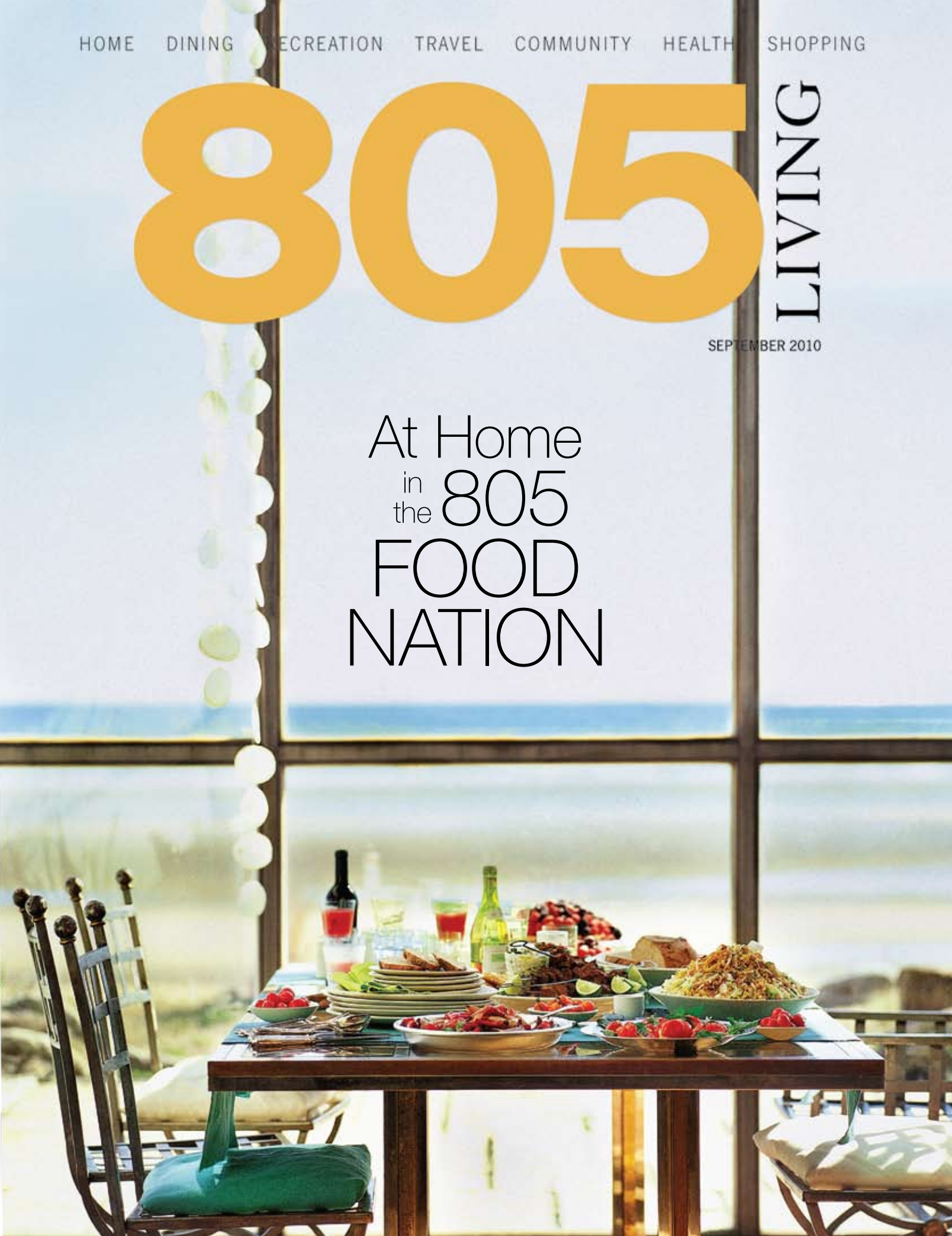


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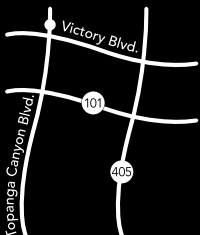
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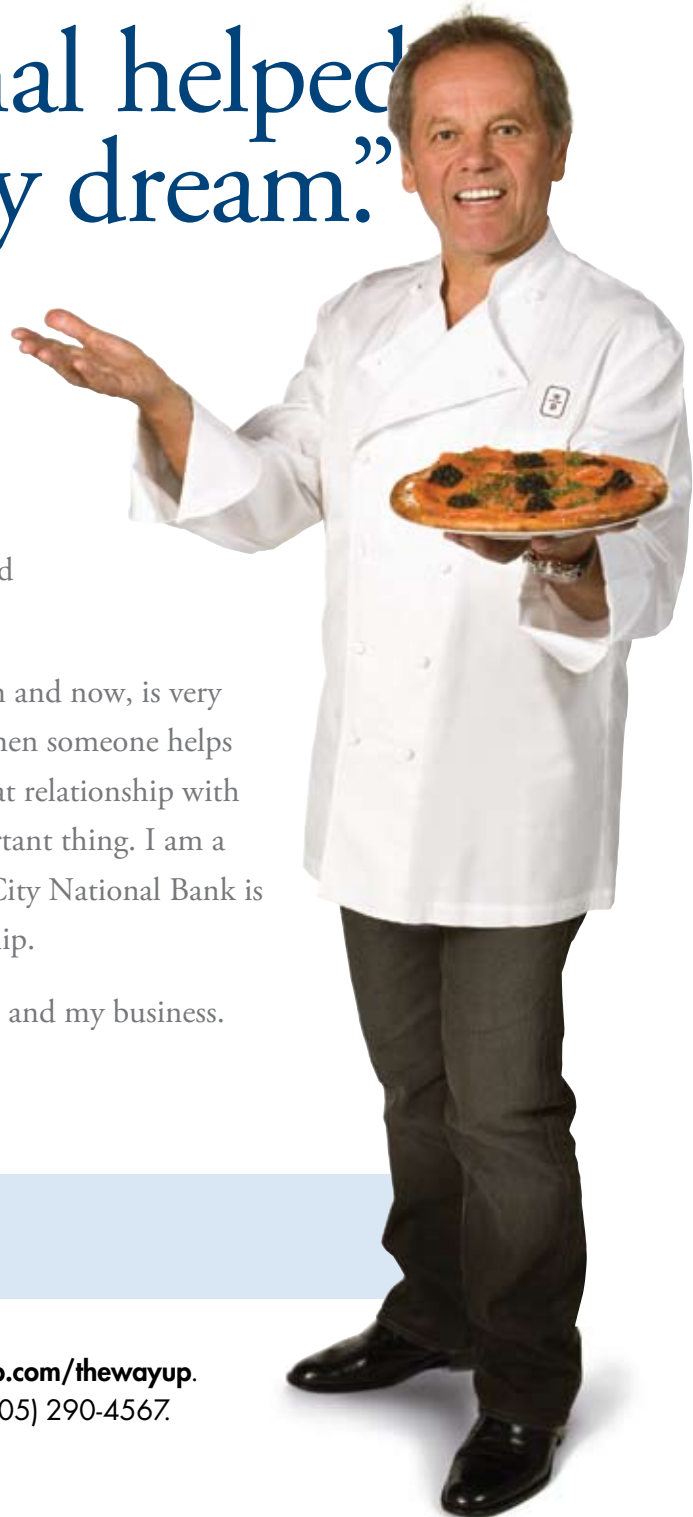
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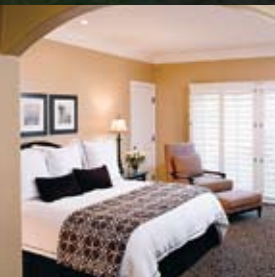
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Behind the Scenes

THE BEST THING THEY EVER ATE

We have more than our fair share of dedicated foodies contributing each month: Even those who don't write about food are passionate about their favorite culinary finds. In honor of our Food and Wine issue (and inspired by the Food Network show, *The Best Thing I Ever Ate*), we asked some of our contributors about the best thing they ever ate—locally, of course.

Contributing photographer **GERARD BELLO** (*Finds/Style*, page 28): The Dean Martin Burger at Stella's in Newbury Park (805-498-0989)—provolone cheese, olives, mushrooms, marinara sauce, and a beef patty all on a homemade bun. It's by far the best burger I've ever had. I've ordered other items on the menu in the past, but I always seem to go back to this. To see more of Bello's work, visit zumablue.com.



Contributing columnist **BILLY GOODNICK** (*In the Garden*, page 50): The Fried Chicken Salad at Santa Barbara's Tupelo Junction Cafe (tupelojunction.com). It's a dietary-dilemma-on-a-plate with fresh, cool greens, toasted pumpkin seeds, dried cranberries, and herb-buttermilk dressing piled with crispy deep-fried chicken strips and cornbread. Nuts, fruit, and foliage—good! Golden batter, oil, and simple carbs—evil!

Contributing columnist **MARYANN HAMMERS** (*Mind/Body/Soul*, page 44): I love the warm bread with olive tapenade at Spumoni in Calabasas (spumonirestaurants.com), especially if the Frank Sinatra soundalike is singing and my meal is accompanied by a glass of sangiovese. I'm crazy about the vegetarian moussaka at The Greek at the Harbor (greekventuraharbor.com), but it helps if people are dancing and I'm sipping ouzo. And I swooned over the parsnips at the Watermark (watermarkonmain.com) in Ventura, but it didn't hurt that they were served by the very cute chef.

Contributing editor **MARK LANGTON** (*Insider*, page 36; *Hot Ticket*, page 38; *Good Deeds*, page 54): As a sushi lover, there is one thing I will always order—giant clam, also known as geoduck (or *mirugai* in Japanese). But it takes a trained sushi master to pick out the best: Not all geoduck is created equal. I order it locally at Kaminari (Westlake Village, 805-446-7001), Kanda (Thousand Oaks, kandasushito.com), or Ori (Thousand Oaks, 805-496-1067).



CARMEN LEIVA, assistant to the editor in chief and publisher: A few years ago I drove up Highway 1 on a self-discovery trip to Cambria, only to discover the best thing I ever ate, a warm, decadent slice of olallieberry pie à la mode at Linn's Restaurant (linnsfruitbin.com). An olallieberry is a cross between a blackberry and a raspberry, the best combination of berries.



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Behind the Scenes

Contributing editor **ANGELA PETTERA** (“Food Nation 2.0,” page 64; *Taste of the Town*, page 84; *Dialed In*, page 86): I’m willing to drive a hundred miles in the summertime for tree-ripened peaches from Buttonwood Farm Winery (buttonwoodwinery.com) in Solvang. The farm grows at least six varieties of peaches, all silky-smooth-fleshed, juicy, and sweet. What makes them even more special is the serendipitous nature of their availability. As it says on the website, “When the fruit isn’t ripe, Fred doesn’t pick. If Fred doesn’t pick, there aren’t any for sale.”

Contributing editor **SARENE WALLACE** (*Pulse*, page 23; “Food Nation 2.0,” page 64): Chef Karim’s in Santa Barbara (now closed) was an exotic experience of Moroccan hospitality, complete with belly dancing. Chef Karim once told me his cooking is from the heart. Love oozed from each bite of lentil soup that I sipped. I scooped smoky baba ghanoush, cinnamon carrots, and egg-plant salad onto sesame bread, and ate powdered sugar-topped *b’sstilla* with phyllo-like layers. I wanted to lick the plates clean, but my daughter stopped me. Karim, thanks for the memories.

Gary’s Outtake

By Gary Moss, Photo Editor

I met Daisy the goat while photographing her owner, Jennifer McColm, at her home for the “Food Nation 2.0” feature (page 64). Daisy enjoyed eating my pants and shoes while I was shooting, so I told her I would give her her 15 minutes in the magazine if she just put on the farmer’s hat for my “Outtake.” It took 30 minutes for this stubborn kid to cooperate, which only happened after coaxing her with her favorite food (bananas). Lesson: Sometimes you just have to bribe your way through photo shoots.



Gary Moss has launched the Camera Whisperer Photographic Workshops and Seminars for all levels of photographers, from emerging to professional. These are extremely interactive seminars and workshops designed to create a positive experience for photographers who want to take their work to the next level. Gary’s motto: “You own the equipment, now own your photography.” Check out camerawhisperer.com for more information. ■



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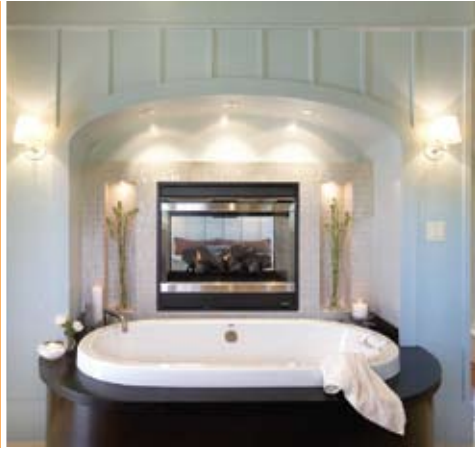
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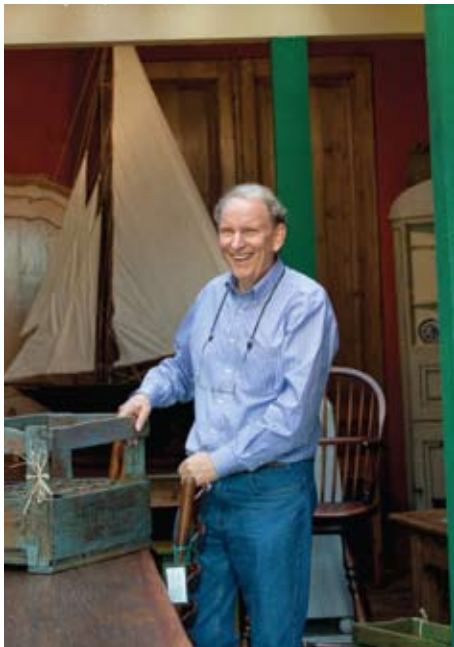
Pine Trader Antiques in Summerland specializes in European antique imports. Shown here, an Irish pantry circa 1860 (background) and a French sycamore-top butcher block circa 1900.

BRITISH ANTIQUES FIND A NEW HOME IN SUMMERLAND

Some people think old kitchenware looks best when displayed against the honeyed hues of old English pine. For anyone with similar taste, it may be worth stopping by the Pine Trader Antiques showroom in Summerland (pinetrader.com). Owner Clive Markey, a Brit who's been living here almost 30 years, has kitchen dressers, cupboards, and tables—mostly English and Irish—along with such curios as butcher blocks and 19th-century, cast-iron wine corks from France. >>

These are just some of the treasures he picks up during regular buying trips to Europe, a habit he's found hard to shake since closing his longtime Santa Barbara antiques store about eight years ago and retiring to the Santa Ynez Valley. Markey says it wasn't long before he was "fed up doing nothing," and so he plunged back into the business. He opened a shop in Los Olivos (also called Pine Trader Antiques and open on weekends) and then expanded to Corona del Mar (though he's now closed that outlet in favor of Summerland).

—Frank Nelson



Owner Clive Markey (left) relishes his buying trips to Europe in search of great finds. Above, 19th-century treasures include this French birdcage—with original paint—resting on an Irish buffet, and a French entry table that's topped with an Eastern European trough.

NATURAL RECYCLING

“Worm Girl” is not a title that most young women would adopt, but it suits Santa Barbara’s Elisa Robles just fine. She runs a service (wormgirl.org) that sells worms—usually red wigglers—and bins to keep them in while they munch through all manner of household food scraps. Nearly a thousand worms weigh only a pound and eat half their weight in food waste every day, which would otherwise go to a landfill. In return, the worms provide castings, which are highly nutritious for the garden.

Robles, who hopes to educate people about the waste-recycling, environmental benefits of worms, says even a small-scale wormery can still work wonders for an owner’s indoor plants. A pound of worms costs \$30 and recycles the food scraps of one to two people; bins range between \$90 and \$160 depending on size and material (usually wood or plastic). However, she says people can make or convert something—wine barrels, an old dresser—into a much cheaper worm house. She finds that people store their little worm farms in all sorts of places, such as under the sink, in the garage, and on board RVs. If properly cared for, worms are low maintenance and odor-free; however, if problems arise, Robles will come around and offer solutions.

—F.N.

From Field to Fork With Plow to Porch

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For those who want to eat organic but don't have time to find all those healthful ingredients, help is at hand: Plow to Porch Organics (plowtoporch.com) makes up boxes of fresh food and even arranges for delivery between Ventura and the Santa Ynez Valley. The service provides a variety of weekly seasonal fruits and vegetables, ranging in size from individual portions to enough for a large family; customers can also add extra organic items, such as eggs, honey, and seafood from an add-on menu.

It feels like a private farmers' market, with food delivered weekly or collected from designated pickup points. Plow to Porch, which now has a store at 3204 State St. in Santa Barbara, even includes food tips and recipes with its food boxes; a monthly email newsletter is also available. Weekly boxes cost between \$25 and \$60 (plus extra for additional items and some delivery fees). In return, organizers say customers receive the best local produce and foods at the best price without having to leave home. —*F.N.*



Variety really is the **SPICE OF LIFE**, which is also the name of the Paso Robles company that offers natural (grown in the wild without chemicals), premium (distributed within one to two days of harvest) herbs and spices. The company launched a line of equally premium teas this spring, combining herbal tisanes with green, black, oolong, and white varieties. Seventeen natural tea blends are packaged loose (for use in a tea ball) as well as in bags.

"I work with a direct importer who gets teas from all around the world," says owner Lori Foster. "I choose various ingredient combinations that create delicious flavors."

There's the traditional Earl Grey "Classic" and chai "Invigorating" along with inspired blends like white pomegranate "Luxurious," which is one of Foster's favorites. It's a smooth, fresh-tasting blend of white tea, rose hips, safflower threads, and natural fruit flavor. The teas are available online (pasospices.com), at Verena's Go Gourmet in Arroyo Grande (verenagourmet.com), Jack Creek Farms in Templeton (jackcreekfarms.com), and Crushed Grape in San Luis Obispo (crushedgrape.com).

—*Sarene Wallace*

Herbs, spices, and teas from Paso Robles' Spice of Life are wild-grown and fresh—both healthy to eat and beautiful to look at.



DIY ORGANIC ORCHARD

WHAT COULD BE HEALTHIER than eating organic heirloom fruits, berries, and nuts? How about eating ones that you've grown yourself? That's now possible thanks to Trees of Antiquity (treesofantiquity.com), which sells certified organically grown trees chosen to meet individual customer needs and growing conditions. Purchases come with lots of free advice about planting, harvesting, and tree care.

Buyers choose from a huge selection of trees, including about 20 varieties each of apples, pears, and peaches, plus berries, apricots, nectarines, figs, and more. Fruits like jujubes, quinces, persimmons, and pomegranates may appeal to more adventurous palates. Neill and Danielle Collins bought this long-established business 10 years ago, and today, on their 45-acre property just north of Paso Robles, they grow about 80 percent of the 30,000 trees sold every year.

—*F.N.*

MR. OMELETTE (mromeletteca.com), a caterer for parties and corporate events, has opened a Thousand Oaks outpost. The vegetarian-friendly food purveyor is best known for its brunch menus, including made-to-order omelettes, pancakes, and waffles; fresh-fruit smoothie bars; and cappuccino/espresso stations. For evening parties, Mr. Omelette offers cocktail parties with an assortment of passed hot and cold hors d'oeuvres and pasta bars.

Mr. Omelette owners, husband-and-wife team David and Jennifer Model, moved to Thousand Oaks about a year ago from Maryland, bringing their business concept with them (the original Mr. Omelette of 30 years is still going strong back East). Now serving the area from the San Fernando Valley to Santa Barbara County, Mr. Omelette caters parties of 30 or more; in its first year in the 805, the service has already booked parties in private homes, at businesses, at Hollywood shoots, and for day-after-the-wedding brunches. "Guests love being able to customize their smoothies, waffles, pancakes, omelettes, crêpes, or cappuccino beverages to suit their tastes," says David. "Our menu is elegant without being extravagant." —*Laura Samuel Meyn* ■

Finds

By Lynne Andujar

CLEVER KITCHEN

Gadgets smart in both form and function.

Potluck Pretty

Show up to the party in style with Vonny's "Orange Daiquiri" casserole carrier (\$45); vonny.com.



No More Unitaskers

Multifunctional "TorkScrew" all-in-one bottle opener (\$20) includes a corkscrew, foil cutter, and openers for screw caps and champagne; BevMo, Thousand Oaks, bevmo.com; or bellasvago.com.



Breadwinner

Teroforma "Avva Felt Breadbasket" (\$62) by special order from Fiona Bleu, Morro Bay, fionableu.com.



Dapper Dozen

Keep eggs at the ready with this stoneware "Farmer's Egg Crate" (\$14); Anthropologie at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks and Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park; anthropologie.com.

Mod Pod

Fill, boil, blanch or steam, lift, drain, done with Fusion Brands silicone "Foodpod" (\$15); Lazy Acres, Santa Barbara, lazyacres.com.



Berry Smart

No more sticky fingers with the Chef'n "StemGem" strawberry huller (\$8); Sur la Table at The Promenade at Westlake, Westlake Village and Santa Barbara; surlatable.com.



What a Mix-Up

Whip up vinaigrette in a jiffy with the Chef'n "Salad Dressing Emulsifier" (\$15); Williams-Sonoma at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks and Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park; williams-sonoma.com.



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1.



2.

3.



4.



CHOCOLATE TRUFFLE

A yummy color accents fall fashion.

1. Gucci dress (\$2,690); Neiman Marcus Topanga, Canoga Park, neimanmarcus.com.
2. "Bohemian Glam" Swarovski pendant necklace (\$55); Bead Lounge, Westlake Village, thebead-lounge.com.
3. Brave Leather "Burnie" cuff bracelet (\$65); Bryan Lee, Santa Barbara, 805-963-8899.
4. Diane von Furstenberg "Chiffon Cheetah" scarf (\$145); Diani Boutique, Santa Barbara, dianiboutique.com.
5. Decoage "Diamond Tank" watch (\$11,289); Jewelry Couture, Ventura, jewelry-couture.com.
6. "Geometric Quartz" ring (\$1,316); Jewelry Couture, Ventura, jewelry-couture.com.
7. Elegantly Waisted "Studded Twisted" belt (\$165); Twyla K, Westlake Village, shoptwylak.com.
8. Yves Saint Laurent "Tribute" pumps (\$760); Madison at The Promenade at Westlake, Westlake Village, madisonlosangeles.com.
9. "Bull Suede" tote (\$1,490); Salvatore Ferragamo at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park, ferragamo.com.



6.

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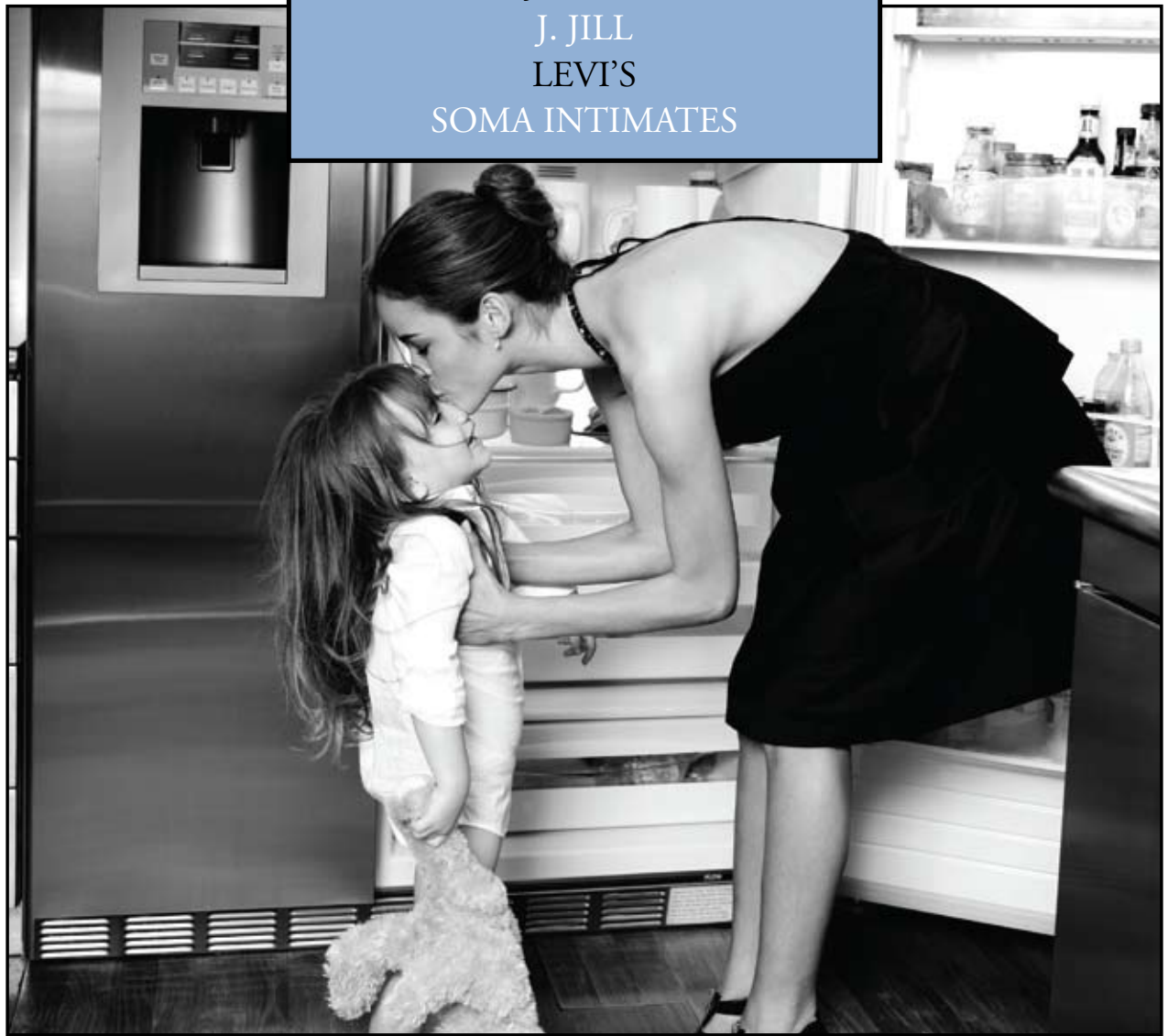
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8.

SAVE THE DATE: 805 Living and Westfield Topanga celebrate Fashion's Night Out, a worldwide fashion event, on September 10. Enjoy a wine and hors d'oeuvres reception (RSVP to topanga@westfield.com) and take advantage of retail sales and promotions, such as a free American Express \$50 Westfield gift card when you spend \$250 at participating retailers. Neiman Marcus Topanga hosts a fashion presentation and a personal appearance by designer Sue Wong (neimanmarcus.com/topanga); other retailers will be offering in-store events as well (westfield.com/topanga).

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OYSTER GRAY

A cool hue that's hot this season.

1. Helmut Lang "Mercury" dress (\$415); Madison at The Promenade at Westlake, Westlake Village, madisonlosangeles.com.

2. "Fool's Gold" bracelet (\$55); Bead Lounge, Westlake Village, thebead-lounge.com.

3. Vintage Bling "Button" rings (\$48 each); Nordstrom at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, nordstrom.com. "Rustic Shell" ring (\$55); Twyla K, Westlake Village, shoptwylak.com.

4. Bvlgari "Parentesi" earrings (\$7,300); Dejaun Jewelers at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, dejaun.com.

5. Prada "Spazzalato" tote (\$2,100); Neiman Marcus Topanga, Canoga Park, neimanmarcus.com.

6. "Hortense" sandals (\$1,580); Louis Vuitton at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park, louisvuitton.com.

7. Diane von Furstenberg "Cupcake Bomber" jacket (\$810); Diani Boutique, Santa Barbara, dianiboutique.com.





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FOODIE FIND: HEALDSBURG

Avoid the hordes at harvest time: When Napa and Sonoma are too crowded but a fall food getaway is a must, try Healdsburg, a jewel of a town about 10 miles from the Charles M. Schulz Airport in Santa Rosa (with direct flights from LA via Horizon Air; horizonair.com). Healdsburg's compact size and easy grid layout of streets around a central square mean the planning can take a backseat to ambling, sipping, tasting, and luxuriating.

But restaurants aren't the only way to get your food on. Cooking classes from **Relish Culinary Adventures** (relishculinary.com) run the gamut from making homemade mozzarella and mascarpone (September 17) to pickle making (September 19) to farm-to-table dinners (October 9) and farmers' market tours led by a chef (October 16). The monthly "Lunch & Learn" classes are a special treat for weekday travelers, as attendees observe a chef prepare a meal in Relish's comfortable teaching kitchen and

then savor the meal afterward (with wine and dessert). Students leave with full bellies, take-home recipes, and tips for DIY meal preparation. On September 15 and 29, chef Monica Sallouti creates a harvest-inspired menu; October includes a hands-on cooking class of Israeli and Mediterranean specialties with Oded Shakked of Longboard Winery at Doran Beach (October 3), a farmers' market tour and hands-on sausage-making class plus a four-course lunch (October 16), Singapore Street Food with chef Mei Ibach (October 17), and Fermenting: Pickles and Sauerkraut (October 24). Classes usually attract an interesting blend of visitors and locals, so it's great way to meet other foodies and get suggestions for dinner or an afternoon snack.

Days in Healdsburg can be spent exploring, shopping, wine tasting, and eating—and the best part is, no car is required to see almost everything the town has to offer.



The eclectic lobby of H2 Hotel in Healdsburg features commissioned art and comfy lounge seating overlooking the pool.

OTHER FOODIE ADVENTURES

Tour the Santa Rosa farmers' market with chefs from Hotel Healdsburg's Dry Creek Kitchen as they shop for the restaurant's weekly produce (Thursdays; available to guests of Hotel Healdsburg; hotelhealdsburg.com).

Sonoma County Farm Trails hosts a weekend of farm tours, artisan tastings, cooking classes, and harvest events (September 25–26; weekend alongfarmtrails.com).

WHERE TO STAY

H2 Hotel (from \$215; h2hotel.com): Opened in July, this modern, clean take on green design

offers luxuries such as deep soaking tubs, rainfall showers, balconies or patios, and water bars on every floor, plus bicycles for guest use.

Hotel Healdsburg (from \$315; hotelhealdsburg.com): Dark, moody rooms for romance and more services (full breakfast, concierge, spa) make this the upscale sibling to sister property H2.

Les Mars Hotel (from \$575; lesmarshotel.com): Think authentic French antiques, luxurious bathrooms, draped four-poster beds with Italian linens, and fireplaces. A splurge, but worth it for the unparalleled luxury and romance.



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Healdsburg Inn on the Plaza (from \$275; healdsburginn.com): Comfortable, affordable 12-room boutique hotel with nice perks such as complimentary afternoon hors d'oeuvres and wine tasting and a full breakfast.

Healdsburg Modern Cottages (from \$250–\$500; healdsburgcottages.com): If decor is important, these charming 1930s cottages have been designed in a minimalist aesthetic with midcentury modern furniture from Ray and Charles Eames, Eileen Gray, and George Nelson, among others. The four cottages have fireplaces, telephones, cable, and internet but no kitchens.

WHERE TO EAT/DRINK

Affronti (affrontihealdsburg.com) is a wine bar that offers small plates (tartines, pâtés, bruschetta, artisan meats and cheeses) and a few large entrées in a comfortably intimate setting complete with courtyard dining. Culinary Institute of America-trained chef Jude Affronti loves to experiment, so opt for the daily specials—the “Garden in the Shade” (octopus with shaved fennel, oranges, niçoise olives, and frisée) on a recent menu was truly divine.

Baci Café & Wine Bar (bacaifeandwinebar.com) wins raves from locals for its traditional Italian desserts and its late (for Healdsburg) hours; it's also where many locals hang out for drinks and desserts after tourists have passed out from too much wine tasting during the day.

Costeaux Bakery (costeaux.com): The perfect spot for an afternoon yummy and café au lait. Try the berry custard tart or the decadent brownies.

Downtown Bakery (707-431-2719): The de facto breakfast stop in town for Donut Muffins and cinnamon rolls. Those who sleep in and miss the morning's batch can buy the frozen batter for the treats to take home and bake later.

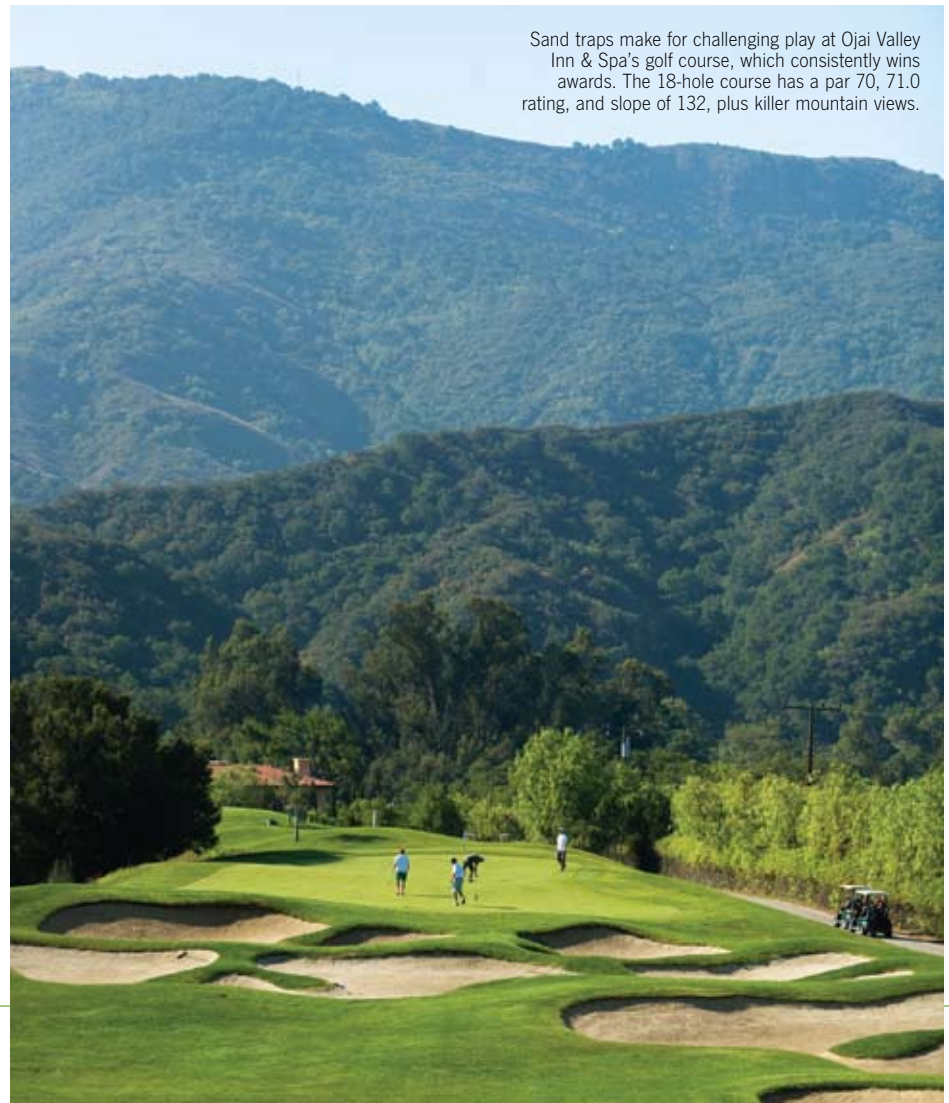
Dry Creek Kitchen (hotelhealdsburg.com): The go-to restaurant in Healdsburg from chef Charlie Palmer, who focuses on local, seasonal cuisine. The Wine Pioneer Series on October 16 offers an interactive wine tasting and seminar on biodynamic wineries.

Flying Goat Coffee (flyinggoatcoffee.com): This coffee shop has slavish devotees of its beans that are sourced from small farms around the world and roasted locally. It's nearly impossible to find any other brand in town—a nice break from the ubiquitous green logoed brew.

Williamson Wines (williamsonwines.com): Aussie winemaker Bill Williamson and his wife Dawn (both of whom are often in the tasting room) believe food and wine should be paired seamlessly, that's why they offer complimentary wine tastings and food pairings daily (plus they stay open later than most other tasting rooms in town). This is the only place their wines are distributed; pourers are knowledgeable and the food pairings are a real treat.

FOOD AND GOLF IN OJAI

Join famous area chefs for meals and golf—all for a good cause—as part of the Second Annual Celebrity Chef Classic at **Ojai Valley Inn & Spa** (October 15–16; ojairesort.com). Chefs Budi Kazali (Ballard Inn & Spa), Bradley Ogden (Lark Creek Steak), Mark Peel (Campanile), Ben Ford (Ford's Filling Station), and Jamie West (Ojai Valley Inn & Spa) will play in the 18-hole golf tournament; the chefs also offer tasting menus to kick off the weekend on Friday night. The package (\$1,995 per person) also includes two nights' accommodations, unlimited golf, and breakfast, lunch, and dinner on Saturday. The event benefits HELP of Ojai and Share Our Strength. ■



Sand traps make for challenging play at Ojai Valley Inn & Spa's golf course, which consistently wins awards. The 18-hole course has a par 70, 71.0 rating, and slope of 132, plus killer mountain views.

Wine & Waves

Pismo Beach is the original "wish you were here" destination on the Central Coast. It's called classic California for a reason. You can walk the pier and drop a line in the water. Eat clam chowder where the locals go. See a real surfer or try to be one yourself. Stay for the sunset. In fact, stay a few days and you'll take home more than great pictures and sand in your shoes. You'll have your own special destination...

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By Mark Langton

Ongoing: MULLIN AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM

Oxnard. Opened in April, this meticulously redesigned space is a testament to French autos and accoutrements from the 1918 to 1941 Art Deco period. There's a heavy dose of Bugatti, the only current French auto manufacturer; four Bugatti prototype design study show cars were recently loaned to the museum. On display for a limited time is the 1936 Bugatti Type 57SC Atlantic, purchased this year for \$30 million, making it the most expensive car ever sold. (mullinautomotivemuseum.com)

September 11–12: THOUSAND OAKS ARTS FESTIVAL

Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza and The Lakes Shopping Center. This festival is two days of visual art exhibitors, continuous live music, dance performances, and children's hands-on interactive art experiences. (toartsfestival.com)

September 18: AVOCADO AND MARGARITA FESTIVAL

Embarcadero, Morro Bay. The event includes live music, specialty margaritas, and avocado-inspired cuisine from local vendors along with arts and crafts booths, local wines, and a local farmers' market. (morrobay.org)

September 18: TASTE OF DOWNTOWN AND ARTE DE TIZA

Downtown City Park, Paso Robles. Check out the amazing *Arte de Tiza* (three-dimensional sidewalk chalk artwork), then enjoy live music and local cuisine and wines from more than 25 restaurants and wineries. (pasoroblesdowntown.org)

September 19: LORNA LUFT

Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Lorna Luft has followed in her mother Judy Garland's footsteps to become a star of stage, screen, and television. She performs with the New West Symphony. (newwestsymphony.org)

September 24–26: WEST BEACH MUSIC AND ARTS FESTIVAL

West Beach, Santa Barbara. It's a three-day rock, reggae, and electro party with continual concerts on four stages featuring national acts and local artists, as well as DJs under a special shaded "oasis," and a kid's "sandbox" with young up-and-coming artists. (westbeachfestival.com)

September 25: VENTURA HILLSIDES MUSIC FESTIVAL

Arroyo Verde Park, Ventura. Enjoy an afternoon of great music from a diverse collection of acclaimed artists, including headliner Emmylou Harris. Proceeds benefit the Ventura Hillside Conservancy. (venturahillside.org)

September 30–October 3: SUNSET'S SAVOR THE CENTRAL COAST

Various locations, San Luis Obispo. The region's food and wine is celebrated by expert food editors and celebrity chefs—including the Food Network's Tyler Florence—as they host several culinary tours, unique winemaker dinners, historic excursions, and wine-tasting events. There will also be farmers' market experiences, seminars, and cooking demonstrations. The event wraps up with a concert headlined by Chris Isaak and a fireworks show at Avila Beach Golf Resort. (savorcentralcoast.com)



ONGOING

Here's an idea:

EL CAPITAN CANYON RESORT
Santa Barbara's "luxury camping" property offers camping without the hassle of toting gear. Less than a mile from the coastline, El Capitan guests stay in safari tents and cedar cabins. Hike the canyon's trails or just walk under Highway 101 to El Capitan State Beach for a day of exploring tide pools or lounging on the sand. It's close enough to downtown for campers to enjoy local food and entertainment, but far enough away to get back to nature. (elcapitancanyon.com)



9/18

Family Fun



9/30/10–1/02/11

Through September 19: MADE IN OJAI VIII

Ojai Valley Museum. Artwork from Ojai Studio Artists Scholarship winners are on display and available for purchase. Sales benefit the museum. (ojaistudioartists.org)

Through September 30: HEARST CASTLE BOTANICAL GARDENS TOUR

Hearst Castle, San Simeon. Noted for its architecture and artistic holdings, the famous San Simeon property also features magnificent gardens. This special self-guided tour concentrates on the beauty of the botanical gardens and provides a glimpse into some of the lesser-known aspects of Hearst Castle. (hearstcastle.com)

September 11–12: I MADONNARI ITALIAN STREET PAINTING FESTIVAL

San Luis Obispo Mission. The 400-year-old Italian tradition of chalk street painting is carried on by local artists and children. (aiacentralcoast.org)

September 17–19: DANISH DAYS

Solvang. This 74th annual event celebrates authentic Danish cultural traditions. There is folk dancing, live entertainment, traditional foods, and more. (solvangusa.com)

September 19: CENTRAL COAST BOOK AND AUTHOR FESTIVAL

Mission Plaza, San Luis Obispo. Readings and talks by noted authors, children's activities, book sales, and author signings all take place for a good reason: Proceeds benefit the Foundation for San Luis Obispo County Libraries. (slolibraryfoundation.org)

September 30–January 2, 2010: BIRDS IN ART

Wildling Art Museum, Los Olivos. In celebration of the annual autumn bird migration, the museum exhibits a collection of more than 60 paintings, sculptures, and works on paper celebrating avian creatures. (wildlingmuseum.org)

October 1–3: REYES ADOBE DAYS

Reyes Adobe Park, Agoura Hills. This event highlights native cultural entertainment; other activities include food vendors, free children's activities, a parade, a fun run and a 5K, and an art gallery. (ci.agoura-hills.ca.us)

October 2: OJAI BIG CHILI COOK-OFF

Lake Casitas, Ojai. Local cooks, clubs, and restaurants vie for top honors in chili- and salsa-making contests—and you get to sample the results. There will also be live music, arts and crafts vendors, and a kid's play area. (ojaibigchili.com) ■





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SEPTEMBER

September 23: Music icon Willie Nelson brings his act **WILLIE NELSON AND FAMILY** to the Santa Barbara Bowl. With 67 albums to his credit and a recipient of virtually every significant music award over his six-decade career, Nelson continues to produce timely and poignant music.

September 24–26: Now in its 11th year, the **FLAMENCO ARTS FESTIVAL** at the Lobero Theatre in Santa Barbara has earned an international reputation. In addition to performances, the festival features educational concerts for children, American flamenco artist showcase forums, and films of legendary flamenco performances. (flamencoarts.org)

September 28–October 3: Based on Alice White's Pulitzer Prize-winning book and the Golden Globe Award-winning movie **THE COLOR PURPLE**, this musical at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza is an inspiring tribute to the power of hope over adversity. The show, which ran on Broadway from 2005 to 2008, received 11 Tony Award nominations in 2006. (toaks.org/cap)

OCTOBER

October 6: Born and bred in Los Angeles, the members of **MAROON 5** received a Grammy Award for Best New Artist in 2005, selling more than 15 million albums worldwide. To kick off their new album *Hands All Over*, they will play the Santa Barbara Bowl with special guests OneRepublic and Bruno Mars. (sbbowl.com)

October 10: Reggae music icon and Grammy Award-winner **ZIGGY MARLEY** performs at the Arlington Theatre in Santa Barbara. A portion of all ticket sales goes to his nonprofit foundation Unlimited Resources Giving Enlightenment (URGE), which supports children's organizations. (thearlingtontheatre.com, ziggyarley.com)

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October 13–14: Environmental advocate **JACK JOHNSON** concludes his world tour at the Santa Barbara Bowl. During his tour, Johnson will collaborate with more than 150 community groups around the world as part of his All at Once Community (allatonce.org), which supports nonprofit groups and educates his fans about plastic waste reduction and sustainable local food systems. Johnson will donate 100 percent of his tour profits to charity. (sbbowl.com)

October 15: The cast of *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* takes the show on the road with **WHOSE LIVE ANYWAY?** at the Center for the Arts at Pepperdine University. Starring Ryan Stiles, Greg Proops, Chip Esten, and Jeff B. Davis, the show is 90 minutes of improvised sketch comedy and musical numbers based on suggestions from the audience. (arts.pepperdine.edu)

October 15–17: One of the most anticipated times of the year in Paso Robles and surrounding regions is the **HARVEST WINE WEEKEND**, a huge celebration of the year's grape harvest. More than 130 wineries host more than 150 events, including barrel tastings, blending seminars, food and wine pairing dinners, live concerts, and more. (pasowine.com)

October 16: The Environmental Defense Center (EDC) introduces its first **RIDE ON THE WILD SIDE** bicycle ride in Santa Barbara. Take a self-guided tour, or ride with a knowledgeable guide while visiting some of the local natural areas that the EDC has helped to preserve and protect. Families and casual cyclists are welcome (there's a choice of two rides of differing distances) and afterwards there will be food and live music at the EDC courtyard. (active.com)

October 30–December 5: The Actors' Repertory Theatre of Simi Valley brings to life the contemporary classic **ANNIE** at the Simi Valley Cultural Arts Center. This story of a Depression-era orphan trying to find her parents won nine Tony Awards, including Best Musical, and spawned some of Broadway's most memorable tunes including "Tomorrow." (simi-arts.org)

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October 30: Known as the star of two of the most family-friendly TV shows of all time—*Full House* and *America's Funniest Home Videos*—**BOB SAGET** comes to the Ventura Theater with his (believe it or not) R-rated stand-up comedy routine. (venturatheater.net)

October 30: The Ojai Valley Inn & Spa concludes its summer **CLASSIC FILM SERIES** with Alfred Hitchcock's legendary thriller, *The Birds*. The screening provides a unique viewing experience under the stars, with food and beverages available. All profits go to HELP of Ojai and Share our Strength. (ojairesort.com)

October 31: **THE PERFECT GENTLEMEN**, an award-winning international vocal quartet, comes to the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Blending a vaudevillian, slapstick stage show with barber-shop, doo-wop, pop, and hip-hop vocals, the Gentlemen's harmonies soar. Not to be missed is their signature original piece, "Salute to the 20th Century," which chronicles the devolution of music over the last century. (toaks.org/cap)

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SEPTEMBER

September 16: MADISON WESTLAKE AND 805 LIVING CELEBRATE FALL FASHION, a night of giving back in style. Twenty percent of the evening's proceeds will benefit the Centennial Guild of Childrens Hospital Los Angeles. Madison will showcase hot fashion trends for fall and present a designer trunk show featuring White + Warren, Tkees, and Twelfth Street by Cynthia Vincent. Enjoy food from Blue Table and Cupcakery Cupcake Bakery & Boutique, and drinks from Malibu Family Wines. To RSVP, email madison@d2publicity.com or call 310-234-8888.

September 17: The Loving Heart Hospice Foundation presents **A MURDER MYSTERY AT HUMMINGBIRD RANCH**. Proceeds benefit Loving Heart Hospice Foundation's programs, which provide hospice care and financial assistance to terminally ill residents

of Ventura and parts of Los Angeles counties. (lovinghhfoundation.com)

September 25: In celebration of M&M Beautyland's one-year anniversary, the **PINK CARPET BEAUTY INSIDER EVENT** fundraiser will be held at the boutique, with a silent auction benefiting Childrens Hospital Los Angeles. Beauty experts will be on hand including author Kym Douglas signing copies of her book, *The Black Book of Hollywood Beauty Secrets*. (mandmbeautyland.com)

September 25: Providing breast cancer education and support since 1997, the Breast Cancer Resource Center of Santa Barbara holds its 12th annual fall fundraiser, **VILLA UNDER THE STARS**, at the historic Villa de la Guerra in Santa Barbara. Attendees will enjoy Mediterranean fare by chef Robin Goldstein and hear inspirational guest speakers. (bcrcsb.org)

September 25: The My Stuff Bags Foundation provides duffel bags with new belongings to children in America who have been rescued from abuse and neglect and often enter shelters with nothing of their own. The **BEST STUFF OF WESTLAKE VILLAGE** fundraiser takes place at the My Stuff Bags corporate headquarters in Westlake Village. Local restaurants and wineries will be on hand for tastings; guests can also participate in table games and other fun sports. (mystuffbags.org)

September 25: Join other animal lovers at the **MALIBU PET COMPANIONS ELEGANT CLUTTER TWO** annual garage sale. The goal is to raise funds for the medical needs of homeless pets at the Agoura Animal Shelter so they can be adopted and given a second chance. Gently used donations of all kinds are welcome. The event takes place at the corner of Thousand Oaks Boulevard and Ironwood Drive in Agoura Hills. (malibupetcompanions.org)

September 26: Ojai Valley Inn & Spa hosts the inaugural **MICHAEL BOLTON AND DAVE MASON BENEFIT CONCERT & CELEBRITY GOLF CLASSIC**. Golfers play the Inn's championship-caliber course; the entrance fee includes breakfast, lunch, and a cocktail/awards reception. The evening event features Michael Bolton and Dave Mason and their bands playing live. A portion of the proceeds benefits Ojai's Yoga Blue, which teaches yoga



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Insider

to people recovering from substance abuse and domestic violence; and the Bogart Pediatric Cancer Research Program at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles. (michaelboltoncharities.com)

OCTOBER

October 9: Habitat for Humanity's **TOUR OF GREEN HOMES** benefit showcases various homes around Santa Barbara County. Green-building providers in the Santa Barbara and Montecito areas will be in attendance with information on sustainable construction and the latest in green-building technologies and materials. (sbhabitat.org)

October 9: The Court Appointed Special Advocates Program (CASA) holds its annual **5K WALK/RUN** at Ventura College. Proceeds benefit CASA's programs, which serve Ventura County's court-dependent abused and neglected children. (icfs.org)

October 16: The Casa Pacifica Angels **SPOTLIGHT ON STYLE** fashion show and luncheon takes place at the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village. The event includes a champagne reception, fashion and style boutiques, and a runway fashion show. Proceeds benefit Casa Pacifica Centers for Children and Families, a crisis-care and residential treatment facility for abused, neglected, or at-risk children in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. (casapacifica.org)

October 20: Assistance League of Conejo Valley (ALCV) hosts a lecture by best-selling author Kate Jacobs (*The Friday Night Knitting Club*) at its annual **BOOKS AND LOOKS** luncheon at the Hyatt Westlake Plaza in Westlake Village. Guests will be treated to a fashion show and boutique shopping from local specialty vendors. ALCV raises funds for its youth assistance programs, which provide clothing, school materials, and educational seminars to children in need, as well as entertainment programs for residents of elder-care facilities. (alcv.net)

October 23: The Boys & Girls Clubs of Conejo & Las Virgenes **STAND UP FOR KIDS** annual gala and auction takes place at the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village. There will be a cocktail reception, gourmet dinner, celebrity inspirational speakers, and live entertainment. (bgcconejo.org)

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October 29–31: *805 Living* is a sponsor of the **24TH SANTA BARBARA CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE** at the Santa Barbara Polo and Racquet Club. Friday's Mille Miglia tour is open to cars participating in the weekend event and includes a driving tour through Santa Ynez wine country with a gourmet lunch at one of the wineries and a champagne celebration at the finish. On Saturday, two auto shows feature historic and current Italian automobiles and classic American brands. A Masquerade Gala fundraiser takes place on Saturday evening. Sunday features judging of some of the most exotic and rare classic automobiles in the world. Other activities include wine tasting at the VINO d'Elegance, a fashion show, an automotive expo, and Halloween activities for the kids. Proceeds benefit the Foodbank of Santa Barbara. (elegantcars.com)

October 30: Rotary Club of Ventura-East holds its **NIGHTMARE ON THE HILL CASINO NIGHT** at the Poinsettia Pavilion in Ventura. In addition to casino games, there will be food, dancing, and prizes for the best costumes. Proceeds benefit various community service projects, including YMCA's Operation Splash, which helps underprivileged kids learn to swim. (rotaryventuraeast.org)

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THE NATURE OF WILDWORKS: More than 50 non-releasable wild animals—including mountain lions, bobcats, and foxes—are cared for at this facility in Topanga Canyon. Contributions are needed to purchase supplies and to help the ongoing interactive wildlife educational programs that the organization provides to local parks and recreation departments and schools. There are also volunteer training programs available for those who want to work with the animals. (natureofwildworks.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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Mind/Body/Soul

By Maryann Hammers



THE BEAUTY BOUNTY

Citrus groves, vineyards, and fruit orchards are the inspiration and the source for locally made skin-care products.



“WE USE NATURAL PLANT-DERIVED INGREDIENTS in all of our products because fruit and vegetable extracts contain compounds that naturally hydrate, moisturize, replenish, and protect the skin,” says Ken Grand, owner of **Earth Science** in Santa Barbara (earthsciencenaturals.com). Products include ingredients such as avocados, papayas, and apricots as well as citrus, licorice root, marshmallow root, honeysuckle extract, sweet almond oil, green tea, ginseng, and other herbal extracts. Sounds like a dessert recipe, doesn't it? In a way, the company's 40 products *are* treats for skin and hair. “Our moisturizers, masques, cleansers, creams, conditioners, and treatments nourish and restore your skin and hair—naturally,” Grand says.

The Apricot Gentle Facial Scrub, made with crushed walnut shell powder, apricot seed powder, and apricot kernel oil, is Earth Science's most popular product. Squeeze a creamy dollop onto your palm and massage it into your skin for a lavish, luxurious sensation. It leaves skin feeling smooth and exfoliates without ever feeling gritty. The Olive & Avocado Hair Masque, a deep conditioner, is also a big hit. Earth Science is launching seven new products this fall.

Other local entrepreneurs have tapped the bounty of California's central and southern coasts to develop food-based skin-care products. With so many acres of vineyards nearby, it was only a matter of time before someone used wine country as a beauty inspiration. **The Grapeseed Company** in Santa Barbara (grapeseedcompany.com) is a small, eco-friendly company with a line of handmade soaps, massage oils, and body lotions in rustic, eco-friendly packaging.

(The paper label wrapped around the soap is embedded with wildflower seeds, so don't toss it—plant it.)

“I use grape seeds as the base of my line since they are a local resource, have so many wonderful health benefits, and are usually tossed by winemakers after they crush the grapes,” says owner Kristin Fraser Cotte.

Take a whiff of the Wine Bar—a chunky, hand-cut, handmade bar of soap—and be transported to memories of a summer picnic with fresh aromas of citrus, cucumber, strawberries, and honeydew melon delightfully commingling with the heady scent of a chilled glass of chardonnay.



Launching an organic, food-based skin-care company was the natural choice for Fraser Cotte, who started the business in her kitchen six years ago. "I've always loved bath and body products, I've always been an entrepreneur, and I've been 'living green' since I was a little kid—my mom ran a natural food co-op out of our barn when I was growing up," she says. "I eat organic and as local as possible, which is pretty easy to do with the amazing farmers' markets here. Studying natural ingredients and aromatherapy has been a hobby of mine for the past fifteen years or so."

The Grapeseed Company just opened a downtown Santa Barbara retail store, which will include a skin-care center and classes in creating fragrances and custom products, such as lip balms, lotions, and massage oils. "I was a teacher before I started The Grapeseed Company," Fraser Cotte says, "so I'm thrilled to be able to blend my careers and [teach] others about [the] incredible benefits of natural skin care."

Santa Paula-based **Limoneira** is the nation's largest lemon and avocado grower. Now consumers can enjoy all that fresh goodness in the company's line of skin-care products. Introduced last year, Limoneira Lifestyles (limoneiralifestyles.com) includes products such as a cooling, instantly hydrating lemon balm mist spritzer; candles that are reminiscent of sweet sorbet; and a refreshing lemon balm hand cleanser with just a touch of lavender (the most popular product), which is safe enough for a baby. There are also avocado-honey lip balms, an ultra-mild lavender-avocado cleanser, and soothing avocado masks—everything made with Limoneira's homegrown ingredients and stringent standards.

"We've been a grower for a hundred and seventeen years and our lemons and avocados reach consumers around the world, so it was natural to consider lemon- and avocado-based natural skin-care products," says Limoneira spokesperson John Chamberlain. "The beautifying properties of lemons have been used for years to make skin look younger and fresher." ■



OPPOSITE PAGE: Kristin Fraser Cotte started Santa Barbara's The Grapeseed Company to take advantage of a local resource that also has health and beauty benefits. **THIS PAGE:** Ken Grand uses fruit, vegetable, and herbal extracts in Earth Science's beauty products.



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Arts & Culture

By Frank Nelson



LEFT: The artist, photographer Mark Robert Halper.
RIGHT: Bob Lindquist, owner and winemaker, Qupé Wine Cellars.

THE ART OF THE VINE

Mark Robert Halper's new book shows a different side of Santa Barbara winemakers.

MOST BOOKS ABOUT WINEMAKERS show the subjects, often flanked by rows of bottles, hoisting a glass of wine. Maybe they're strolling amid the vines, or in their cellars carefully examining barrel samples. But Los Angeles commercial and fine art photographer Mark Robert Halper has steered well clear of those sorts of images in his new book, *Sunlight and Water: Celebrating the Winemakers of Santa Barbara County*.

"I wanted to get past the clichés," says Halper, who doesn't believe winemaking is as glamorous as many people think. "It's hard work though it is still romantic and creative."

Readers of this coffee-table book, brimming with 110 portraits of local winemakers, grape growers, and vineyard owners, will struggle to find even a single glass of wine, and Halper includes only a few bottles, barrels, tanks, and vines. It's a deliberate, calculated, artistic approach, as is Halper's decision to shoot everything in black and white, using mostly natural light supplemented by "a few lights from Home Depot," rather than sophisticated studio lighting.

The result is a series of gently unassuming, romantic images that look almost like they could have been taken many years

ago. "Black and white strips things down and is more timeless," explains Halper. "They are soft in places and have the look and feel of very old photos." His back-to-basics technique even re-creates traces of the "beautiful imperfections" often apparent in very early photography.

The book was officially launched last month amid wine tasting and hors d'oeuvres at Avant Tapas and Wine in Buellton. Proceeds from the evening's ticket sales (and silent auction) went to benefit the Valley Foundation's scholarship fund supporting local college students. Halper said he had wanted to do something to repay and benefit the local community; he decided on this particular charitable organization because one of the winemakers, Priscilla Higgins of Three Creek Vineyards, was involved with the foundation.

Halper has been a professional photographer for 20 years, and has taught photography for UCLA Extension and at the renowned photographic workshops in Santa Fe; he is also on the advisory board of The Art Institute of California. He captured the images for this book over a six-month period last year in four trips to Santa Barbara County, each one lasting five days.





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LEFT: Fred Brander, The Brander Vineyard, Santa Ynez Valley.
RIGHT: Winemaker Karen Steinwachs, Buttonwood Farm Winery, Solvang.



Halper chose his subjects from large and small wineries, from well-established ventures to relatively new ones, and from a variety of backgrounds—some connected with the land, others from completely different walks of life. What attracted him here, rather than somewhere like Napa, was the intimate nature of the local wine industry.

“Santa Barbara winemakers are very hands-on, and they’ve got a lot of personality,” he says. “There’s a lot of character in the wines and in the people.”

During the creative process, Halper came up with the idea of a “Meandering Gallery” to showcase the photos in the book. “I thought it would be fun to take over Los Olivos,” he jokes, referring to the eight tasting rooms, one restaurant, and one hotel, now each displaying between half a dozen and 20 examples of artwork from the book (through mid-February). The venues, all a short walk from one another around the heart of Los Olivos, are: Fess Parker Wine Country Inn, Los Olivos Café, and the tasting rooms of Andrew Murray Vineyards, Blair Fox Cellars, Coquelicot, Daniel Gehrs, Qupé-Ethan-Verdad, Scott Cellars, Stolpman Vineyards, and Tre Anelli.

In conjunction with these exhibitions, Halper will also be signing copies of *Sunlight and Water* over the next few months at some of the roughly 100 wineries and tasting rooms captured by his camera, as well as at other events in Los Angeles, Santa Monica, and Santa Barbara. Copies are priced at \$40; a custom-made, leather-bound and boxed limited edition sells for \$795. These signed, special editions come with a print of one of the book’s images, which is chosen by the buyer and also signed by the photographer. (Visit sunlightandwater.com for purchasing information and book-signing schedule.)

The book’s title is taken from a quotation attributed to the Italian-born astronomer and mathematician Galileo: “Wine is sunlight, held together by water.” The tome includes an introduction by Anthony Dias Blue, former *Bon Appétit* wine and spirits editor and currently editor in chief of *The Tasting Panel* magazine. ■

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In the Garden

By Billy Goodnick



IT TAKES A COMMUNITY

Grow-your-own fresh food could be just outside your door.

CAMARILLO COMMUNITY GARDEN PRESIDENT MIKE TAYLOR watched as a 70-something gardening newbie bit into her first-ever harvest of leafy greens. She seemed uncertain.

“Bitter?” Taylor asked.

“No,” the woman smiled. “I just didn’t know lettuce had so much taste.” Taylor knew he’d found another convert.

For some gardeners, growing their own food is about flavor that peaks a nanosecond before a sun-warmed cherry tomato squirts in their mouths. For others—alert to the seemingly constant recall of everything from alfalfa sprouts to zucchini—homegrown means peace of mind from potentially tainted food.

Taylor, along with other like-minded volunteers, banded together to start the Camarillo Community Garden on an empty lot (once full of trash) supplied by the Pleasant Valley Mutual Water Company. The quarter-acre tract of land, at the north end of Ponderosa Drive, became a hit. The recycled gates—scavenged along with hundreds of feet of chain-link fence from a nearby development—swung open on November 4, 2009. Nearly a year later, 30 families, a group of developmentally disabled adults from the Arc of Ventura County, and a perpetually giggling gaggle of 5- and 6-year-old Girl Scout Daisies keep the garden pumping out luscious treats.

When I visited in June, massive tomato plants were beginning to bend under the weight of ripening fruit, and the aroma of oregano and basil wafted on the air. (If only a magical Mozzarella Tree could grow in the 805.)

Aside from the obvious reasons, like “Veggies so fresh they don’t know they’re dead yet,” Taylor says his favorite benefit from community gardening is the effect on families. “I watched three sisters—20 months, 4 and 6 years old—pluck their first strawberries from the family plot. They were beside themselves,” he says. Taylor also enjoys the intergenerational mix of visitors, citing the seniors in their 90s that come from the Alma Via retirement home across the street to get some exercise and the opportunity to talk with gardeners from six continents. “We put the ‘community’ in community gardens.”

Whether motivated by concerns for the kids, the environment, or a self-indulgent desire for fresh mint in an icy Mojito, there are plenty of ways to grow food without leaving your own digs. Local nurseries are great places to learn how.

When Glenn Izard opened Nordic Nursery in Newbury Park 31 years ago, people weren’t thinking about the now-banned bottles, boxes, and bags of herbicides and pesticides filling the shelves, but a lot has changed.

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>> In the Garden

“These days, people come in specifically looking for organics,” says Izard. “The majority of my customers are women with families. They want their families to be safe and healthy. And they see themselves as positive role models when it comes to saving the earth.”

Izard and his seasoned crew have everything a beginning gardener needs to get started. “For landlocked urban farmers with balconies or paved townhouse patios, container gardens are the way to go,” he says. The nursery carries a variety of container options—everything from inexpensive pulp pots made from recycled newspaper to old wine barrels to brightly glazed ceramic pots.

Izard cautions that filling pots with dirt from the garden is a big no-no: “Typically, garden soil can harbor pests, harmful bacteria, or fungal diseases. Worse, our local clay soil drains poorly. It’s better to buy packaged potting soil recommended for food crops.”

If there is a convenient, sunny space for an in-ground garden, it’s worth the effort to construct raised beds, where soil mixes can be customized, drainage problems reduced, gophers banished with a bottom layer of chicken wire, and where there’s less bending over—meaning fewer chiropractic visits. For gardens planted directly in the ground, ask Izard about his peat moss, perlite, and chicken manure soil blend.

Home gardening takes the sting out of grocery bills, too. In 2009, the National Gardening Association figured that a well-maintained vegetable garden could save the average household 500 bucks per year, and that’s not chump change.

When a bountiful harvest exceeds a homeowner’s needs, hundreds of backyard gardeners from Carpinteria to Isla Vista organize under the banner of Santa Barbara Food Not Lawns (sbfoodnotlawns.org). They meet with their neighbors once a month on a driveway or patio to share surplus fruits, veggies, eggs (some raise chickens), seeds, seedlings, and best of all, recipes. At last count, more than a dozen groups had formed, keeping good food from going to waste while building a sense of community.

Growing food isn’t for everyone, especially those with busy schedules and complicated lives. Like kids and pets, veggies need attention and care. Start simple with something you know will be put to use, like a strawberry pot on the deck or a sprinkling of carrot seeds in a sunny flower bed, and see where the adventure takes you. There’s nothing like the sense of pride and peace of mind you get from eating a meal you grew yourself. ■

Backyard Basics

Before you crank up the tractor and replace the lawn, here are a few basics.

SUNLIGHT Most vegetables need at least six hours of direct sunlight. Fruit-bearing crops—like tomato, squash, and eggplant—need the most; leafy plants like herbs, lettuce, and chard can get by on a bit less.

WATER Vegetables are composed mostly of water, so keep the soil moist but not constantly saturated. Many gardeners rely on a simple automated drip irrigation system to ensure that all the water makes it to the roots. Adjust seasonally for changes in the weather.

BUGS AND STUFF The more diverse the garden, the more likely you are to create a home for beneficial insects that prey on the bad boys. Dill, coriander, fennel, and yarrow attract delicate but voracious lacewings, whose larvae feed on aphids, mites, and other small pests.

COMPETITION Trees and large shrubs can cast shade and compete for water and nutrients. Plant beyond the edge of any nearby tree’s canopy.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, call the Master Gardener Helpline (805-645-1455), consult the *Sunset Western Garden Book*, or visit your local nursery.

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- Mille Miglia Salute Driver Breakfast
- 100+ Mile Road Rally: Santa Barbara through Santa Ynez
- Concour's Opening VIP Party
- Historical Vehicle viewing - Beginning at 6 pm

OCTOBER 30TH SATURDAY 10 AM - 4 PM

- Concour's d'Italiano
- American Classics Auto Show
- Vino d'Elegance
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THE EVENT: Voted the best cultural event in Ventura County by the *VC Reporter* for the past two years, the annual Casa Pacifica Angels Wine & Food Festival was held at California State University Channel Islands on June 6. Ventura County's largest food and wine festival featured more than 80 of the region's top chefs and specialty food purveyors, as well as more than 150 wineries and 30 breweries offering unlimited samples. Nonstop live music was provided by Latin, rock, and jazz bands, capped off by the uproariously entertaining Spazmatics. (cpwineandfoodfestival.com)

THE CAUSE: Casa Pacifica Centers for Children and Families, located in Camarillo, is the largest nonprofit provider of children's mental health services in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. Its emergency shelter facility specializes in crisis care for abused, neglected, and at-risk children; the agency also administers several community-based programs designed to stabilize and strengthen families while striving to keep children in their homes. (casapacifica.org) ■



Mitch and Marizza Crespi, Martha and Duke Potts



Al Jonas, Craig Manning



Meri and Rob Hagelberg



Chris CUILTY, Patricia Cordero, Hugh Cassar (top);
Alex CUILTY, Alan Cordero (bottom)



Stephanie Jamison, Kari Troncatty, Paulette Lambert, Shelby Taylor



Bruce Barrios, David Hernandez



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Good Deeds

By Mark Langton
Photographs by Judi Bumstead



Sue Stonehouse, B4BC champion Leslie McCarthy, Pam MacCallum



Joe and Leslie Van Dalsem



Amy Masino, Jennifer Chastain, Wendy Reed



Rich and Sue Ann Ferraro



Jody and Jaime Skendarian, Sue and Joe Skendarian

ROLLING THE DICE FOR A CURE

Bunko 4 Breast Cancer brings women (and men) together for a common cause.

THE EVENT: Bunko, a gambling game originating in mid-18th-century America, has become popular again as a modern-day parlor game, especially among women. Played by four-person teams using three dice, bunko is as much about players connecting with each other on a social basis as it is about playing the game. In June, the second annual Bunko 4 Breast Cancer tournament, hosted by 2006 World Champion Sue Stonehouse at her home in Santa Rosa Valley, was a family affair both in attendance and organization. Meant to be lighthearted and fun, this tournament attracted more than 200 participants.

THE CAUSE: Stonehouse and a friend started this event after Stonehouse's sister Leslie Van Dalsem was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2007. Thanks to early detection and treatment, Van Dalsem is now cancer-free. This year's event exceeded last year's tally by more than \$10,000, enabling the group to donate \$30,000 to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, which informs women about prevention. The organization also strives to find a cure for breast cancer by providing funding for clinical and translational research at leading medical centers worldwide. (bcrcure.org) ■



Jennifer Orriss, Debbie Cleary, Traci Adcock



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Kim Wilker, Howard Leong

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FLAVORS OF ITALY

Using food, wine, and culture to inspire home design.

THE PARALLELS BETWEEN Southern California and Mediterranean regions are many, and it's important to take those influences—food, lifestyle, and culture—into account when it comes to home design, according to Carol Hilton and Ann Mulligan, the owners of Great Rooms Home Furnishings and Design Services in Camarillo (greatroomsdesign.com) and authors of the newly released *Great Rooms ... Sapori d'Italia, Décor of Toscana & Campania* (\$40; Brio Press, 2010).

“What we tried to really translate was our passion for design and the culture that is the seed of the design—really getting absorbed into it and understanding it and finding the parallels here in the States that we overlook or get watered down,” Hilton says.

Hilton and Mulligan “absorbed” the culture of Italy during a five-week trip last year, focusing on Toscana (primarily Florence) and Campania (Naples and the Amalfi Coast). There were some locations—houses and vineyards—that they pre-arranged to visit and photograph. Others popped up from chance meetings with locals or peeks through an open window or unlocked door. “I’m Italian-American, I speak the language,” Hilton says. “We wound up gaining entry into 16th-century villas and penthouse apartments in Florence overlooking the Arno River.” And they captured exactly what they saw, warts and all. “People opened up their homes on a moment’s notice, so nothing was staged. If there were things that didn’t make it a clean, perfect shot, we kept it, [to be] authentic.”

Armed with mountains of photographs and inspiration from the food they ate, the people they met, and the culture they experienced, the business partners returned stateside to organize the photographs into a book, and to build on their Italian inspiration with their clients’ homes here (also pictured in the book). “We [wrote the book] in the perspective that we were the audience. It’s not ‘take this vase here and put it here,’” Hilton says, but allows readers to take inspiration from the rooms pictured and find a design solution that works for them.



Ann Mulligan (in the car) and Carol Hilton of Great Rooms Design in Camarillo found design inspiration all over Italy when researching their new book. But how to get it home in such a small car?

The differences between Italian and California design? “[The Italians] spent a lot of money on things that were permanent design elements: flooring, mosaic tile inlaid rugs ... using elements of the earth, not synthetic materials,” Hilton says. She also notes that doors (“the doorway to the heart of the home”) and windows (“the window to the souls”) played strong design roles, as well as lighting. “It’s the jewelry of the home—either very grand or very utilitarian with a beautiful line.”

But it’s not just a new book that has the pair busy these days—they’ve also launched two new furniture lines with New Dimensions furniture company. According to Hilton, the Mediterranean look is still the number-one design choice of local consumers, and French Country is a strong second (the duo’s next book will focus on France), so one collection is called Italia Rustic Villa (“elegant-casual furniture embellished with nailhead trim”) and



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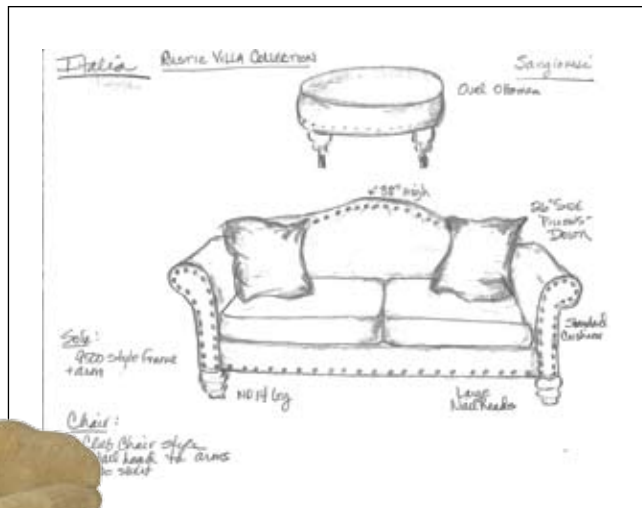
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>>Upgrades

the other French Laundry (“more organic and rustic”). “They’re new silhouettes that Ann and I have created ... our take on clean lines and rich fabrics and upholstery that [are] going to be at ease in California.” Style names are culled from grape varietals—Chianti, Viognier—another nod to the importance of the mix of culture and design that the pair espouses. “It offers high-end appeal at a low-end mark-up,” Hilton adds. “Furniture is a big ticket item you want to be able to keep.”

Great Rooms ... Sapori d'Italia, Décor of Toscana & Campania is sold at Great Rooms as well as at other home design stores; Barnes & Noble will carry the book in early spring 2011. ■



A sketch (above) and the finished product (left) from Carol Hilton and Ann Mulligan’s new Sapori (which means “flavors”) upholstered furniture line from New Dimensions. Italia Rustic Villa Collection **SANGIOVESE SOFA** (\$1,849 as shown), **NEBBIOLO CLUB CHAIR** (\$1,089 as shown), and **DOLCETTO OTTOMAN** (\$975 as shown) with nailhead trim in a choice of fabrics; Great Rooms, Camarillo, greatroomsdesign.com.



Hilton and Mulligan were working with a client who already had this wine room, but didn’t know what to do with it. They showed the client pictures of wineries—one small, one grand—from their trip to Italy, where stone played a prominent role. “The stone wall was the afterthought idea that made it sing,” Hilton says. “It gave it that more authentic cantina look.” Since the wine room connects to the dining room, Hilton and Mulligan chose stone for both sides of the wall so it could be seen from both rooms.

Wine barrels are repurposed into the **WINE2NIGHT NAPA BISTRO TABLE** (\$479) and **STAVE STOOL WITH LEATHER TOP** (\$239); Great Rooms, Camarillo, greatroomsdesign.com.



The **AUGUSTINE WINE CABINET** (\$1,062) from Classic Home Furnishings holds 20 bottles of wine; Great Rooms, Camarillo, greatroomsdesign.com.

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TASTING, SIPPING, AND SAVORING ACROSS THE 805.

Photographs by Gary Moss

EDITOR'S NOTE: Last year we brought you "805 Food Nation," a roundup of people and products that make eating locally a world-class experience. This year we've done it again, but we've sniffed out *more* purveyors and *more* foodie finds covering *more* of the 805—and that's why it's "Food Nation 2.0."

In many ways, the international growth of the Slow Food Movement mirrors the ripening of the 805 Food Nation. So many chefs, producers, growers, and vintners within our delicious borders demonstrate a commitment to community and the environment while celebrating local styles and caring for the land and water that sustain us. We take a freshness-based approach to cooking that produces, reveals, and if need be coaxes out the best flavors from these ingredients. The Nation is also quite innovative: Techniques, ingredients, and lessons developed by local food culture influence the world. All this creates a wonderful sense of place in the 805 Food Nation and makes a hungry person want to shout, **"I love this country!"**

Fresh fish from
Santa Barbara's
Kanaloa Seafood
Market: striped
sea bass, Pacific
red snapper, and
New Zealand
Tai snapper.





Sustainable Seafood

Most visitors to Santa Barbara have stumbled upon **Santa Barbara Fish Market** (sbfish.com) in the harbor, which sells sustainable seafood from local fishermen. But at the moment, only savvy Santa Barbara residents have bloodhounded **Kanaloa Seafood Market** (kanaloa.com) on Gutierrez Street, which sells only fish and shellfish from sustainable global sources, including those on the Central Coast. Kanaloa's owners vet their suppliers with the rigor of Greenpeace volunteers. Wild seafood from Santa Barbara waters, like line-caught white sea bass, spot prawns, and lobster, appear as seasonal specials. Those who can't make it to the storefront can order guilt-free seafood over the phone (888-526-2562). —*Angela Pettera*

15 Degrees C Wine Shop

With such a rich history of viticulture up and down the Central Coast, it's no wonder that wine shops have become much more than simple retail spaces. Places like **15 Degrees C Wine Shop and Bar** in Templeton (15degreeswines.com) are gathering spots and culinary platforms to discuss, taste, and buy so much more than wine. Of course, 15 Degrees *does* have wine, especially Central Coast beauties like Justin, Four Vines, Opolo, Foxen, and Tablas Creek.

Beyond the vino, 15 Degrees purveys fine cheeses, charcuterie selections, and beers and sakes from around the world. Like the best wine shops, it's also a place of good conversation. Drop by with a friend on Thursday evenings for Spanish tapas, and all day Friday for oysters and bubbly. There's bound to be lots to talk about.

—*Anthony Head*

Healthy Beef

Grass-fed cattle aren't yet as common as backyard hens. Last year we searched out **Rancho San Julian Beef** (rsjbeef.com) in Lompoc, which feeds only grass to a small number of its animals. This year we uncovered **Novy Ranches** (novyranches.com), whose owner, veterinarian Dr. Lowell Novy, divides his time between Northern California and Simi Valley. Novy raises his cattle up in Northern California on open grassland. The resulting beef (rich in omega-3s and low in saturated fats) is dry-aged for great flavor and tenderness. The frozen ground beef, steaks, short ribs, and roasts can be ordered online or by phone (805-217-7152) and picked up at Dr. Novy's office at 845 E. Los Angeles Ave. in Simi Valley. —*A.P.*

No Passport Required

There's a world of flavors out there and Dena Walker is bringing many of them home for area residents to enjoy. An insatiable traveler, Walker just launched **Cairn International Café & Market's** online store (cairncafe.com); and a European micro-truck outfitted as a mobile café will soon be traveling around Ventura. "I will also be at farmers' markets in Ventura and Los Angeles counties, as well as community events like festivals and street fairs, and local sports events like Roller Derby," Walker says.

If you find her, sample the *cortados* and *café bon bons* (coffee drinks), pastries, Russian empire biscuits, falafel, Latin rice and beans with fried plantains, Argentinean *chimichurri*, Hawaiian coffee, Icelandic cheese, and Asian teas. "With our mobile café, all our products are an experience that will transport you to another part of the world, like a café in Paris or a beach hut in Costa Rica," says Walker, who supports organic, free-trade, and non-GMO products. —*Sarene Wallace*

Buttered Up

Inspired by her love of butter and the wine country she calls home, Tammy Anderson has created cabernet sauvignon- and chardonnay-infused butters. They're found at the **Paso Robles Butter Company** (pasoroblesbutter.com/Index.html) and are made with a blend of organic butter, locally sourced wine, shallots, salt, pepper, and herbs.

"They're versatile because you can use them as a spread or melt them into an instant sauce," says Anderson, adding that when melted, the products mirror French

beurre blanc and *beurre rouge* sauces. "The chardonnay butter pairs well with seafood and shellfish. The cabernet pairs well with beef, pork, and lamb."

Use them instead of mayo in sandwiches or as a simple way to spruce up dinner rolls and baked potatoes. The butters are also available at gourmetfoodmall.com and select Paso Robles retailers, including J&R Custom Meat and Sausage (jrmeats.com). J&R also stocks other varieties of Paso Robles Butter, like lavender and honey, orange-ginger, and smoked bacon. —*S.W.*

David De Candia, director of tea, The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf

To David De Candia, tea is a spiritual thing. The Ventura resident travels all over the world—to countries like Sri Lanka, India, Japan, China, and Taiwan—to find the best ingredients for the teas he blends for **The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf**. But he says he's never too busy to take the time to have a cup. "You could be driving in the middle of India, all of a sudden someone says, 'Let's stop and get some tea.' It's never, 'Oh shoot, we have to get where we're going,'" he says. "There's *always* time for tea. Sharing a pot of tea with someone—you remember it for years."

Of course, it helps if it's really good tea. (His favorite is oolong from Thailand.) Thirteen years ago, when De Candia joined The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf as warehouse production manager in Camarillo, he wasn't yet an expert. "I found tea purely [by accident]," he says. "I started tasting teas on my own, reading about them in a book." He began attending tea expos to learn more; roughly a decade later, he was teaching at them.

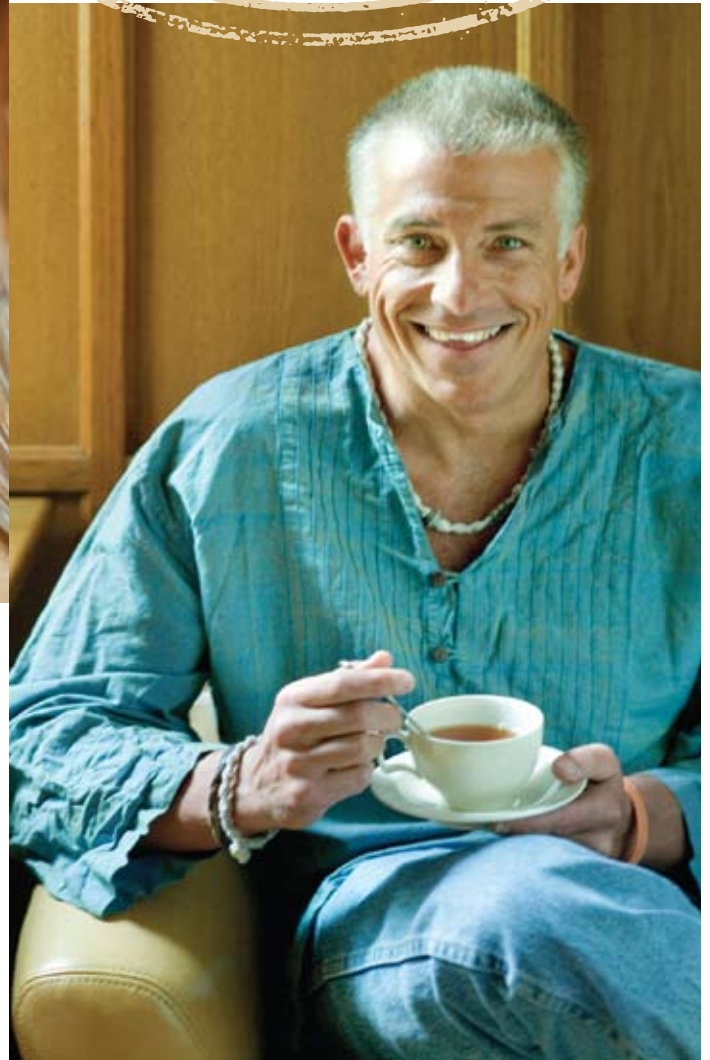
These days, De Candia is also involved in giving back to the remote areas around the world where tea is grown, both through The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, and as a director for Aid Lanka Kids (aidlankakids.org), which he helped found after the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

"I've always found it difficult to go that far and get something this great and just leave," he says. "I believe we all should leave some form of a footprint wherever we go." For David De Candia's tips on preparing tea, visit coffeebean.com/tea/askthelmaster.aspx.

—*Laura Samuel Meyn*



“There’s *always* time for tea.
Sharing a pot of tea
with someone—you
remember it for years.”



Clockwise from left: The popular Chai tea sold at The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf; director of tea David De Candia enjoying a cup; Ali Rush Carscaden is the sommelier at 15 Degrees C Wine Shop in Templeton.



“It is about getting together with people that you care about, sharing a meal, and creating memories with them.”

Komali Nunna, author, *Entertaining From an Ethnic Indian Kitchen*

In Indian cuisine, it's all about the spices. Born in southern India, Komali Nunna, who recently published *Entertaining From an Ethnic Indian Kitchen*, comes to that conclusion from more perspectives than most. One perspective is culinary, of course: She's an Indian cooking teacher, instructing students in her Camarillo home once a month. “If you have turmeric, cayenne, coriander, cumin, fresh ginger, garlic, cilantro, and limes in your pantry, you can cook Indian food in no time,” she says. (She buys her Indian spices at Apna Spiceland on Thousand Oaks Boulevard; apnaspiceland.com.)

The fact that Nunna is a trained chemist (who only recently left her job to focus on her book) made developing new recipes second nature—and it also gave her convincing reasons to spread the joys of using spices liberally. “Turmeric, the spice used in almost all Indian curries, has anti-inflammatory properties. Diets rich in curcumin, a compound found in turmeric, are also said to reduce the risk of ovarian cancer and Alzheimer's disease,” she says. “Ginger is a digestive aid, and cinnamon reduces blood pressure.”

Nunna learned to cook and entertain from her mother; after marrying at age 20 and moving to the States, Nunna refined her skills, adapting to Western influences along the way. Once her children left home for college, Nunna's lifelong passion for cooking and entertaining took form in her book. Not just a cookbook, it includes insights into Indian culture and tradition, plus tips on flower arranging, tabletop settings, and more.

“It is about getting together with people that you care about, sharing a meal, and creating memories with them,” Nunna says. Autographed copies of *Entertaining From an Ethnic Indian Kitchen* are available at komalinunna.com. The cookbook is also available at Barnes & Noble, Borders, and online at amazon.com.

—L.S.M.



Opposite page: Author Komali Nunna picks fresh veggies in her home garden. **This page:** Customers at Vom Fass in Westlake Village can pour their own olive oil (Don Giovanni extra virgin pictured, left) and decant other specialty goodies from casks lining the walls of the store (below). Fresh cocktails at Malibu Café (bottom) include the Cucumber-Cumin Margarita, Country Fresh Bloody Mary, and the Blackberry-Sage Lemon Drop.



Vom Fass Arrives

In German, *vom fass* means “from the cask” or “out of the barrel.” That sums up the concept of the new Vom Fass specialty store at the North Ranch Mall in Westlake Village (vomfasswestlakevillage.com). This branch of the international chain that began in Germany 16 years ago is locally owned. The casks, stacked up high along the walls, share their payloads of scotch, Cognac, brandy, assorted liqueurs, olive oil, argan oil (a staple of Moroccan cooking), fruit vinegar, and more with curious tasters. Glass bottles in a myriad of interesting and attractive shapes stand by ready to transport the bounty home.

—A.P.

Farm-Fresh Cocktails

Cocktails made with muddled fresh fruit are nothing new: J’s Tapas and The SideCar Restaurant, both in Ventura, have been serving them for years. The latest twist, however, might be fresh vegetable cocktails. Mixologist Tim Benjamin shakes things up with farmers’ market produce at **The Malibu Café at Calamigos Ranch** (themalibucafe.com)—a funky outdoor Thursday-through-Sunday nouveau-barbecue restaurant with rustic, tentlike cabanas, rafts on the lake, and a pool table lit at night by a chandelier hanging from a tree. Benjamin—equal parts bartender and chef—uses fresh cucumbers to make his Cucumber-Cumin Margarita (a muddle of cukes, organic agave, fresh lime juice, and tequila that’s shaken and strained, then topped with a sprinkle of the Middle Eastern spice). Benjamin insists on pure ingredients in all of his drinks, garnishing his Bloody Marys with heirloom tomatoes. “So many things today are processed,” he says. “The ingredients we’re using are easier for your body to break down.”

—A.P.

Bakery CSA

At **Knead Baking Company** in Ojai (kneadbakingcompany.com), local ingredients like honey, walnuts, lemons, and strawberries—plus herbs from its kitchen garden—get transformed as if by Hollywood magic into beautiful tarts, breads, flatbreads, quiches, and cupcakes. The bakery’s hours are more limited than a bank’s (Thursday through Saturday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.; at the Ojai farmers’ market Sunday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.), so the best way to sample Knead’s wares might be through their Breadshare program—a sort of CSA for baked goods. Participants sign up for a 12-week



commitment (at \$35 per week it totals \$420 for three months) and receive a different basket of goodies each week. There's always one large loaf of bread (maybe Normandy rye, caramelized grape focaccia, or walnut bread), a few smaller baked goods (bagels, crackers, or scones), and a couple specialty items (perhaps Parmesan cheese, organic polenta, or homemade pasta). Email kneadbakingcompany@me.com to get on the list for the next Breadshare program.

—A.P.

Farm-to-Table Dining

The idea of eating a freshly prepared dinner on a farm calls to mind all sorts of romantic notions about food, and I love being close to the source of my meal as long as I don't have to get dirty. And so do an abundance of others, judging by the success of the farm dinners orchestrated by **Outstanding in the Field** (outstandinginthefield.com). These dinners pair chefs with farmers and result in multicourse extravaganzas served and enjoyed al fresco at long communal tables.

The beauty of our area is that so many chefs take advantage of the multitude of local farms here. Several Outstanding in the Field dinners take place locally, but they sell out quickly so it's hard to nab a spot. I thought I'd point everyone toward some local versions of these celebrations.

A regular contributor to the Outstanding in the Field dinners, chef Tim Kilcoyne of **The SideCar Restaurant** in Ventura (thesidecarrestaurant.com) sometimes serves the same farm menu inside his restaurant for those who can't get tickets to the outdoor experience. It's not a stretch for Kilcoyne, who regularly sources produce from McGrath Family Farms, Friend's Ranch, Underwood Family Farms, Weiser Farms, and others. Kilcoyne is so farm-to-plate that he lists the source farms on his menus and regularly invites farmers over to his restaurant for ag versions of wine dinners.

Jason Collis is the chef and owner of **Jonathan's at Peirano's** in Ventura (jonathansatpeiranos.com). Because of his catering relationship with **Limoneira** in Santa Paula (limoneira.com), Collis creates a three-course dinner on the citrus-grower's orchard nearly every Friday night at sunset. Round communal tables are dressed with linens, hors d'oeuvres are passed, and wine is poured with each course. Limoneira citrus and avocados are used liberally throughout the meal. The price ranges from \$65 to \$115

per person depending on the menu. Call 805-525-5541 for reservations and to book a tour of the packing plant (\$20) or a one-hour drive through the ranch (\$20) before dinner.

The **Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village** (fourseasons.com/westlakevillage) has long utilized its large garden planted near the Wellness Kitchen. Recently, the property converted a flower hothouse into a produce greenhouse to supply the hotel's restaurants, like Hampton's (which, incidentally, is open only for a Friday night seafood buffet, Saturday night dinner, and Sunday buffet brunch now). The hotel's new executive chef Mario Alcocer leads free tours of the greenhouse and garden every Saturday at 4 p.m. Guests and local residents can meet in the hotel lobby for the one-hour tour, where Alcocer points out the tomatoes, lettuces, beets, Japanese cucumbers, and other produce and herbs used in menu specials throughout the hotel. Some of the herbs are even used in The Bar to make drinks (like the Westlake Piña Colada with pineapple sage).

The **Ojai Valley Inn & Spa** (ojairesort.com) and **Bacara Resort & Spa** in Santa Barbara (bacararesort.com) are two hotels with kitchen gardens on steroids. With acres dedicated to growing produce like lettuce, tomatoes, citrus, and herbs, both resorts employ happy chefs plating produce that gets harvested just hours before serving. Chef Jamie West at Ojai Valley Inn & Spa uses his field-fresh greens and other produce in the new Herb Garden Pool and Café (open to Inn guests only), Café Verde, the Oak Grill, and Maravilla. The general public can explore the garden located just outside the new pool area. Miro's chef David Garwacki sees daily produce deliveries from Bacara's 10,000-acre ranch in Santa Barbara, which can be toured by resort guests.

Thomas Hill Organics in Paso Robles (thomashillorganics.com) is both a farm and a bistro. Chef Julie Simon gets her pick of the produce grown just minutes from her kitchen—like white pomegranates, walnuts, peaches, nectarines, and herbs. Simon's lunch and dinner menus change weekly to take advantage of the seasonal produce. The farm's weekly community-supported agriculture program (called T-Hill Basket subscriptions) offers just-picked produce to feed two to three people (\$24) or four to five people (\$30). The baskets can be picked up at the bistro or Cass Winery in Paso Robles (casswines.com).

—A.P.

Justin West, chef/co-owner, Julienne restaurant

Justin West grew up in a restaurant family. But at **Julienne** in Santa Barbara (restaurantjulienne.com), chef and co-owner West does things a little differently. He defines Julienne's cuisine as farm-to-fork, sticking to the locavore ideals of using seasonal ingredients that come from within 150 miles of the restaurant (he misses Maine diver scallops, but insists that local seafood has led to some great new ideas). West uses whole animals in the kitchen instead of, for instance, ordering a case of lamb legs, coming up with a variety of dishes to feed a week's worth of guests. And the restaurant has a Natura Water System to filter, chill, and even carbonate municipal water in-house, which is bottled at the restaurant and served free as a courtesy to guests. ("This gets two trucks off the road: the one that delivers the water, and the one that picks up the empties," he says.)

West co-owns the restaurant with his wife, Emma, who runs the front of the house. The couple maintains that Julienne isn't a fine-dining restaurant, although the tasting menu, wine list, and service might say otherwise. "Emma and I hate eating at stuffy restaurants where the service is robotic and the dining room is quiet. We want people passing plates around the table sharing flavors, yelling back at the open kitchen about how good everything is," says West. "We have people dressed up going to the theater sitting next to people that just finished yoga."

In spite of Julienne's many unique characteristics, patrons are most surprised by how young the couple behind the restaurant is: Justin is 28 and Emma's only 23. And Julienne? It just turned 2 last month. The restaurant's moniker first surfaced in a typical young-couple conversation about future baby names. How fortunate for Santa Barbara that the couple's first baby is a restaurant.

—L.S.M.



Quiche (left) and flatbread pizzas (below) topped with farmers' market zucchini, roasted tomatoes, goat cheese, and fontina cheese served by Rachel Corbin at Knead Baking Company in Ojai. Chef Justin West (bottom) at Julienne farm-to-fork restaurant in Santa Barbara.



“We want people passing plates around the table sharing flavors, yelling back at the open kitchen about how good everything is.”



This page: Jennifer McColm with her chickens Spice and Red at her home in Calabasas. **Opposite page:** Chef Jamie West from Ojai Valley Inn & Spa uses garden-fresh veggies grown on-site in meals like this beet and arugula salad.

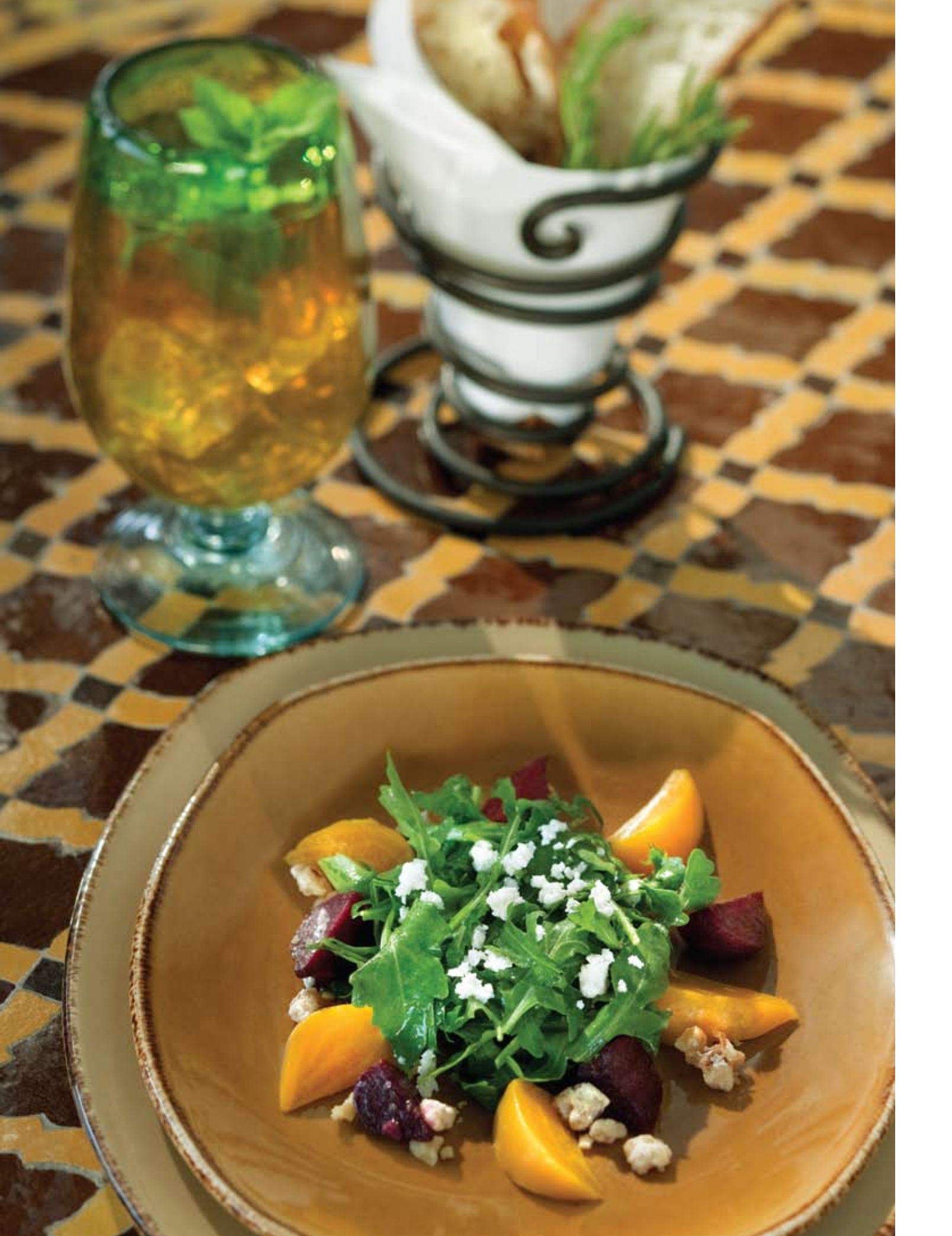
“I believe in honest labels.”

Jennifer McColm, founder of Jennifer McColm Living Green Enterprises

It's difficult to put just one label on what Jennifer McColm does, though all her efforts seem to branch out from a central passion for promoting a sustainable lifestyle. Under the umbrella of **Jennifer McColm Living Green Enterprises**, she runs 18 California Certified Farmers' Markets (ccfm.com). She runs the licensing agency Jennifer McColm Certified, granting her green stamp of approval on everything from food to products made from recycled or renewable materials—but only after applicants prove what they're selling is legit (“I believe in honest labels,” she says). With Raw Inspiration (rawinspiration.org), she helps to educate children and adults about the importance of a healthful diet—especially about getting enough fresh fruits and vegetables daily—through neighborhood markets. McColm began the “Just Do One Thing Green” (justdoonethinggreen.com) initiative four years ago to promote sustainable living. As founder of the “Gardens Into Schools” program, she funnels a percentage of farmers' market revenues to help build and cultivate organic gardens at local schools.

McColm herself got a very early start as a gardener, tending her own organic garden as a child, even setting up a stand to sell strawberries and other produce. She became a certified organic farmer in 1998; her Calabasas home garden feeds her three children. It's no wonder that McColm sees the next generation as the biggest opportunity for promoting sustainability. “I believe our kids are going to run with our agenda and make it work,” she says. “Twelve years ago I had one farmers' market; today I have eighteen. Just to know more and more people are eating healthier foods is really rewarding.”

—L.S.M. ■



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SWEET ON LEMONS

This zesty citrus is a versatile kitchen staple.

DESPITE A DISPARAGING REPUTATION IN THE AUTO WORLD, lemons are the culinary poster child for optimism, what with their sunny yellow color, bright flavor, and reputation for making something sweet out of something sour. But they're also a kitchen staple, hard at work behind the scenes to take a variety of dishes to the next level. Freshly squeezed lemon juice is in cocktails; in marinades and sauces for meat, chicken, and seafood; in salad dressings; splashed over green vegetables—it even perks up desserts. Lemon zest is the secret ingredient in my favorite scones, and lemon juice is what makes hollandaise sauce so irresistible.

While different varieties peak at various times, fresh lemons can be found at local farmers' markets year-round. And that's enough to make a devoted locavore very happy: consider the poor purists who aren't lucky enough to live in a state that single-handedly supplies 80 percent of the country's lemons.

In fact, lemons are big business here at home, where cool ocean breezes provide just the right climate (lemons cover more land in Ventura County than any other crop). Mary Shore of Shore Family Timber Canyon Ranch sells her lemons through the Ventura Farmers' Market Association (vcfarmersmarkets.com). Her farm grows Lisbon and Eureka lemons, which are available year-round, and the relatively sweeter Meyer lemons, which begin showing up at markets later this month.

While Shore favors Lisbon and Eureka varieties for her lemonade (see recipe on page 78) and for recipes requiring lemon zest, she reaches for Meyer lemons to dress up green vegetables like asparagus or broccoli. "Squeeze it over, and you don't even need any butter," she says.

Ventura Limoncello

Considering the volume of lemons grown in Ventura County, it's fitting that Ventura has its own locally made

limoncello, an Italian lemon liqueur that's traditionally served ice-cold in small cordial glasses as a *digestivo*. Ventura Limoncello Company (venturalimoncello.com) produces its award-winning limoncello from locally grown lemons. The company also recently launched Ventura Limoncello Vinaigrette, which is made with Ventura Limoncello, Ojai Olive Oil, and Bennett's Honey—all Ventura companies.

For a taste of Ventura Limoncello before buying a bottle, indulge in a glass after dinner at one of the many local restaurants that pours it (Brooks Restaurant and JJ Brewsky's, among many others; see the company's website for a complete list). It's aromatic and fresh with a full, sweet lemon flavor. Served straight from the freezer (preferably in chilled cordial glasses), it's delightfully syrupy to sip, with a smooth alcohol finish that keeps it from being too sweet. While limoncello is often sipped on its own after dinner or with dessert, it can also be part of dessert: Try pouring a splash over a scoop of dense vanilla ice cream or gelato. Look for Ventura Limoncello at Bristol Farms (bristolfarms.com) and local liquor stores; visit venturalimoncello.com for a complete list of retailers.

California Lemon Festival

The lemonade will be flowing at the 19th Annual California Lemon Festival, held the weekend of October 16 and 17 at Girsh Park in Goleta (lemonfestival.com). Expect plenty of lemon meringue pies and lemon bars baked by Anna's Bakery in Goleta, lemon tarts from Bacara Resort & Spa, and lemon zest ice cream and lemon sherbet from the Santa Barbara-based McConnell's Ice Cream. On Saturday, the festival features wine tasting conducted by Oreana Wines and the Goleta Fall Classic Car and Street Rod Show. Both days include music, rides, games, arts and crafts, and lemon-laced beer and food.



Lemon meringue tarts or tartlets make a chic twist on the classic deep-dish pie. Fill the crust with the lemon mixture almost up to the top (there might be some filling left over) before spooning on a thick layer of fluffy meringue. Use a rubber spatula to create dramatic swirls and peaks in the meringue before baking; the tallest parts will brown the most, giving it appealing variation.



IN THE KITCHEN



Lemon Juicing and Zesting Tips

To juice and zest lemons, it helps to have the right tools. Phyllis Vaccarelli, the owner of Let's Get Cookin' in Westlake Village (letsgetcookin.com), recommends the handheld juicer made by Chef'n (\$20); she likes it for its soft handles and efficient juicing. A simple plastic citrus juicer set over a glass measuring cup also works. No matter how you juice, it helps to roll each lemon on the countertop before cutting it, pressing down firmly with the palm of your hand. (This releases juice trapped near the peel.)

When zesting, a paring knife will work to remove the lemon peel, but a dedicated tool is much more efficient at removing and shredding the zest—and using such a tool makes it easier to avoid the lemon's white pith, which can be very bitter. "My favorite zester is the Microplane citrus zester (from \$13), which is shaped to handle round or oval-shaped fruit and has a comfortable handle," says Vaccarelli. "It also has a loop on the side for making long citrus strips for drinks."

LEMONADE

This recipe comes courtesy of Mary Shore of Shore Family Timber Canyon Ranch, which sells lemons through the Ventura Farmers' Market Association. Shore suggests using Eureka or Lisbon lemons in this recipe, and she recommends experimenting with other ingredients, too. "Adding a little pomegranate juice makes a lovely pink lemonade," Shore says. "Or, blend in some freshly squeezed orange juice and sparkling water for a punch taste." We reduced her recipe to make a smaller batch.

- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons water
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice (from about 6 Eureka or Lisbon lemons)

Stir the water and sugar in medium saucepan over low heat until sugar dissolves, making a simple syrup. Cool. Add lemon juice and stir to combine. (Can be made ahead; cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.) When ready to serve, pour lemon mixture into a pitcher. Add 2 to 3 cups cold water (to taste), and lots of ice.

Makes about 5 cups.

CHAMPION LEMON MERINGUE PIE

This recipe was adapted from the now out-of-print cookbook, If You Love Lemon: The Official Cookbook of the Goleta Lemon Festival. This old-fashioned pie requires some effort, but the results are impressive—just like what you'd see on the counter of a retro coffee shop. As a shortcut, substitute a purchased crust.

Crust:

- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup shortening or ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
- ¼ cup cold water

Lemon Filling:

- 3 large eggs, divided
- 6 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1½ cups sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1½ cups hot water
- 2 tablespoons butter
- ½ cup fresh lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest

Meringue:

- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 6 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons cold water
- ½ cup boiling water
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 3 egg whites (reserved from lemon filling)
- Pinch of salt

For crust: Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix flour and salt in a bowl with a dinner fork. Add shortening and mix together. (If using butter, prepare crust in a food processor, cutting butter into 8 pieces before adding to flour/salt mixture and pulsing briefly.) Add cold water. Form dough into a ball, roll out on floured surface to ⅛-inch thickness, and fit into a 9-inch pie pan, folding and crimping edges. Freeze piecrust until cold, about 5 minutes. Line crust with parchment paper, fill with pie weights (or dried beans), and bake until sides of crust are set, about 20 minutes. Lifting sides of parchment, remove pie weights and paper and continue baking crust until just beginning to turn golden, about 10 minutes longer. Set aside to cool. (Keep oven hot for meringue.)

Meanwhile, prepare lemon filling: Separate eggs, putting yolks in a small bowl. Whisk yolks to blend. (Put whites in the bowl of an electric mixer; set aside until ready to make the meringue.) Combine cornstarch, sugar, and salt in a heavy medium saucepan. Add hot water and whisk until smooth. Place the mixture over high heat and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and let bubble for several minutes, stirring constantly, until mixture thickens like pudding. Remove from heat and whisk in yolks thoroughly. Return mixture to medium heat and cook for 5 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and stir in the butter, lemon juice, and lemon zest. Whisk until smooth. Cool to room temperature, then transfer filling to the cooled pie shell.

For meringue: Whisk the cornstarch, sugar, and cold water in heavy medium saucepan until blended. Stir in boiling water and cook over medium heat until thickened, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat and set bottom of saucepan in bowl or pan of ice water to hasten cooling. Fit electric mixer with wire whisk attachment or beaters. Add lemon juice and salt to egg whites in mixer bowl, and beat until soft peaks form. Gradually add cornstarch and sugar mixture. Continue beating egg whites until stiff and glossy. Spoon meringue atop filling in crust, spreading to edges of crust and making decorative peaks in meringue. Bake until meringue is dry to touch and just beginning to brown, about 15 minutes. Cool at room temperature 1 hour, then cover and refrigerate until cold, about 3 hours. ■

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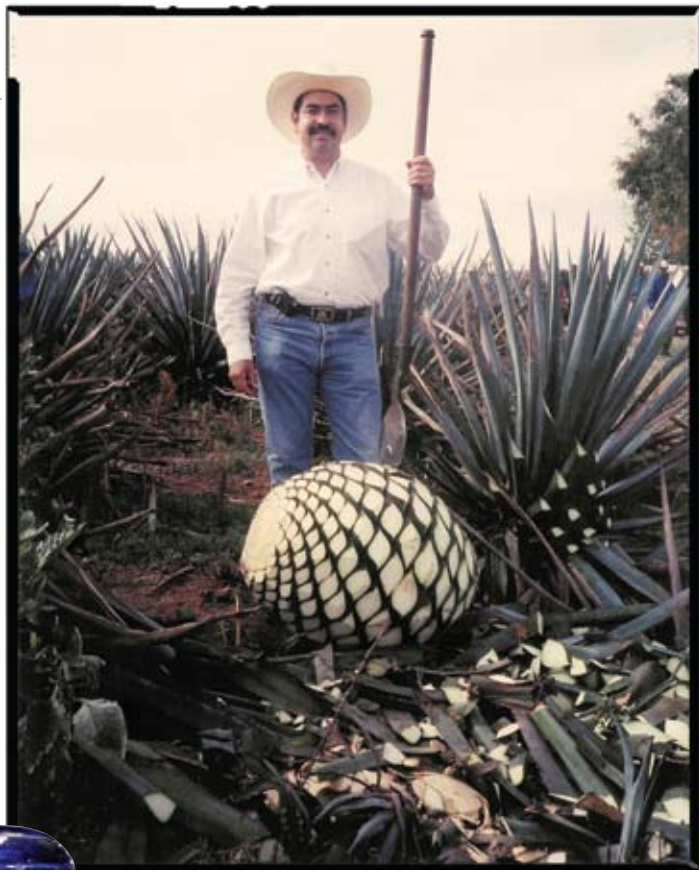
"I'M AN OPTOMETRIST. I spend Monday through Friday helping people to see better," says Adolfo Murillo. But in addition to more than a quarter century spent sharpening people's vision in Oxnard, he's also undertaken a second career of sharpening people's palates. "On the weekends," he continues with a laugh, "I help them to see twice as good."

Murillo is founder, president, and CEO of Tequila Alquimia, a boutique distilling operation based in Jalisco, Mexico. He's imported Alquimia into the U.S. since 2007; but the story actually starts about 18 years ago, when his family was considering selling Murillo's grandfather's ranch in Jalisco.

"I thought it would be such a shame to sell a part of our family history and our roots in Mexico," Murillo says. Determined to hold onto the property, Murillo knew he would have to change its purpose, so he explored whether the land could support blue agave, the plant behind tequila. Even though most of the farmers in Jalisco told him the growing conditions weren't conducive to such an undertaking, he was not deterred.

Murillo had no background in agriculture, but he holds a degree in biological sciences in addition to his optometry credentials. He studied agave-growing techniques and traveled throughout Jalisco talking with growers and field foremen. After personally testing the ranch's soil, he figured out what needed to be done to transform the ranch into a suitable growing area for agave. (*Alquimia*, it turns out, translates to "alchemy.")

"From the beginning I wanted to do it organically," Murillo says. "That's how my grandfather treated the soil when he was on the ranch. After I contracted my foreman, who grew up on the ranch and worked for my grandfather, we developed protocols based on natural methods and modern organic science."



Oxnard-based Adolfo Murillo planted acres of agave on his grandfather's ranch in Jalisco, Mexico, in 1996. In 2004, the plants reached maturity and Murillo harvested them to make Tequila Alquimia.



Remaking the soil was only the first step on the road to tequila production. The second step was patience, which led to lots more work: On average agave takes 7 to 10 years to mature. Murillo has about 200 acres of agave, and in any given field not every plant matures at the same time, so the various crops are hand-harvested to ensure that overripe and under-ripe agave aren't used.

It wasn't until 2004 that the agave originally planted in 1996 reached a level of maturity and quality that Murillo felt would produce top-shelf tequila. In developing Alquimia, Murillo used natural and environmentally healthy processing methods, which is why Alquimia bears the USDA Organic certification. Tequila producers often release their *añejo* (barrel-aged for at least one year), *reposado* (barrel-aged from two months to one year), and *blanco* (unaged) varieties at the same time; and so after Alquimia *añejo* was aged in oak for almost three years, the lineup arrived in the U.S. in 2007.

While all three are excellent, my favorite is the blanco. It's wonderful sipping on its own (do not destroy this gentle spirit with lime or salt, please). The distinct, crisp agave notes and earthy brightness also mix into margaritas and other cocktails with ease.

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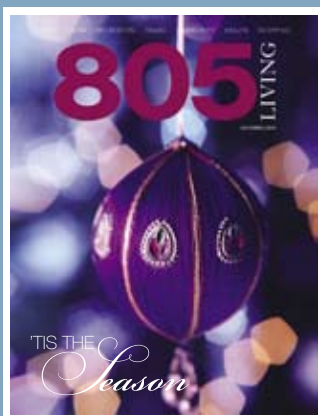
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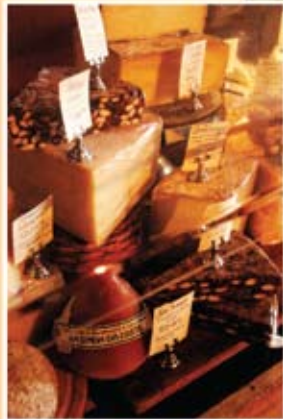
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“When I open a bottle of the blanco it takes me back to walking the ranch on an early summer morning, right before the sun comes up,” Murillo says. “The dew is all around. There are aromas of the flowers and the eucalyptus trees. All these fresh flavors and aromas are there in the blanco tequila.”

Tequila Alquimia is found in many shops and on many menus throughout the Central Coast, including Yolanda’s in Oxnard (yolandasmexicancafe.com). In fact, the restaurant proudly displays an oversized painting of Alquimia’s bottle as well as framed photographs of Murillo’s ranch in its bar area.

“I love walking into Yolanda’s and seeing the ranch,” Murillo says. “It’s a little bit of Jalisco right here in the 805.”

Although Murillo was born on the ranch, he grew up in Ojai. He and his wife have raised their two daughters in Ventura County, where he’s also spent 25 years in private practice. Murillo emphasizes the importance of continuous support from his community to the brand’s success; in return, Alquimia participates in many events throughout the year in support of numerous local organizations.

As Murillo’s dreams of producing world-class tequila have taken shape, he’s also making an impact on the cultural advances in Mexico by passing on the lessons he’s learned: “It was very important to make tequila of the very highest quality because we wanted to call attention to Jalisco with a product that demonstrates organic farming. Over the years, we’ve continued to improve our soils and we share as much knowledge as we can with others in the area. Our ranch has become an outdoor classroom, where we teach organic protocols to other landowners to improve their soils, their products, and their way of life. We do this for free and ask only that once they learn the methods they turn around and teach others as well.” ■

For more information on Tequila Alquimia, including upcoming events and where to find it in retail outlets and restaurants, visit tequilalquimia.com. Facebook: Tequila Alquimia.

Head’s Up:

Passport to the World of Wine, first Wednesday of every month

Taste five wines from around the world paired with seasonal cuisine at Santa Barbara’s Pierre Lafond Wine Bistro. Keep it in mind for next month (\$25; 6 to 8 p.m.; pierrelafond.com).

Santa Maria Winery & Vineyard Walk, September 11

Vineyard managers and winemakers lead tours at participating Santa Maria Valley wineries and vineyards (free; noon to 2 p.m.; 866-480-5194).

Chumeia Vineyards Sunset Wine Cruise, September 17

This sunset cruise around Morro Bay includes beautiful scenery, appetizers, and Chumeia wines (\$90 per person; 5 to 8 p.m.; chumeiavineyards.com).



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CENTRAL COAST WINES MADE EASY.

By Anthony Head

There may be a small breach of protocol in the BEEspoke label's intentions, at least as I see it. Apart from the twin capital E's in the name, which are enough to give any copy editor fits, if I see a bee on a bottle—or on anything, for that matter—I run. If anyone else out there was at an impressionable age when Irwin Allen's *The Swarm*, a 1978 blockbuster movie (of sorts) about the invasion of Africanized “killer” bees came out, they might be able to empathize.

Despite the unintended implication of massive pain and swelling, the wine is not sharp or unpleasant at all. Rather, it's a very soft, 50-50 split of grenache and syrah. There are rounded, almost cooling notes of smoke and spiced red fruit, which hint at a change of seasons taking place (that is, in places where such things can be experienced).

It would make a wonderful first great red wine for the fall, to be served on September 22. Even though the autumnal equinox doesn't

take place until 8:09 p.m. (PST), it won't breach anyone's protocol if you open it at, say, 7-ish. ■

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Taste of the Town

By Angela Pettera

SLO SPOTLIGHT

Food festivals and restaurants to explore in San Luis Obispo.

FALL IS THE PERFECT TIME to be in the northern end of the 805 because five fantastic food and wine festivals happen in the space of a month. Morro Bay's downtown Embarcadero hosts its fourth annual **Avocado & Margarita Festival** (morrobay.org) on September 18 with a guacamole contest, an avocado recipe contest, and a best-dressed avocado contest. **Pallet to Palate** (pallettopalate.com) in Shell Beach on September 19 and 20 teams restaurants with farmers to deliver wonderfully collaborative dishes served with local wines. **Sunset's Savor the Central Coast** (savorcentralcoast.com), with its wide range of culinary events—from tastings to tours to educational seminars—sponsored by *Sunset* magazine and *805 Living*, takes place from September 30 to October 3. Next up is the self-explanatory **Harvest Wine Weekend** (pasowine.com) in Paso Robles from October 15 to 17, when more than 130 wineries open their doors to the public to celebrate the crush. Overlapping that weekend is the **Pismo Beach Clam Festival** (pismoevents.com) October 16 and 17 with its parade, clam dig, and chowder cook-off.

San Luis Obispo (known locally as “SLO”) is the ideal place to stay because it's smack in between Pismo and Paso. The website sanluisobispovacations.com has plenty of great hotel choices, from the eccentric Madonna Inn to the more practical but very pleasant La Cuesta Inn with its free Wi-Fi, DVDs for guests to borrow, and complimentary in-room popcorn (not to mention free breakfast in the lobby).

SLO has seen plenty of new restaurant openings in the past year or so, including the interesting **The Neon Carrot** (theneoncarrot.com). Owner Maegen Loring (with her husband, Jeff) uses Hearst Ranch beef in the delicious burgers, which can be topped with caramelized onions and cheese. Organic, locally grown carrots are shredded for the perfect, triple-decker carrot cake with fluffy cream-cheese frosting. Loring, a longtime caterer, used to own The Park, a more formal dining space than Neon Carrot's counter-service, stylized industrial digs with two long communal tables and a few rows of two-top tables. She closed The Park, she says, because “I wanted to do something different than fine dining.” So does half of SLO, judging by the crowds that mob the breakfast and lunch spot daily. Everything on the excellent, no-miss menu rings in under \$10, including the crab cake salad with citrus vinaigrette and the Italian grinder with excellent Italian salsa verde.



Fruits of the vine and land are celebrated this month and next at several food festivals in San Luis Obispo; Tyler Florence and other celebrity chefs will take part in *Sunset's* Savor the Central Coast.

Ciopinot (ciopinotrestaurant.com) is named for the winning combination of cioppino and pinot noir. My favorite version here (there are four on the menu, \$30–\$40) is the No-Work Cioppino with tomato-rich broth and tender, shelled seafood (shrimp, scallops, and fish). The recommended wine pairing for this huge bowl—which comes with plenty of bread—is the Byron pinot noir from Santa Maria.

Granada Bistro (granadabistro.com) is a small, dark, cash-only wine bar that reminds me of a Spanish bodega. The bar stocks only imported wines and draft beers. The kitchen serves a limited menu of small bites, such as marinated olives, cheeses, flatbreads, and panini (\$4–\$15) served at one of the four tables or at the bar. Every day **Amy Bakes Cupcakes** (amybakescupcakes.com) drops off different flavors of cupcakes (\$4 each), which pair quite well with the wines (\$10 for the pairing). For instance, the chocolate merlot cupcake goes perfectly with a cabernet-merlot blend, while the salted caramel cupcake matches up nicely with prosecco. Check Granada Bistro's website to see the current cupcake flavor schedule, because I can't think of a better way to end a visit to the Central Coast than with a glass of wine and a cupcake. ■

Visit our “Angie Eats” blog (blog.805living.com) during the month of September to get updated on the bevy of food festivals coming this month and next.

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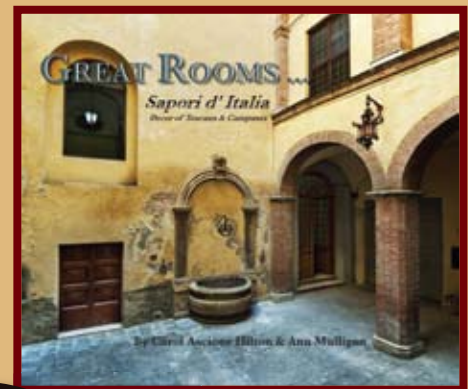
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Taste of the Town

By Angela Pettera

DIALED IN

Food news and delicious dishes from the local dining scene.

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

EDITOR'S NOTE: Our Dialed In page will now feature must-have dishes in the 805 as well as restaurant and dining news. For additional news and special promotions, see the new highlights sprinkled throughout the Dining Guide pages.

At lunchtime, **Grissini** in Agoura Hills (grissiniristoranteitaliano.com) offers a large **Greek pizza** (\$11) bursting with flavors. The thin, crunchy crust is smeared with a bit of pesto sauce and topped with pitted kalamata olives, feta cheese crumbles, grilled red peppers, and tiny squares of grilled eggplant. After baking, the whole pie is given a windfall of fresh, raw spinach leaves on top, which helps me pretend that I'm eating a salad. It's delicious and addicting.

New to the Paso Robles dining scene, **Il Cortile Ristorante** (ilcortileristorante.com) on the main square serves a lovely pasta at lunchtime. Chef Santos MacDonal prepares **penne** in a deep-orange *pomodoro* sauce; then he shreds a mound of *ricotta salata* (pressed, salted, and dried ricotta cheese) over the top of it. The pure white, salty cheese adds a perfect tang to the sweet tomato sauce and makes the dish sing (\$12). I couldn't get enough of it.

The best **meatloaf** I've ever eaten is at **The Sidecar** in Ventura (thesidecarrestaurant.com): Chef Tim Kilcoyne starts with grass-fed beef, then mixes in his homemade ketchup. He also folds in minced vegetables that he's braised in red wine. The result is a tender, beefy loaf with an unmatched depth of flavor. He puts it over mashed Yukon gold potatoes and drizzles it with a red wine sauce. The dish (\$18) is served at dinnertime with seasonal vegetables.

The **Tagine Roasted Chicken** (\$25) at **Azu** in Ojai (azuojai.com) is heady, flavorful comfort food. Chef Laurel Moore roasts her chicken with preserved lemons and Moroccan olives and then serves it with a fruited Israeli couscous to wonderful effect.

I've never been a big fan of flan, but the **coconut flan** (\$4) at the new **Café Habana** at Malibu Lumber Yard (cafehavana.com) is heaven. All coconut cream, no shredded coconut, the small round disk is drizzled with *dulce de leche* sauce. How can flan taste this good? Maybe it was the stylish but casual vibe of the pan-Latin restaurant helping the flavors, or the friendly servers, or the fact that Cindy Crawford and her husband Rande Gerber—an owner of Café Habana along with former Ray-Ban model Sean Meenan—were sitting next to me. Props also go to the crispy *pollo al limón* (or lemon chicken; \$20) with its chunky, garlicky *mojo* sauce; the rice and plantains; the Tacos de Pescada Malibu Style (\$12)—freshly made corn tortillas stuffed with grilled mahimahi, avocado, pico de gallo, cabbage, and a slightly spicy ancho chile cream; and the Bayamo cocktail (\$11), a muddle of strawberries and cilantro covered in vodka, lemon juice, and Sprite.

Veranda Fireside Lounge & Restaurant at Rancho Bernardo Inn

Veranda Fireside Lounge & Restaurant, the open-air dining venue at **Rancho Bernardo Inn** in San Diego (ranchobernardoinn.com/veranda), is worth checking out because it has undergone a beautiful transformation. At the bar area, natural wood communal tables and a backlit onyx panel lend a sophisticated feel to the room. The choicest seats, however, are outside under the pergola overlooking the golf course. Relax on oversized patio furniture while dining on pan-roasted salmon, grilled lamb chops, or wild mushroom risotto. Cushy chairs surround the outdoor fireplace and are perfect for guests who want snacks like the fish tacos made with grilled mahimahi and mango salsa, or the trio of sliders with three different toppings. Mojitos and martinis are made with fresh herbs and citrus—try an Infused Rosemary Mojito and a Citrus Lavender Martini. ■

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

805 DINING GUIDE

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

LOOK Indicates an update to an existing listing.

Restaurant information is subject to change without notice.

We will be adding new listings to the Dining Guide each month. Please send any comments and suggestions to angela@805living.com 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.

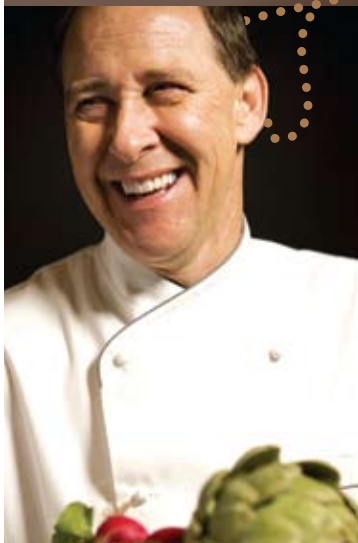
BELLINI OSTERIA BAR & LOUNGE

951 S. Westlake Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-497-8482
belliniosteria.com
Italian
Entrées \$11–\$34
Romantic

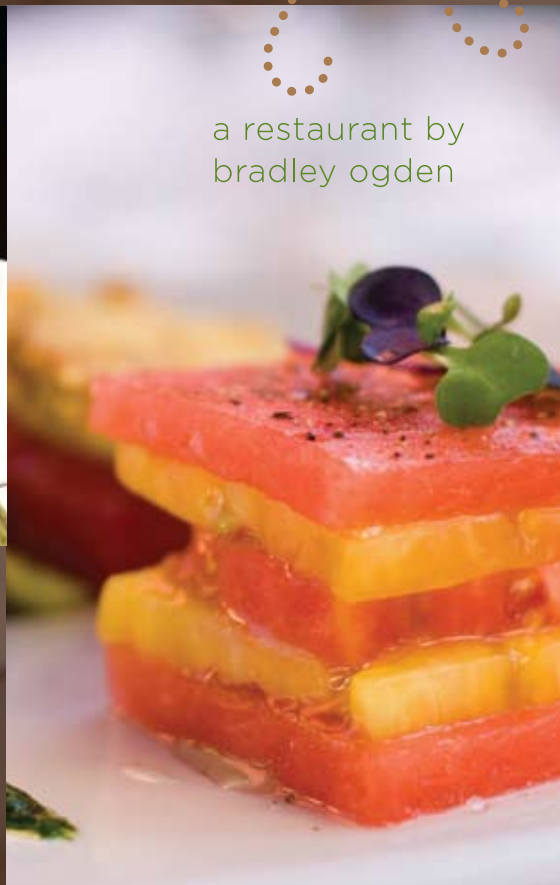
Delicious Italian food comes from the hands of chef Gianluca Sarti at this stylish trattoria. Patrons enjoy authentic pastas, osso buco, and a few fish dishes inside the main dining room or out on the patio, where black-and-white movies—mostly Italian in origin—are screened. A wine bar near the entrance has a communal table and a happy hour (4 to 7 p.m., Sunday through Friday). Service from an attractive wait staff is attentive and helpful. Bellini is open for lunch and dinner daily.

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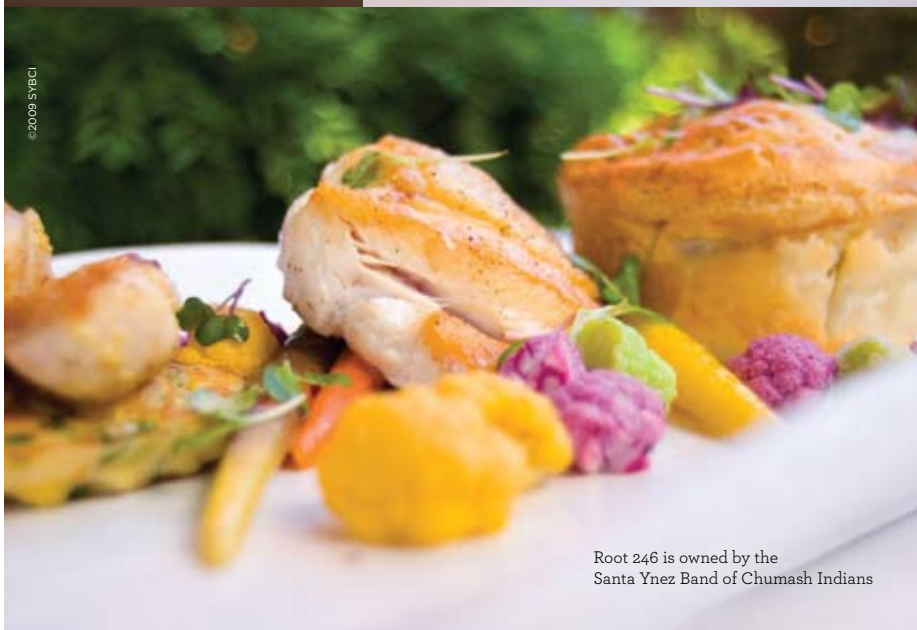


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BOCCACCIO'S

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

Saturday & Sunday Brunch, Great View

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

BOUCHON

9 W. Victoria St.
Santa Barbara, 805-730-1160
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.

LOOK CAFÉ PROVENÇAL

2310 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-496-7121
cafeprovençal.biz
French
Entrées \$14–\$37
Romantic

This French café with a big heart is run by vivacious owner Serge Bonnet. He loves to entertain his patrons with live accordion music on Thursday nights and dancing. He also loves to keep wine glasses filled during Deluxe Dinners on Wednesday and Thursday nights. There are always lunch and dinner specials to try; just ask. The menu keeps Francophiles happy with classics such as French onion soup, ratatouille, and fillet of sole in lemon-butter sauce.

CHARLIE'S MALIBU

22821 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, 310-456-3132
charliesmalibu.com
American
Entrées \$16–\$45
Romantic

Across the street from the Malibu Pier, Charlie's feels like a Malibu resident's living room. The bar is usually stocked with locals checking out wines by the glass, taste, or flight

Café Provençal's (Thousand Oaks; cafeprovençal.biz) two-for-one lunch deal, the "Formule Express," is only \$16 for soup or salad, choice of daily special, dessert, and beverage for both diners. Mention it to the waiter when ordering; available Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dinner deals include Wednesday's and Thursday's Deluxe Dinner: five courses (which change weekly) paired with three different wines (bottomless glasses) for \$45.

via the Enomatic system. Sommelier Caitlin Stansbury focuses on small producers like the vintners in Malibu. In the dining room, beautiful leopard-print chairs and paintings by Jane Seymour lend color to the otherwise minimalist white decor. A few tables dot the raised back patio, which sits behind a pane of glass. The menu is chock-full of steakhouse classics by chef David Linville. Charlie's is open for dinner nightly.

COAST RESTAURANT & BAR

31 W. Carillo St.
Santa Barbara, 805-879-9100
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-crusting sea bass comes in a green coconut-curry sauce. Short ribs get the Szechuan treatment and a ginger-orange gremolata, while a veal burger benefits from caramelized onions and Gruyère cheese. Save room for desserts, like the mini cupcake sampler or the mint-chip ice cream sandwich. The bar scene is lively, especially during happy hour (4:30 to 6:30 p.m., Monday through Friday). Bottles from the wine list can be purchased from the Elements website.

ENOTECA TOSCANA WINE BISTRO

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

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

might see braised short ribs or Tuscan chicken. At lunch-time, panini sandwiches are available. Enoteca Toscana is open for lunch and dinner Tuesday through Sunday.

ERIC'S RESTAURANT & BAR

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

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

FINS CREEKSIDE

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

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

FLEMING'S PRIME STEAKHOUSE & WINE BAR

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

LOOK 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.

GRISSINI RISTORANTE ITALIANO

30125 Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-735-9711
grissiniristoranteitaliano.com

Italian
Entrées \$10-\$32

Live Music



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>> 805 DINING GUIDE

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

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 oversized. Sides are à la carte, and the list of potatoes and veggies is long but unremarkable. Resist ordering more than one so that you can indulge in a giant dessert, which will be ferried out with a bowl of freshly whipped cream. The wine list features local vintners as well as highly rated wines from France and Italy.

MEDITERRANEAN

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) menu, the yellowtail with jalapeño, the lobster salad with lemon dressing, and the black cod. The rest of us like to go to see the culinary stars, for the rock shrimp tempura, and for the bento box of desserts (you have to ask for that one), but be prepared to pay the price.

LOOK 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 *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.

RIVIERA RESTAURANT & LOUNGE

23683 Calabasas Road
Calabasas, 818-224-2163
rivieracalabasas.com

Continental

Entrées \$14–\$39

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

ROY'S

6363 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Woodland Hills, 818-888-4801
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-crust mahimahi, and a hot chocolate soufflé cake. On special occasions, drummers and hula dancers perform in the restaurant.

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 butter-nut squash, English cucumber, Point Reyes blue cheese, smoked salmon, focaccia croutons, and spiced hazelnuts. At brunch, the hollandaise is tangy and the house-made lemon curd is irresistible. Tuesday night is grilled cheese and jazz night. Look for purveyor dinners and murder mystery theatre nights.

SPARK WOODFIRE GRILL

1555 Simi Town Center Way
Simi Valley, 805-823-4756
sparkredfish.com

Every Saturday night at Grissini (Agoura Hills; grissiniristoranteitaliano.com), enjoy dinner and a murder-mystery show for \$69, all-inclusive. The meal begins with bruschetta; entrée choices include Dover sole or chicken cacciatore. Dessert is tiramisu or imported Italian gelato plus coffee or tea.

Seafood
Entrées \$14–\$28
Live Music

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

SUZANNE'S CUISINE
502 W. Ojai Ave.
Ojai, 805-640-1961
suzannescuisine.com
Cal-Med
Entrées \$15–\$28
Romantic

Travelers to Ojai make Suzanne's a part of their itinerary so they can explore what she's up to in any given season. Relying heavily on the produce around her, Suzanne Roll turns out lunch and dinner dishes that are interesting and handcrafted. Breads for the sandwiches are made by a local bakery; soups change daily. You might see a rainbow trout grilled with rosemary and lemon or a stuffed Cornish game hen with an apricot-marsala sauce. The atmosphere is casual with seats on the back patio next to the garden and a most pleasant gurgling fountain and outdoor fireplace. For cooler weather, there's also an enclosed patio. Note: The restaurant is closed on Tuesdays.

**TIERRA SUR RESTAURANT
AT HERZOG WINE CELLARS**
3201 Camino Del Sol
Oxnard, 805-983-1560
herzogwinecellars.com
Kosher Californian
Entrées \$25–\$44

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

TRATTORIA FARFALLA
160 Promenade Way
Westlake Village, 805-497-2283
farfallawestlakevillage.com
Italian
Entrées \$10–\$20
Romantic

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

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

VINEYARD HOUSE

3631 Sagunto St.
Santa Ynez, 805-688-2886
thevineyardhouse.com
Eclectic
Entrées \$11–\$28

Sunday Brunch, Kid-Friendly

The large, wooden, wraparound deck allows diners to gaze upon the rolling hills of Santa Ynez Valley—whether enjoying the fruits of its vines or teetotaling with the Bleeding Heart spritzer (ginger ale, grape juice, and lime). A wide range of cuisine styles share the menu space. Sandwiches are filled with pesto chicken, Virginia pulled pork, or the catch of the day with wasabi mayonnaise. Burgers, pizzas, and pastas compete for your attention with the spicy venison chili verde with tomatillos and green chiles. The crispy chicken salad and the crab cake spinach salad are also crowd pleasers. At night, choose from a 12-ounce rib eye, rack of lamb, chicken “three ways,” or butternut squash ravioli (among other things). Sweet endings include a warm, chewy, chocolate-walnut brownie topped with McConnell’s vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce.

LOOK 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.

WATERMARK

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

Romantic

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

ZIN BISTRO AMERICANA

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

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

FOODIE

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

BROOKS

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

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

CAFÉ 14

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

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

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.

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 Lentz are sometimes simple, sometimes complex, but always spot-on delicious. The Maine lobster roll is smeared with a Meyer-lemon aioli instead of standard mayo. Baltimore crab cakes sit on frisée with pancetta and a coddled quail egg. The space is small and reservations aren’t taken, so some waiting may be involved, but an East Coast cocktail with muddled fruit ought to take the edge off. Open for dinner nightly.

Padri (Agoura Hills; padrirestaurant.net) has a \$12 two-course lunch special, Monday through Friday from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Choose from options like pear Gorgonzola salad or minestrone soup to start, then spaghetti and meatballs or chopped chicken salad. This deal comes with a soft drink.

KANDA SUSHI

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

NEW 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.

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.

A Beverly Hills tradition has come to Westlake Village.

The Grill on the Alley serves Prime Steaks and Chops, Fresh Seafood, Classic Cobb and Caesar Salads, not-to-be-missed Desserts and other traditional favorites. The bar boasts classic Martinis, hand-crafted Cocktails and an extensive wine list. All served in a sophisticated yet comfortable atmosphere.

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LOOK 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.

LOOK 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 chophouses, Sly's offers a list of pastas as well as sandwiches and small cuts of steak for those who don't have a huge appetite. Desserts are wonderful, too. Sly's is open for lunch Monday through Friday, dinner nightly, and lunch and brunch on Saturday and Sunday.

WINE CASK

813 Anacapa St.
Santa Barbara, 805-966-9463
winecask.com
Wine Country
Entrées \$19–\$32

Romantic

Minimal decor enhances the attention paid to the food on the plate and the wine in the glass. Proprietors Doug Margerum and Mitchell Sjerven have so much experience serving wine and food to Santa Barbarans, they typically know just what their clientele wants. Chef David Sundeen crafts a seasonal menu of wonderful treats using wild fish, farmers' market produce, and meats like quail, lamb, and beef. Open only for dinner, it's Santa Barbara's signature restaurant and next-door wine shop (called The Alliance).

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.

BODEE'S

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

Californian

Entrées \$18–\$34

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

BRENT'S DELI

2799 Townsgate Road
Westlake Village, 805-557-1882
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.

He's baaack! Celebrity chef
Fabio Viviani once again has
control of Café Firenze's kitchen.
(Moorpark; cafefirenze.net)

LOOK CAFÉ FIRENZE

563 W. Los Angeles Ave.
Moorpark, 805-532-0048
cafefirenze.net
Italian
Entrées \$13–\$34

Romantic

Pastas are handmade daily at this beautiful, sprawling Italian restaurant. Chef Kimberly Fujitaki makes a lovely wine-poached pear salad and bruschetta topped with roasted zucchini and shrimp. Ravioli is filled with lobster or braised short ribs. Main meat dishes include osso buco, rib-eye steak, and chicken piccata. Weekly wine-tasting events take place at the fully stocked bar.

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.

CIGALE CAFÉ

702 Lindero Canyon Road
Oak Park, 818-991-2442
cigalecafe.com
Cal-French
Entrées \$14–\$32

Chef and owner Denis Rion named his café after a cicada, the symbol of hospitality in southern France. He creates some classic French dishes like onion soup, steamed mussels, frog legs, and *boeuf bourguignon* for dinner, but he also offers some Mediterranean and Californian fare. At lunch a wide range of salads is on offer including one with the grain quinoa and some grilled veggies. There's also paella, pasta dishes, and a bouillabaisse for both lunch and dinner. The surroundings are great for a business meeting.

COSMOS GRILL

23663 Calabasas Road
Calabasas, 818-591-2211
cosmosgrill.com
Eclectic
Entrées \$9–\$20

Whether you sit on the sunny patio or inside the small dining room, service is friendly at this casual Calabasas eatery across from the Commons. The menu has a little of everything, from salad to pasta to fish to burgers to panini. The flavors are all over the map, from American (yam chips) to Latin (spicy adobo chicken salad with a cilantro-lime dressing) to Asian ("tilapia Bangkok" in spicy Thai peanut sauce) to Italian (cheese ravioli).

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.

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.

DARBAND GRILL

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

Live Music

Both locations of this Persian eatery have a slightly lush look thanks to nice fabrics. The service is quick and the

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

ELADIO'S

1 State St.
Santa Barbara, 805-963-4466
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.

EXOTIC THAI CAFÉ

29045 W. Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-991-8147
and at 1145 Lindero Canyon Road
Westlake Village, 818-575-3248
and at 2705 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-373-9231
and at 1930 Newbury Road
Newbury Park, 805-375-0272
and at 1145 S. Victoria Ave.
Ventura, 805-658-4861
and at 22776 Ventura Blvd.
Woodland Hills, 818-225-0789
and at 1555 Simi Town Center Way
Simi Valley, 805-306-1255
and at 849 E. Ojai Ave.
Ojai, 805-646-6618

Thai

Entrées \$10–\$16

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

FEAST BISTRO

254 E. Ojai Ave.
Ojai, 805-640-9260
feastofojai.com

New American

Entrées \$12–\$20

Romantic

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

GINO'S BISTRO

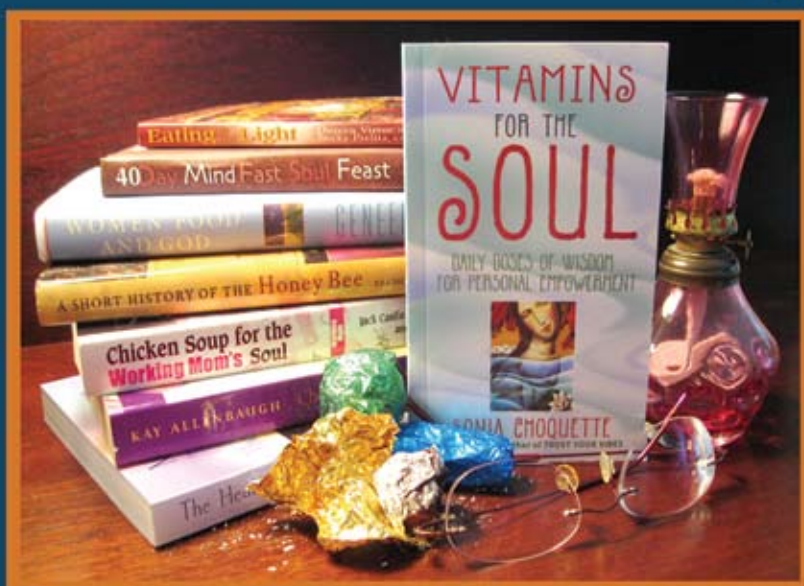
1620 Newbury Road
Newbury Park, 805-498-3188
ginosbistro.net

Italian

Entrées \$13–\$29

Kid-Friendly

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805 DINING GUIDE

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

KING'S FISH HOUSE

4798 Commons Way
Calabasas, 818-225-1979

Seafood

Entrées \$10-\$39

(and up to \$72 for a 3-pound lobster)

Kid-Friendly

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

KUMO SUSHI

860 Hampshire Road
Westlake Village, 805-494-5250

Japanese

Entrées \$13-\$26; Sushi \$3-\$13 per roll

Kid-Friendly

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

THE LANDING GRILL AND SUSHI BAR

32123 W. Lindero Canyon Road
Westlake Village, 818-706-8887
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.

MANDARIN EXPRESS

5015 Kanan Road
Agoura Hills, 818-991-9831
mandarinexpressagourahills.com

Chinese Fusion

Entrées \$10-\$27

It's not much to look at (think Formica tables and mirrored walls) but the owners of this tiny storefront are dedicated to keeping Chinese food interesting, fresh, and as organic as possible. Chef Dan Chang creates fusion dishes like filet mignon in a bourbon, basil, and black bean sauce and shrimp with nuts and balsamic vinegar over rice. The food isn't cheap by any stretch, but you've never had Chinese takeout like this before. The choices are almost endless considering the chef will pair just about any sauce you like with any meat, fish, vegetable,

or mock meat (made of tofu or seitan) you want. He'll also adjust the heat (as in spice) level to your liking. When you want something different and delicious and delivered, this is definitely the place to get it.

MI PIACE ITALIAN KITCHEN

4799 Commons Way
Calabasas, 818-591-8822

Italian

Entrées \$8-\$20

Sunday Brunch, Kid-Friendly

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

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.

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THE WHALE'S TAIL

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

Seafood
Entrées \$10–\$43
Great View, Sunday Brunch

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

WILLY'S SMOKEHOUSE

28434 Roadside Drive
Agoura Hills, 818-991-7227
Barbecue
Entrées \$9–\$24
Kid-Friendly

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

WOLFGANG PUCK L.A. BISTRO

30990 Russell Ranch Road West
Westlake Village, 818-597-1902
wolfgangpuck.com/bistro
Californian
Entrées \$9–\$15
Kid-Friendly, Sunday Brunch

This hot restaurant has delicious pizzas, focaccia sandwiches, and fresh salads that hit your table less than 10 minutes after ordering. Heartier dishes include meatloaf, rotisserie chicken, and teriyaki salmon. Some menu items change seasonally (with Puck himself vetting every dish). The look is smart and sleek with indoor dining plus two outdoor patios. Wine bottles hanging on the wall suggest good drinking options; by day there are GuS sparkling sodas. Brunch gets the addition of egg dishes and waffles. It's tasty; it's fast; it's crowded; so go at off-peak hours if possible. Curbside pickup is a handy alternative to dining in.

THE CHAIN GANG

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

CALIFORNIA PIZZA KITCHEN

2200 Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-777-1778
and in Westfield Topanga
6606 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Canoga Park, 818-884-8858
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, 805-371-9705
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.

CLAIM JUMPER

2150 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-494-9656
claimjumper.com
American
Entrées \$10–\$31
Kid-Friendly

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

NEW JOHNNY ROCKETS

322 W. Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, 805-778-0780
and 5015 Cornell Road
Agoura Hills, 818-879-9933
and at The Commons at Calabasas
4799 Commons Way
Calabasas, 818-222-3460
and at The Promenade at Camarillo
640 E. Ventura Blvd.
Camarillo, 805-383-1888
johnnyrockets.com
American
Entrées \$7–\$10
Kid-Friendly

The ultimate 1950s diner with tiny jukeboxes on the tables, lots of chrome, and darling uniforms on the servers. There are 10 different hamburgers on the menu in addition to a great Nathan's hot dog, killer milkshakes, and flavored sodas. We don't know who will love it more, the kids or Grandpa.

P.F. CHANG'S CHINA BISTRO

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

Chinese-American
Entrées \$6–\$18

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

WOOD RANCH BBQ & GRILL

5050 Cornell Road
Agoura Hills, 818-597-8900
and 540 New Los Angeles Ave.
Moorpark, 805-523-7253
and 1101 E. Daily Drive
Camarillo, 805-482-1202
and 3449 E. Main St.
Ventura, 805-620-4500
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.

ADOBE CANTINA

29100 W. Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-991-3474
Mexican
Entrées \$9–\$17
Kid-Friendly

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

ALOHA STEAKHOUSE

5800 Santa Rosa Road
Camarillo, 805-484-1422
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.

Wood Ranch BBQ & Grill (Agoura Hills; woodranch.com) has added six boutique beers—including Firestone's Double Barrel Ale and Bayhawk Hefeweizen—to its full bar menu. On Tuesdays, all wine is half-price all day in every Wood Ranch location.

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

BROPHY BROS. CLAM BAR & RESTAURANT
 119 Harbor Way
 Santa Barbara, 805-966-4418
 and 1559 Spinnaker Drive
 Ventura, 805-693-0865
brophybros.com
 Seafood
 Entrées \$10–\$21
Great View

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

CAFÉ FIORE RESTAURANT & MARTINI LOUNGE
 66 S. California St.
 Ventura, 805-653-1266
fiorerestaurant.net
 Italian
 Entrées \$14–\$28
Romantic, Live Music

Lively and loud, this martini bar and restaurant is beautifully decorated. A tall, dark-wood bar dominates the room in which it stands and showcases the bartenders mixing up cucumber martinis and blueberry cosmos. Booths and tables are usually crowded with friends enjoying themselves either indoors or out on the patio. The kitchen turns out many flavorful Italian dishes like pizza with pesto sauce, grilled chicken, mozzarella, and sun-dried tomatoes; or ravioli filled with lobster and braised leeks then doused in a tomato-cream sauce. A classic osso buco is served over saffron risotto, as it should be. Whole-wheat pasta makes an appearance on the spa menu, which is geared towards lighter fare. The dessert list offers plenty to smile about including a chocolate trio with molten-chocolate cake, bittersweet chocolate pot de crème, and a frozen custard with pistachios and white chocolate. Live music plays in the lounge area Tuesday through Saturday nights.

CHAR FASL
 5843 Kanan Road
 Agoura Hills, 818-889-9495
 Persian
 Entrées \$13–\$20

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

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-crusting 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
elreycantina.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 \$12–\$26
Live Music

Red is a major accent of this restaurant, whose name means "flames" in Italian. The fire theme carries through to some of the grilled menu items, like the baby back ribs and the spicy heat of the *peperonata* sauce on the pork

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

FOX SPORTS GRILL

30970 Russell Ranch Road
Westlake Village, 818-338-7080
foxsportsgrill.com/westlake
American
Entrées \$6-\$27

Sports on 20 screens

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

GALLETTO BAR & GRILL

982 S. Westlake Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-449-4300
gallettoabarandgrill.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 Milanesa 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 picatta, fettuccine Bolognese, pizza, and Caprese salad. Don't miss the gelato truffles for dessert.

KABUKI JAPANESE RESTAURANT

20940 Ventura Blvd.
Woodland Hills, 818-704-8700
kabukirestaurants.com
Japanese
Entrées \$10-\$18
Kid-Friendly

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

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

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*.

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.

THE MELTING POT

3685 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-370-8802
meltingpot.com
Fondue
Entrées \$18-\$23 individually or \$59 for two
Kid-Friendly

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

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.

SCHECK & SHAY'S ROCKIN' DINER

3907 Cochran St.
Simi Valley, 805-306-9566
simidiner.com
American
Entrées \$7-\$12
Kid-Friendly

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

SHEILA'S PLACE WINE BAR & RESTAURANT

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

The Hideaway at Lindero Country Club (Agoura Hills; linderocc.com) has gotten an extreme makeover. The dining venue has always been open to the public, but owner David Smith recently decided to go big with it. He hired chef Robert Grenner (Bellavino, Wood Ranch Country Club) to craft a beautiful menu with all entrées ringing in under \$24. Smith built an outdoor wood-burning pizza oven and laid down flagstone on the lovely patio with tables set between its ivy-covered walls and gurgling fountain. At lunchtime, diners can request to sit in the pool cabanas.

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.

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

California
Entrées \$9–\$12; Specials \$17–\$35
Part tasting room for the Bella Victorian Winery, part lingerie boutique (tastefully done), and part bistro. Chef G el 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 CAF 

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, cr pes, and salads vie for your attention with an array of delicious baked goods including croissants, madeleines, custard brioche, and crispy *palmier* cookies.

CHOCOLATINE

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

Bakery
Entrées \$7–\$10

A chocolate caf  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 cr pes. 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.

DAMON & PYTHIAS

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

American
Entrées \$8–\$13

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

NEW FRESH & FABULOUS BAKERY

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 dietician 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.

NEW 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!

NEW MAIN COURSE CALIFORNIA

1363 Donlon St.
Ventura, 805-658-8900
maincourseca.com
American
Entrées \$8-\$13

When a caterer first opens a retail dining space, it's bound to be modest. But the few seats in this industrial space are comfortable and the food is fresh and delicious. Sandwiches, salads, soups, and desserts are made with local ingredients, so they change with the seasons. There's a refrigerated cabinet for take-home quiches.

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 and lunch are more popular than dinner due to the great sandwiches like the Reuben, turkey with cranberry sauce, and New York steak on garlic bread. Portions are big enough for two, so don't be afraid to doggy bag it or order the half-portion of the many pasta dishes.

LOOK 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.

NEW 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.

NEW 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.

NEW 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.

LOOK 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.

NEW 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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INSIDE INFORMATION

Being a chef in today's food-crazed society is one of the most enviable careers going. They're kitchen alchemists and social tastemakers, media personalities and culinary celebrities. But still—it's just a job. And like the rest of the working classes, after getting off work chefs like to go out to dinner. Here's where some local toques go when they get hungry.

FABIO VIVIANI, CHEF

Café Firenze (cafefirenze.net)
Moorpark

For the Italian hospitality, I go to both Tuscany il Ristorante and Rustico in Westlake Village (both can be found at tuscany-restaurant.com). I trust the chefs to cook for me and they never do wrong. I hate fancy food. They cook simple, well-made food using good ingredients.

ALBERTO VAZQUEZ, CHEF

Mediterraneo at Westlake Village Inn (med-rest.com)
Westlake Village

I dream about the Special Spicy Shrimp Tempura Roll with Maguire Sauce and the miso soup prepared "spicy" with jalapeños at Sushi Oaks in Newbury Park (805-498-5518). I stop there at least four times a week on my way home. It's consistently good and has been around ten years to prove it.

DEBORAH SCARBOROUGH, CHEF AND OWNER

The Black Cat Bistro (blackcatbistro.com)
Cambria

The shrimp tacos at Villa Creek in Paso Robles (villacreek.com) are spicy and simple and come with house-made flour tortillas, which smell amazing and taste even better. The spiciness of the dish goes great with a margarita. I always run into restaurant or winemaker friends there.

TODD AARONS, EXECUTIVE CHEF

Tierra Sur Restaurant at Herzog Wine Cellars (herzogwinecellars.com)
Oxnard

"Pizza fusion" is the thing at Pizza Nosh in Agoura Hills (pizzanosh.com). I am always impressed by the level of quality and consistency at this fast-food eatery. There are two pizzas with especially unique flavor combinations: Mexican pizza with refried beans, tomato, and jalapeño peppers, and the BBQ Veggie Chicken pizza with barbecue sauce, cheese, red onion, and cilantro.

CHRIS BRYAN, CHEF

Safire American Bistro (safirebistro.com)
Camarillo

While I have a few old favorites like the California Grill (805-987-1922) and Charn Thai (charn-thai.com) in Camarillo, I am constantly trying new places in the area to keep a finger on the pulse of local trends. My latest find is Ladyface Alehouse and Brasserie in Agoura (ladyfaceale.com). The Croque Madame is a delicious classic dish that you just don't see that often anymore. It's basically a French grilled cheese sandwich. ■





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A Selection of Highlights from the Hideaway Menu

- Lunch**
Chef Grenner's World Chili / Cup-\$5.50 Bowl-\$8.50
served with chopped sweet onions and cilantro
- Chilled Yucatan Seafood Cocktail / \$9.95**
chilled poached shrimp, scallops and fresh fish in a refreshing tomato, cucumber and cilantro broth with diced avocado
- Curried Chicken, Raw Organic Vegetable Papaya Salad / \$9.50**
with ginger and honey
- Panzanella Tuscan Bread, Tomato, Buffalo Mozzarella / \$8.95**
with heirloom tomato, fresh buffalo mozzarella, torn basil salad with cold pressed extra virgin olive oil and sherry vinegar
- BBQ Tri Tip with Black Strap Molasses-Bourbon Sauce / \$9.50**
with grilled onions, grilled peppers and aged sharp cheddar cheese
- Grilled Portobello Mushroom, Buffalo Mozzarella / \$8.50**
with organic field greens and marinara on a garlic-rubbed potato bun
- Grilled Shrimp Locally Grown Vegetable Tostada Salad / \$9.50**
with sweet corn, lentils, black beans, chipotle ranch and fuerte avocado
- Grilled Chicken Breast with Thai Basil-Toasted Almond Pesto / \$8.50**
sliced marinated tomato and organic baby greens
- Grilled Angus Sirloin Burger / \$7.50**
with house-made 1000 Island Dressing on a toasted soft potato bun.
Served with locally grown lettuce, tomato and onion
- Bar Menu Served All Day**
- Wood Fired Pizza**
Four Cheese, Roasted Garlic and Arrowhead Spinach / \$10.95
Margherita Pizza / \$9.95
With Heirloom Tomatoes, Basil, Thyme and Four Cheeses
Pepperoni, Caramelized Sweet Onion and Cracked Olive / \$11.95
Wild Mushroom, Rosemary and Lamb Sausage / \$12.95
- Kids Menu 12 and Under**
- Dinner**
"First Tastes"
Roasted Trio of Heirloom Beets / \$8.50
with burrata, pomegranate molasses, hazelnut oil and marcona almonds
- Chesapeake Blue Crab and Corn Pancakes / \$10.95**
with sweet pickled green tomato relish
- Classic Caesar with Garlic-Rubbed Croutons / \$6.50**
Add Grilled Chicken-\$2.50 · Add Bay Shrimp-\$2.95
- Hawaiian Yellow Fin Tuna Tataki / \$9.95**
with sweet pea guacamole and red lentils
- Charcuterie / \$13.95**
with a selection of artisan salumi, fresh burrata cheese, marcona almonds, spicy field greens tossed with fig balsamic, lavender-orange zest cured olives and sliced toasted baguettes
- "Fork and Knife"**
Roasted 12 oz. Prime Top Sirloin / \$23.95
with a Kona coffee-smoked paprika crust and summer stone fruit chutney, herb roasted potatoes and farmer's market vegetables
- "Bowl of Soul" Fresh Fish, Andouille Sausage, Prawns, Scallops / \$22.95**
fresh fish, andouille sausage, prawns, scallops, and roasted vegetables in a fiery saffras-tomato broth
- Grilled Snake River Farm Double Cut Korabuta Pork Chop / \$21.95**
with an agave nectar-tamari lacquer, herb roasted potatoes and farmer's market vegetables
- Herb Crusted Oven Roasted Organic Chicken Breast / \$19.95**
Shelton farms organic chicken breast with a pear blossom cherry-roasted shallot confit, toasted organic saffron couscous and farmer's market vegetables
- Roasted North Atlantic Salmon Fillet / \$20.95**
wrapped in applewood bacon and thyme with a viognier-porcini jus, toasted saffron couscous and farmer's market vegetables

Chef Grenner's World Chili / \$10.95
and cornbread with sweet butter and Somis honey

Castro Valley Artichoke Ravioli / \$16.50
with white truffle oil, pink peppercorns and arrowhead spinach

Finish your meal with one of our delicious homemade desserts

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