then I pour on a spare amount of warm maple syrup for the perfect sweet/salty balance.

Catering Celebrations by The Plug Nickel (cateringcelebrations.com) in Westlake Village has also been around for many years, 35 to be exact, serving breakfast and lunch in a cozy nook within a business park. I just love the lunchtime **MacIntosh Sandwich** (\$10) with peanut butter, thinly sliced apples, bacon, and Swiss cheese on raisin bread. It sounds as if those ingredients wouldn't play well together, but the whole effect is weirdly good.

Lunchtime is buzzing at **McPhee's Grill** (mcphees.com) in the tiny farm town of Templeton. The large dining room in an old wooden structure that looks like it came right out of a spaghetti western is always full. It's hard to believe that this many people can possibly live nearby, but chef-owner Ian McPhee has been making lunch and dinner here for 17 years and says, "It's kind of an interesting deal. At lunch, business people from Paso and Atascadero seem to find us." I can see why: The **oak-grilled salmon** on a ciabatta roll (\$12) is perfectly cooked and comes with rémoulade on the side. The **sweet-potato fries** (\$6) topped with basil salt are impossible to put down. The **barbecued pulled pork sandwich** (\$14) topped with slaw and pickles is fantastic and memorable, because the meat is tender and moist. Hints of a Chinese spice blend McPhee uses come through with subtlety. It's sort of haunting.

The dining venue of the Thousand Oaks Inn Best Western continues to evolve. **TOI Tapas Bar & Lounge** (toitapasbar.com) opened quietly in the library space of the Inn, just beyond the front desk. Soon it will take over the old Du-par's space with its own entrance beside the Inn. Restaurant manager Walner Amaya and executive chef Richard Blanke both came from Breadbar in LA. The small-plates menu is sophisticated and well executed. Don't miss the tiny squares of **Taleggio Grilled Cheese Canapés** (\$5). The mini sandwiches are smeared with a black olive tapenade and sit on a spoonful of smoked tomato sauce. TOI also turns out delightful pizzas like the vegetarian variety topped with basil oil, roasted vegetables, Gouda cheese, and baby field greens from McGrath Family Farms. Once the restaurant moves into its larger space, the menu will expand to include more main courses.

A few changes have been happening at **Café 14** (cafe-14.com) in Agoura Hills. Chef-owner Neil Kramer explains that he and his partner Claudine Bernard have "tried to bring our price points down." All the entrées are now \$29 or less, which meant moving some of the steak side dishes to an à la carte menu. At the same time many more small plates have been added. One of those outstanding examples is the **seared diver scallops** (\$17), two large, juicy scallops perfectly seared and placed over a carpet of quickly sautéed leeks in a light cream sauce. Two drizzles of a tangy, sweet apple-cider reduction bookend the plate. It's as delicious as it is beautiful. "We're making a lot of strides in being very boutique, very local," explains Kramer, who is now curing meats like pancetta, *tasso* ham, and *merguez* sausage in-house. He's thrilled with Café 14's recent high score for food from the *Zagat Survey*. "We're really excited about the 27." As if to prove it, Café 14 is now offering a six-course tasting menu (\$65; \$95 with wine pairings) by request (just call a day ahead to set it up). ■

Have a tip for our restaurant news pages? Email our dining editor at angela@805living.com.

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. The "Lunch Bunch" listings are casual spots ideally suited for lunch hour. Enjoy!

KEY TO SYMBOLS:

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

LOCK 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 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
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.

NEW BELLA VISTA IN THE FOUR SEASONS THE BILTMORE SANTA BARBARA

1260 Channel Drive
Montecito, 805-969-2261
fourseasons.com/santabarbara/dining.html
Californian
Entrées \$23–\$49

Romantic, Great View, Sunday Brunch, Afternoon Tea Friday & Saturday

Bella Vista, named for its sweeping views of lawn, ocean, and sky, has a slightly Italian bent thanks to chef Alessandro Cartumini. He uses local fish and produce plus herbs from the resort's garden and handmade pastas. Light sauces, grains like farro, and fruit-focused desserts keep dishes healthful. On Sunday nights the theme is "surf and turf" with grill and seafood pairings. On Monday nights an Italian buffet takes over for \$39 per person. On Thursday nights the buffet dishes up seafood for \$49 per person. The wine list has lots of California bottles.

BOUCHON

9 W. Victoria St.
Santa Barbara, 805-730-1160
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
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; terra-cotta-baked chicken with a tomato and red-wine sauce; and a classic rib-eye steak with white beans and sage.

COAST RESTAURANT & BAR

31 W. Carillo St.
Santa Barbara, 805-879-9100
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
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.



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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 lunch-time, panini sandwiches are available. Enoteca Toscana is open for lunch and dinner Tuesday through Sunday.

FLEMING'S PRIME STEAKHOUSE & WINE BAR

6373 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Woodland Hills, 818-346-1005
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.

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL WESTLAKE VILLAGE

2 Dole Drive
Westlake Village, 818-575-3000
fourseasons.com/westlakevillage/dining.html
Californian & Asian
Entrées \$10–\$50; Buffet Meals \$39–\$62
Romantic, Great View, Sunday Brunch

Executive chef Mario Alcocer oversees the food for Hampton's and the Lobby Lounge at this Four Seasons while chef Masa Shimakawa tackles the menus for Onyx. Hampton's serves a seafood buffet on Friday nights, a Mediterranean à la carte menu on Saturday nights, and Sunday brunch in a posh room with views of the waterfall. Onyx serves beautiful sushi and Japanese dishes for dinner Monday through Saturday nights. The more casual Lobby Lounge offers breakfast and lunch daily, with dinner Sunday through Thursday nights. Afternoon high tea service is available every Saturday, but reservations are required.

GEOFFREY'S MALIBU

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

Great View, Saturday & Sunday Brunch

The alfresco 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
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.

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
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
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 outsized. 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
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
mozbar.com
Pan-Asian
Entrées \$17–\$36
Live Music

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; mahimahi 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
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) menus, 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.

PADRI RESTAURANT & MARTINI BAR

29008 Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-865-3700
padrirestaurant.net
Italian
Entrées \$11–\$26
Live Music

The Martini Bar adjoining the restaurant has its own upbeat scene but the dining room and patio stay tranquil and relaxing all night. Before settling into a comfy cushioned booth, check the specials on the blackboard because they're usually wonderful and unusual. The bruschetta appetizer is quite hearty with three different toppings per order. A prosciutto and

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burrata plate comes with grilled veggies. The spaghetti with tiny veal meatballs (*polpettine*) is a classic. There are plenty of wines by the glass, beers, and (of course) martinis to drink.

ROY'S

6363 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Woodland Hills, 818-888-4801
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.

NEW SABOR COCINA MEXICANA

2200 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-497-2457
saborcocinamexicana.com

Mexican

Entrées \$15–\$32

Romantic

It's flashy, spendy, and fancy—not your usual Mexican *cocina*. Eat in the bar area where huge margaritas are being blended, or on the front patio while people-watching, or in the main dining room with the massive chandeliers strung with red glass hearts. Chef-owner Leticia Hansen turns out beautifully plated entrées like chicken enchiladas with Oaxacan cheese and *cochinilla pibil*, which is pork in achiote sauce. Her partner and husband, Mark Hansen, makes sure the dining areas are running smoothly.

SEAGRASS

30 E. Ortega St.
Santa Barbara, 805-963-1012
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 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
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.

Vince Restivo, the son of one of Vitello's (Studio City) founding fathers, has brought his family tradition to Thousand Oaks as Vitello's Trattoria (vitellostrattoria.com). "We're going back to our old recipes," says Restivo, who is no longer connected with the 818 restaurants.

SUZANNE'S CUISINE

502 W. Ojai Ave.
Ojai, 805-640-1961
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 fire-place. 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
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.

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-herb sauce; and the chicken breast comes under a sun-dried tomato pesto.

VIVOLI CAFÉ & TRATTORIA

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

Italian

Entrées \$11–\$29

Romantic

The lighting is flattering and the booths are cozy at this romantic little trattoria. The bread and olive tapenade set on the table are delish, so is the shaved artichoke salad with Parmesan. The long list of pastas won't disappoint. Fish and seafood dishes tend to be light and flavorful. Meats include beautifully breaded chicken and veal, rack of lamb, pork tenderloin, and steaks. On Mondays, look for a three-course *prix-fixe* menu special for around \$15.

LOOK WATERMARK

598 Main St.
Ventura, 805-643-6800
watermarkonmain.com

New American

Entrées \$15–\$44

Romantic

Downstairs is posh and formal with stylish vintage decor and a large deco-style bar serving classic drinks. The menu at brunch and dinner is hearty sit-down fare from chef Peter Edwards. Top-notch musical acts play Tuesday through Saturday nights. Upstairs on the roof, accessed by elevator, the mood is lighter and the dress more casual. The ocean motif includes fish tanks and wavy glass; the menu is more about small plates and new drink concoctions. Wherever you sit, you won't be disappointed with the views.

ZIN BISTRO AMERICANA

32131 Lindero Canyon Road
Westlake Village, 818-865-0095
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.

ARTISAN

1401 Park St.
Paso Robles, 805-237-8084
artisanpasorobles.com

New American

Entrées \$21–\$28

Romantic, Sunday Brunch

Vegetables farmed on demand, sustainably raised meats, and an award-winning chef combine to form a temple of gastronomy in the heart of 805 wine country. Chris Kobayashi creates unforgettable, seasonal food, his brother Mike Kobayashi makes sure the service is impeccable, and Chris's wife Shandi Kobayashi matches excellent wines to her husband's cuisine. No visit to Paso is complete without a stop here.

BROOKS

545 E. Thompson Blvd.
Ventura, 805-652-7070
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).

LOOK CAFÉ 14

30315 Canwood St.
Agoura Hills, 818-991-9560
cafe-14.com
Cal-French
Entrées \$25–\$29

Romantic

Chefs-owners Neil Kramer and Claudine Bernard put a lot of care into the cooking at Café 14: the kitchen staff cures their own meats, buys local produce from farmers, and makes their own desserts; nothing but the well-curated wine list is outsourced. But that doesn't mean this sweet little romantic café will break the bank. Exquisite small plates and hearty side dishes are all less than \$20. Larger main courses, like the crispy-skinned duck in a gorgeous muscat-cassis sauce, the brown-sugar-crusted salmon, and even the steaks, are under \$30. The wine list offers many French and Californian wines by the glass and half-glass (three-ounce pours). The best deal of all might be the six-course tasting menu for only \$65 (\$95 with wines); just reserve it one day in advance.

DOWNEY'S

1305 State St.
Santa Barbara, 805-966-5006
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.

LOOK FEAST BISTRO

254 E. Ojai Ave.
Ojai, 805-640-9260
feastofojai.com
New American
Entrées \$15–\$20

Romantic

Multiple rooms provide completely different vibes at this magical bistro in downtown Ojai. The bar area is always bustling and fun; inner rooms are quieter. Chef and owner Susan Coulter lets the seasons dictate her small menu. She also relies heavily on local ingredients like Ojai olive oil. Coulter makes sure to offer vegetarian dishes, a catch of the day, and meats like pork, duck, chicken, and beef. Check the website to see the current monthly winemaker dinner schedule.

THE HUNGRY CAT

1134 Chapala St.
Santa Barbara, 805-884-4701
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 Lenz 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.

KANDA SUSHI

3637 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-230-0101
kandasushito.com

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(805) 418-1760
Make reservations online: www.TheGrill.com

Japanese

Sushi \$5–\$18; Small plates \$4–\$14

Serene and beautiful with comfy white leather chairs, this Japanese restaurant is perfect for a date. The small plates and sushi rolls are high-quality and delicious. Service at the tables from kimono-clad girls is very sweet. Note: If you sit at the sushi bar, be prepared to follow proper sushi etiquette.

LEILA'S RESTAURANT & WINE BAR

752 Lindero Canyon Road
Oak Park, 818-707-6939

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.

MARAVILLA

905 Country Club Road
Ojai, 805-646-1111

ojairesort.com

Mediterranean

Entrées \$19–\$39

Romantic & Great View

After being closed to the public for a year, the formal dining room of the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa is again serving dinner nightly. The views of the surrounding hillsides and mountains are stunning, especially at sunset. The Mediterranean menu from chef Jamie West is casual, with signature items like a half-chicken under a brick and a salmon dish with arugula pesto and fingerling potatoes. The wine list features bottles from Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy.

MARCELLO RISTORANTE

140 W. Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, 805-371-4367

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).

OLIO E LIMONE

17 W. Victoria St.
Santa Barbara, 805-899-2699

olioelimone.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.

PETROS

2860 Grand Ave.
Los Olivos, 805-686-5455

petrosolosivos.com

Greek

Entrées \$23–\$32

Romantic

Inside the Fess Parker Wine Country Inn & Spa, Petros basks in lovely simplicity. The decor celebrates textures in warm wood and white sculpture. Owner Petros Benekos' food pays homage to modern Greek cooking as opposed to old-school Americanized dishes. In the *Horiatiki* (or "peasant") Salad, he meticulously stacks cucumber spears, tomato wedges, Greek olives, avocado slices, and a square of perfect feta cheese. A dainty dip combo delivers plenty of flavor on pita triangles, especially the *kafteri* cheese blended with hot peppers. The Nikos Saganaki contains molten *kefalotiri* cheese wrapped in a skin of sesame seeds, and drizzled with honey to splendid effect. The daily fresh fish is either grilled or pan-seared, and dressed in olive oil, lemon juice, and Greek oregano. *Keftethes*, or meatballs, resemble tiny, tasty, very tender meat loaves doused in tomato sauce. For an unusual finish, try the *loukouma* (or *loukemathes*)—crispy, light, almost-hollow fried doughnuts sauced in cinnamon-walnut honey.

Maddy's Market (maddysmarkets.com) purveys organic produce and grocery items at the Summit at Calabasas, just at the Lost Hills exit of the 101.

Stop in for a quick hit from the tonic bar before battling traffic.

ROOT 246

420 Alisal Road
Solvang, 805-686-8681

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

saddlepeaklodge.com

New American

Entrées \$16–\$54

Romantic, Sunday Brunch

An homage to game animals and the fine wines that pair well with them, this rustic suite of rooms never

disappoints. Chef Adam Horton hits all the right notes with his accompaniments and never overcomplicates the meat preparations. Once-a-month wine dinners feature local vintners. Mixologist Chris Barragan makes a mean Mint Julep. Sunday brunch on the patio is splendid.

SAFIRE

4850 Verdugo Way
Camarillo, 805-389-1227

safirebistro.com

New American

Entrées \$12–\$41

Romantic

The prettiest dining room in Camarillo dishes up excellent New American fare from chef Chris Bryan. A wood-fired oven crisps up flatbreads and pizzas. Nice seafood dishes and steaks hold up the expensive end of the menu while special bistro dishes come in under \$20. Happy hour in the bar area from 4 to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday offers even more value-driven dining. Check the website for live musical performances and wine dinners.

SLY'S

686 Linden Ave.

Carpinteria, 805-684-6666

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 chopouses, 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.

WINE CASK

813 Anacapa St.
Santa Barbara, 805-966-9463

winecask.com

American Riviera

Entrées \$17–\$29

Romantic

The Wine Cask is a virtual shrine to wine-country eating and drinking. Co-owner Mitchell Sjerven (of Bouchon and Seagrass restaurants) oversees the wine-friendly menu in the beautiful and historic main dining room. Plenty of fresh, local produce gets dressed in salads or roasted or sautéed and plated next to steak, pan-seared fish, and roasted chicken. A cheese plate with honeycomb and dried fruit is a nice way to end dinner with yet another glass of wine from the well-chosen collection. The staff is always happy to suggest appropriate pairings.

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.

BRENT'S DELI

2799 Townsgate Road
Westlake Village, 805-557-1882

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.

C-STREET RESTAURANT

450 E. Harbor Blvd.
Ventura, 805-652-5151
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.

CAFÉ FIRENZE

563 W. Los Angeles Ave.
Moorpark, 805-532-0048
cafefirenze.net
Italian
Entrées \$13-\$40
Romantic

Pastas are handmade daily at this beautiful, sprawling Italian restaurant with bar stools along the open kitchen counter in the back. A full bar dominates the front room with a long list of specialty martinis. Chef and owner Fabio Viviani turns out classic Italian dishes like ravioli, osso buco, and chicken scaloppine. The cannoli, rolled in pistachios and chocolate chips, are sublime.

CHOLADA THAI CUISINE

1282 Newbury Road
Newbury Park, 805-498-7801
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.

THE COUNTER

30990 Russell Ranch Road
Westlake Village, 818-889-0080
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.

DARBAND GRILL

868 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-449-1323
and 19337 Ventura Blvd.

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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

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*.

ERIC'S RESTAURANT & BAR

495 N. Ventu Park Road

Thousand Oaks, 805-716-4100

palmgardenhotel.com

Mexican and American

Entrées \$8–\$17

Live Music

Casual food like burgers, pasta, New York steak, salmon, fajitas, and tacos anchor the menu at this dining venue of the Palm Garden Hotel. Televisions throughout the dining room and bar stay tuned to sports. A large patio offers plenty of shaded seating. The daily three-hour happy hour (from 4 to 7 p.m.) makes the already low prices even more appealing. Live music is featured on Friday nights.

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

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.

NEW LOS ARROYOS MEXICAN AND TAKE OUT

1280 Coast Village Road

Montecito, 805-969-9059

also at 14 W. Figueroa St.

Santa Barbara, 805-962-5541

and in the Camarillo Premium Outlets

630 Ventura Blvd.

Camarillo, 805-987-4000

losarroyos.net

Mexican

Entrées \$9–\$14

Kid-Friendly

The fanciest of the three Los Arroyos restaurants run by the Arroyos family is in Montecito right on Coast Village Road. This location has full table service both inside the small dining room and out on the patio. The bar mixes up margaritas all day long. The other two locations serve beer and wine only with the same fresh, moderately priced burritos and tacos. Here food is ordered at the counter and brought out to the tables. Don't miss the tasty salsa bar. The daily specials are worth trying.

Fins Seafood Grill (finsinc.com) in Westlake Village has morphed into Fins Tavern & Grill. Besides the name change, the restaurant now serves a pub menu all day long.

LOOK MI PIACE ITALIAN KITCHEN

4799 Commons Way

Calabasas, 818-591-8822

Italian

Entrées \$11–\$20

Sunday Brunch, Kid-Friendly

The open spaces inside and out create a pleasant spot to sit at lunch or dinner. Waiters wearing long, black bistro aprons ferry big bowls of pasta—like shrimp scampi with angel hair and freshly made ravioli—from the open kitchen. The pizza chef constantly pulls pies like Margherita or Classica and calzones from the display oven. Seafood linguine in a red or white sauce is a favorite of many. The *Pollo al Sesamo* is a pounded breast, crusted with bread crumbs and sesame seeds and then lightly sauced. Apple pie comes with ice cream or whipped cream.

PIERRE LAFOND WINE BISTRO

516 State St.

Santa Barbara, 805-962-1455

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.

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.

STONEFIRE GRILL

3635 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.

Thousand Oaks, 805-413-0300

stonefiregrill.com

American

Entrées \$7–\$15

Kid-Friendly

Entrées come in varying sizes, from single to family, so feeding a crowd here is easy. The lemon-garlic chicken is unbelievably juicy and tender. Salads are big winners, too, from the Caesar to the "BBQ Chopped" with chicken or tri-tip. Don't miss the garlicky breadsticks. The quick-serve format requires ordering at the front and then fetching drinks before sitting down in the Craftsman-style environs. Take-out orders get their own entrance and counter, making it super-easy to pick up dinner on the way home from work.

THE SUNSET RESTAURANT

6800 Westward Beach Road

Malibu, 310-589-1007

thesunsetrestaurant.com

New American

Entrées \$12–\$30

Great View, Saturday & Sunday Brunch

A lounge-like setting keeps things relaxed at this beachside eatery in the north end of Malibu. Brunch on Saturday and Sunday offers French toast, salmon Benedict, seafood, and salads. Dinner Tuesday through Sunday nights keeps things casual with crispy whitefish sandwiches, burgers, mussels and fries, and flatbread pizzas. A full bar pours cocktails and plenty of wines.

TERRI'S CAFÉ

30135 Agoura Road

Agoura Hills, 818-707-1934

American-Italian

Entrées \$8–\$15

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

3835 Cross Creek Road
Malibu, 310-456-0169
tradinoimalibu.com

Italian

Entrées \$14–\$34

In the Malibu Country Mart, just a stone's throw from Nobu Malibu, this laid-back Italian spot draws all the same celebs. Chef Francesco Velasco has solid control of his menu of Italian salads, pastas, pizzas, chicken in a lemon-caper sauce, veal marsala and a whole branzino. Specials are market-driven, so Velasco always uses truffles when he can get his hands on them. The take-out window has its own menu of quick-serve salads, pizzas, and pastas, which can be eaten in the Mart's park.

TUTTI'S OFF MAIN

34 N. Palm St.
Ventura, 805-643-0880
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.

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
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.

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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
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.

THE CHEESECAKE FACTORY

442 W. Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, 805-311-9705
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.

P.F. CHANG'S CHINA BISTRO

2250 Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-277-5915
and 21821 Oxnard St.
Woodland Hills, 818-340-0491
pfchangs.com
Chinese
Entrées \$8–\$24

Kid-Friendly

A chain like this is always great for bringing large groups of people together. Dishes are served family-style for easy sharing. The pan-Asian menu has influences from China (half duck in plum sauce), Thailand (lemongrass prawns with garlic noodles), and Japan (green tea noodles), not to mention Americanized desserts (cheesecake, banana spring rolls). Dishes are spicy, salty, and never dull.

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

An artisanal ice cream parlor has opened at Westfield Topanga. LA Creamery (lcreamery.com) owner Jessica Goryl uses organic dairy from Straus Family Farms to whip up persimmon ice cream and dark chocolate yogurt. The rocky road flavor makes good use of Valrhona chocolate, roasted almonds, and handmade marshmallows.

and 3449 E. Main St.
Ventura, 805-620-4500
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 Illy 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.

ALOHA STEAKHOUSE

5800 Santa Rosa Road
Camarillo, 805-484-1422
and at 364 S. California St.
Ventura, 805-652-1799
alohasteakhouse.com
Steakhouse
Entrées \$20–\$50

Ten different cuts of steak are available at these two Hawaiian-themed steakhouses with laid-back servers. All the entrées come with soup or salad and a side of potatoes, rice, or veggies at dinnertime. The house salad with hearts of palm and a good vinaigrette is nice. The tables are large to accommodate the big portions. If you don't want meat, the salads can be topped with shrimp, salmon, or ahi tuna. There are plenty of fresh fish dishes, too. Early-bird specials from 4 to 5:30 p.m. will save a bundle, as will the lunch specials, some from \$10. Desserts are great fun, from bananas Foster flambéed tableside to volcanic soufflé.

AZU

457 E. Ojai Ave.
Ojai, 805-640-7987
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
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
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 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.

BOGART'S BAR & GRILL

166 W. Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, 805-494-4702
muvico.com/bogartsmenuoaks.asp
American
Small plates \$8–\$13; Entrées \$10–\$22
Kid-Friendly

Ordering at the walk-up counter at Bogart's and then taking your meal into the Muvico theaters is great fun. Obviously, finger foods work best while enjoying a meal in the dark, but fork-friendly dishes like chopped salad or the spicy mac and cheese are good, too. Bacon-wrapped dates are a refreshing upgrade from nachos. Marinated steak skewers are accompanied by a *chimichurri* sauce. The sliders come in three different varieties: steak, battered cod, and ground chuck. Instead of candy, there are desserts like a bag of cookies for sweet movie-snacking.

BOGIES NIGHTCLUB AND LOUNGE

32001 Agoura Road
Westlake Village, 818-889-2394
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.

CAFÉ FIORE RESTAURANT & MARTINI LOUNGE

66 S. California St.
Ventura, 805-653-1266
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.

CAFÉ HABANA

3939 Cross Creek Road
Malibu, 310-317-0300

cafehabana.com

Pan-Latin

Entrées \$9–\$25

Sunday Brunch

Café Habana isn't limited to Cuban food or cocktails. Dishes represent all of Latin culture, from South American ceviches to Mexican grilled corn and huevos rancheros to Cuban pulled-pork sandwiches. Owner Sean Meenan is an eco-warrior while partner Rande Gerber brings in the celebs and keeps the nightlife hopping. The food is good, the cocktails are great, and the coconut flan is out of this world.

DON CUCO MEXICAN RESTAURANT

254 W. Los Angeles Ave.

Moorpark, 805-523-2261

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

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-crusted 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.

EL REY CANTINA

2302 Ventura Blvd.

Camarillo, 805-484-4433

and 294 E. Main St.

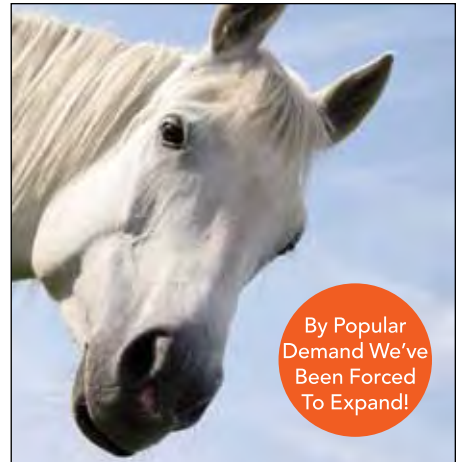
Ventura, 805-653-1111

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805.595.7302 www.sycamoresprings.com

Mexican Entrées \$3–\$13

This pair of tequila bars in Old Town Camarillo and downtown Ventura pays homage to The King ("El Rey" in Spanish) of rock 'n' roll: Elvis. Fun decor, complete with velvet Elvis paintings, sets the mood at these cantinas with happy bartenders and servers. The food is reasonably priced and unbelievably good. Super-fresh guacamole and chips, beer-can chicken, and baby back ribs in tomatillo sauce are some of the delights that await.

FIAMME

3731 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-497-9444
fiammerestaurant.com
Italian/American
Entrées \$13–\$29

Live Entertainment

Weekends are always interesting at this upscale restaurant serving Italian specialties alongside classic American dishes. The large menu includes an Italian chopped salad, chicken marsala, and rack of lamb with apple reduction sauce. The small stage set in the midst of the dining room hosts top-drawer comedians and musicians regularly. Check the website for event listings. The full bar pours cocktails, wine, and draft beer, which makes the entertainment even better.

LOOK FINS TAVERN & GRILL

982 S. Westlake Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-494-6494
finsinc.com
Seafood
Entrées \$12–\$29

Live Music Friday & Saturday

Inside, a long dark bar and hanging chandeliers give a big-city feel to this seafood-heavy tavern with an all-day pub-grub menu of eats like sliders, lamb lollipops, and sweet-potato fries. The owners are trying to revive the martini lunch by offering them for 99 cents from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday through Friday. A long wine list, craft beers, live music on the weekends, and a pretty front patio keep things interesting all year long.

GALLETTO BAR & GRILL

982 S. Westlake Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-449-4300
gallettobarandgrill.com
Italian/Brazilian
Entrées \$15–\$26

Live Music

The Brazilian dishes are nice and full of flavor: Marinated chicken and mesquite-grilled meats come with black beans and rice and plantains; skirt steak is topped with *chimichurri* sauce, (parsley, lemon, and olive oil); *chimichurri* sauce also tops a breaded, pounded chicken breast in a dish called Milanese do Borghetti. Italian dishes here are also solid, from chicken piccata to mushroom risotto in a Parmesan wheel. Live music comes from a Spanish guitarist (Monday through Wednesday) and bands of various genres (Thursday through Saturday), which provide the appropriate ambience, as does the long bar in the front.

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 piccata, fettuccine Bolognese, pizza, and Caprese salad. Don't miss the gelato truffles for dessert.

THE HIDEAWAY@LINDERO

5719 Lake Lindero Drive
Agoura Hills, 818-735-3530
hideawayrestaurant.net
American
Entrées \$11–\$24

You'll find The Hideaway tucked away on the grounds of Lindero Country Club. This restaurant has plenty of dining areas including a bar area, main dining room, back patio and front patio paved with flagstone and sporting an ivy-covered pergola. String lights above a fountain add to the festive mood out front where Chef Robert Grenner pulls crispy, thin-crust individual pizzas out of the wood-burning pizza oven. He also creates lovely salads, hearty steaks, and nice seafood including crispy crab cakes with a pickled green tomato relish. Desserts are fun and worth the calories.

LADYFACE ALEHOUSE & BRASSERIE

29281 Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-477-4566
ladyfaceale.com
French-American
Entrées \$9–\$15

With the feel of a French Brasserie, this alehouse provides a one-of-a-kind dining experience. The communal table allows camaraderie to develop, while the proprietary wheat beers and ale lend local flavor to the upscale pub. The food is better than it has to be, given the fun atmosphere and the top-notch pours from brewer David Griffiths. Chef Ray Luna knows his way around Belgian fries, artisanal sausages, and salad niçoise. But he can also turn out some serious fish-and-chips and *moules frites*.

Garlic Jim's (garlicjims.com) has opened in Simi Valley. They deliver garlicky pizzas with pesto, cashews, roasted garlic, black beans, and tortilla chips (or the usual toppings) on thick, thin or gluten-free crust.

LAZY DOG CAFÉ

172 W. Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, 805-449-5206
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 Cafe, located at The Oaks mall, is open for lunch and dinner daily.

LOS OLIVOS WINE MERCHANT CAFÉ

2879 Grand Ave.
Los Olivos, 805-688-7265
losolivoscafe.com
Cal-Med
Entrées \$12–\$29

This retail wine shop adjoins an all-day café with seating indoors by the stone fireplace and outside on the wisteria-covered patio. Cheese plates and olives are small bites perfect for pairing with wines at the bar. Salads, sandwiches, burgers, pasta, and pizza comprise the lunch menu. At night choices get a little fancier with pot roast, lamb shank, pasta, chicken, steak, and fresh fish. The wine selection from the shop (available to diners) has more than 400 labels and specializes in picks from California's Central Coast. Now that's fun.

OLD PLACE RESTAURANT

29983 Mulholland Hwy.
Agoura Hills, 818-706-9001
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.

NEW OLIO PIZZERIA

11 W. Victoria St.
Santa Barbara, 805-899-2699
oliopizzeria.com

Italian

Small Plates \$3–\$18

Part of the Victoria Court, this narrow space has really high ceilings and a long bar with a peekaboo view of the pizza oven. The small tables seem to overflow with multiple plates of antipasti, salads, cured meats, cheeses, and vegetables. The pizzas, with thin, chewy crusts, are individually sized and topped with all manner of excellent ingredients, like sautéed rapini, spicy salami, crimini mushrooms, and black truffles. At night the noisy scene revolves around wines poured by the glass, the *quartino*, 500 ml bottle, or 750 ml bottle. Of course, wines from Italy and California dominate at this pizza and wine bar by the owners of Olio e Limone.

SHEILA'S PLACE WINE BAR & RESTAURANT

330 N. Lantana St.
Camarillo, 805-987-9800
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
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.

LOOK TRATTORIA FARFALLA

160 Promenade Way
Westlake Village, 805-497-2283
farfallawestlakevillage.com
Italian
Entrées \$13–\$30

Live Music

The dark and sexy environs evoke both romance and fun, aided by a classical guitarist playing in the lounge area on Friday and Saturday nights. Excellent Italian fare from

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www.paradisepantry.com

chef-owner Santino Coccia includes an extensive list of cheeses including a full-blown fresh mozzarella bar. Salads are created as either starters or main courses. The pasta list is long and has many interesting choices. Pizza, plus seafood like cioppino and branzino, and plenty of meats will satisfy most appetites.

TUPELO JUNCTION CAFE

1218 State St.
Santa Barbara, 805-899-3100
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.

LUNCH BUNCH

Perfect for a midday meal, these listings are casual spots and fabulous cafés (which might not be open for dinner) that are ideal for meet-ups.

BELLA TERRAZA RESTAURANT AT THE HYATT WESTLAKE PLAZA

880 S. Westlake Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-557-4710
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.

BELLA VICTORIAN VINEYARD WINERY & BISTRO

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

Californian
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.

NEW BLUE TABLE

28912 Roadside Drive
Agoura Hills, 818-597-2583
bluetable.net

Italian
Entrées \$8–\$11

A few blue tables provide seating for those dining inside this charming little deli with high-quality Italian eats. Different salads rotate through the deli case and the list of sandwiches is written on a blackboard. The prosciutto and *burrata* panini is not to be missed. Pizzas, soups, cookies, and everything else are made fresh daily. A small freezer carries pastas and sauces for home use, but anything on the menu can be packed and taken to go.

CHAMPAGNE FRENCH BAKERY CAFÉ

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

French
Entrées \$7–\$9

A quaint bakery that harks 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.

CHIPOTLE

5754 Lindero Canyon Road
Westlake Village, 818-597-1603
chipotle.com

Mexican
Entrées \$6–\$7

Kid-Friendly

Building your own burrito is fun and satisfying at this chain devoted to environmental health (it uses local and organic

produce and naturally raised meat when possible). The food is prepared quickly, the quality is high, and the flavors are good. The lime-and-cilantro-laced rice is addictive. I'm partial to the fajita burrito, which has sautéed peppers and onions in place of beans. I load it up with steak, sour cream, and the Roasted Chili-Corn Salsa.

CHOCOLATINE

2955 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-557-0561
chocolatine.net

Bakery
Entrées \$7–\$10

A chocolate café with a Parisian accent, Chocolatine offers tiny treats of chocolate, cookies, pastries, coffee, tea, and hot chocolate made from scratch by baker and owner Sabrina Barthe. The *macarons* are perfection. Check the blackboard for daily specials of salads, sandwiches, quiches, and crêpes. The service is friendly but very laid-back. Don't expect to be in and out in a hurry. Once a month Chocolatine opens its doors in the evening for a special dinner; check the website for details.

FIVE GUYS BURGERS AND FRIES

487 N. Moorpark Road
Thousand Oaks, 805-496-0173
fiveguys.com

American
Entrées \$3–\$7

Kid-Friendly

Bulk peanuts in the shell are man-pleasers at this burger joint with self-serve fountain drinks. Little burgers have one patty while the regular burgers sport two—all are cooked well done. All toppings—including grilled onions, jalapeños, tomatoes, pickles, and grilled mushrooms—are free. Fries, dunked in peanut oil, are thick-cut with skins on; the Cajun-style are dusted with heat.

NEW FRESH & FABULOUS CAFE

401 S. A St.
Oxnard, 805-486-4547
myfreshandfabulous.com

American
Entrées \$5–\$11

Kid-Friendly

The sandwiches here are served on house-made bread. Four different quiches are baked daily. Owner Magda Weydt is a registered dietitian so the salads and sandwich fillings have a healthful bent. There are also coffee drinks, cookies, and pastries to be enjoyed in this retro coffee shop in downtown Oxnard.

ITALIA DELI & BAKERY

5657 Kanan Road
Agoura Hills, 818-991-4838
italiadeli.com

Italian
Entrées \$7–\$11

An Italian market and deli that makes its bread fresh every day is a good concept. Add to that a menu of fresh sub sandwiches, salads, and baked pastas and it becomes irresistible. A few tables are scattered outside for dining, but frozen pasta dinners (like eggplant Parmesan and vegetable lasagna) are crazy good when taken home and warmed in the oven. They come with fresh, house-made garlic bread—what a concept!

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
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



Two Fresh Brothers pizza locations (freshbrothers.com) have sprouted up at The Promenade at Westlake and The Commons at Calabasas. These boys whip up salads, wings, and pizza with some health-conscious items like vegan cheese and gluten-free crust.

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-portions of the many pasta dishes.

MY FLORIST CAFÉ & BAKERY

76 S. Oak St.
Ventura, 805-653-0003
myfloristcafe.com
American
Entrées \$7–\$18

Live Music

My favorite part of this restaurant is the bakery in the back with its own separate entrance; I drop in to pick up pastries and breads fresh from the oven. A table in the café is the perfect spot to enjoy a sandwich made with that freshly baked bread. Tall windows lend a nice, bright ambience during the day. A large lunch menu offers plenty of salads, sandwiches, wraps, bruschetta, and a couple of hot dishes. Breakfast is served until 2 p.m. on weekends. The dinner menu looks a lot like the lunch menu with the addition of cheese selections and desserts. Wednesday through Saturday nights, there are live performances on the baby grand piano in the dining room.

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
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.

NM CAFÉ INSIDE NEIMAN MARCUS

6550 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Canoga Park, 818-316-7040
American
Entrées \$13–\$27

A quiet oasis in the midst of the Westfield Topanga Mall, this pretty café has stone floors and walls, and lively seats covered in a green-and-brown-print fabric with orange dots. The service is polished, the complimentary popovers are delish, and the salads are huge. Sandwiches include a BLT and a lobster club.

PANERA BREAD

205 N. Moorpark Road
Thousand Oaks, 805-496-2253
and 740 E. Ventura Blvd.
Camarillo, 805-484-1414
panerabread.com

American
Entrées \$6–\$9

Kid-Friendly

Freshly baked pastries and coffee are perfect in the a.m. At lunchtime a delicious sandwich on house-made bread is a must, whether it's a hot tomato-mozzarella panini or a cool Napa almond chicken salad on sesame semolina. Salads, soups, and seasonal items keep the menu fresh and interesting.

PIZZA NOSH

30313 Canwood St.
Agoura Hills, 818-991-3000
pizzanosh.com

Pizza
Entrées \$5–\$11

Kid-Friendly

This certified-kosher restaurant eschews meat to keep things simple. Different cheeses provide the main protein in the pasta dishes; sandwiches are stuffed with eggplant, falafel, tuna, or veggie chicken; and for the pizza toppings, there's a long list of veggies like tomatoes, spinach, zucchini, and capers. The veggie pepperoni is dense—a good replacement for its meaty cousin. Check the specials board for fresh fish dishes like salmon or fish-and-chips.

PIZZASALAD

1655 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-371-7878

pizzasalad.com
Pizza

Entrées \$6–\$12

Kid-Friendly

USDA Certified Organic is the name of the game at this unusual pizza place, which follows strict organic regulations. Vegetarians, vegans, and the gluten-intolerant will find something delicious to eat here. The tasty pies can be topped with spicy tomato sauce, arugula, crimini mushrooms, kalamata olives, feta cheese, and Italian sausage (along with many more traditional ingredients). Salads can be custom designed with veggies, meats, cheeses, and flavorful dressings (all organic). For value dining, check out the lunch specials.

THE RANCH CATERING

30843 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Westlake Village, 818-575-9033
theranchwestlake.com

American
Entrées \$4–\$10

Kid-Friendly

Getting in and out quickly is easy at this small, counter-service lunch and dinner spot. The house-made brioche-style buns for the sandwiches and burgers are light and fluffy. The Philly cheesesteak sandwich is cheesy goodness. The burgers, like the Duimo with two kinds of cheese and The Ranch's special sauce, have a cult following. Salads are substantial and sweets are made daily. Service from the owners is always friendly and helpful.

SILVERGREENS

791 Chapala St.
Santa Barbara, 805-962-8500
silvergreens.com
Californian
Entrées \$5–\$9

This health-focused spot offers tons of nutritional information (like calorie counts printed on each receipt) so diners can make informed decisions. There are plenty of healthy options, like salads, pastas, and smoothies, but there are also indulgent choices like burgers and shakes. Bamboo-topped tables and aluminum chairs are tucked into different sections of the modern green-hued space and on the patio out front. ■

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WHAT'S YOUR SIGN?

Another January arrives with a chance for our resident Horoscopist to get it right. As always, readings are based on speculative Zodiacal ruminations and remain open to Cosmologic interpretations.

 **CAPRICORN**
DECEMBER 23–JANUARY 20

As the world emerges (or drops further into) recession, your Lunar North Node is in Cancer while the South Node is stuck in Libra. Being a Capricorn, you don't pay heed to Nodes, so this advice probably won't do any good. But here goes: Change the smoke detector batteries.
Outlook for finding happiness: Very good.

 **TAURUS**
APRIL 21–MAY 21

If you're married, work will affect your relationship. If you're single, you will meet someone new through work. Or you might work with someone you knew in school. Or you might change jobs because of a new relationship. *Outlook for finding happiness: Unclear.*

 **VIRGO**
AUGUST 24–SEPTEMBER 23

Two words: Lottery ticket.
Outlook for finding happiness: Expect to hear from various exes throughout the year.

 **GEMINI**
MAY 22–JUNE 21

Broadly speaking, there is a Quasar sticking in your New Moon phase until the end of March, so you'll be cuffed with Celestial Conundrums. From April onward, though, you'll be so delirious with those chains you won't know any better.
Outlook for finding happiness: Good—but avoid Scorpios.

 **LIBRA**
SEPTEMBER 24–OCTOBER 23

Your generosity spills over to the point of being controlling. Calm down. Relax. You can't rule the universe. *Outlook for finding happiness: Excellent with the right planetary alignments, but you don't have any control over that, either.*

 **AQUARIUS**
JANUARY 21–FEBRUARY 19

Venus is retrograding again, and it's a good idea for all Aquarians to follow that lead. Retrograding has been shown to add highway mileage, cleanse the kidneys, and double the bonus points.
Outlook for finding happiness: Depends on whether the "check engine" light will ever turn off.

 **CANCER**
JUNE 22–JULY 23

Your star sign, the crab, represents dynamic vitality and fondness for Long John Silver's takeout. Work, love, sex, health, finances, friendship, family, travels—they all get better with breaded fish sticks.
Outlook for finding happiness: Keep the sodium in check.

 **SCORPIO**
OCTOBER 24–NOVEMBER 22

Hey, Scorpio, aren't you the least bit concerned with what they're saying about you around the Zodiac? You brought this on yourself, you know?!
Outlook for finding happiness: For Astrological purposes, you need to stop calling my number!

 **PISCES**
FEBRUARY 20–MARCH 20

Don't allow that Solar 5th House of uncertainty to creep into purchasing decisions; it negatively affects the relationship with your pets. Don't show fear either, they can sense it.
Outlook for finding happiness: Positive if you keep everyone on a short leash.

 **LEO**
JULY 24–AUGUST 23

No one can tell you anything, Leo, so let's go straight to the Outlook.
Outlook for finding happiness: Common sense Astrologizing helps you steer clear from Scorpios, but since no one can tell you anything—just have at it.

 **SAGITTARIUS**
NOVEMBER 23–DECEMBER 22

You were born during holiday shopping season, which explains any palpitations you may experience toward the end of the year. Until then, save up on baby aspirin and try meditation.
Outlook for finding happiness: Good (just stay away from Scorpios). ■

 **ARIES**
MARCH 21–APRIL 20

Under Scorpio's influence, you'll touch new people with your beliefs. And then you'll find yourself in search of the meaning behind a restraining order.
Outlook for finding happiness: I'm no attorney, but I counsel caution when bourbon is involved.



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