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APRIL 2010

HOME & GARDEN ISSUE

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Editor's Note



GARY MOSS

Sometimes, Staying Put Means Getting Out

I hate to bring this up, but obviously the economy is still impacting nearly every aspect of our lives, and not in an especially positive way. We keep hearing about the road to recovery, but the destination doesn't seem to be getting closer as quickly as we would like. Despite gasoline prices hovering somewhere around three dollars a gallon (which somehow seems like a bargain), there isn't always enough money to get out of town for a vacation. So more of us are focusing on our homes for entertaining and relaxation.

Naturally, our annual look at ideas for the home and garden centers around the concept of staying on-property; but the reality is that the process requires a bit of legwork. At least that was the case when I did my own home remodel—going out to look at fabric swatches, picking through antiques, and pricing tiles and light fixtures is a great excuse to poke around neighborhoods near and far. I discovered that sometimes the real treasures are found off the beaten path. In general, that's how life works: You have to dig to uncover the really cool stuff (which is why this issue is valuable) to freshen up many aspects of your life.

Speaking of treasures, this month we welcome Billy Goodnick as the gardening columnist. Around Santa Barbara, Goodnick is known as the “Garden Wise Guy,” and we're so happy that he's bringing his extensive knowledge to the pages of *805 Living*. Check out his first column on Australian plants (page 42) to see how they can transform the garden, then go to his website (www.billygoodnick.com) for more ideas.

Finally, if you really need to get out of the house, the Amgen Tour of California is coming. *805 Living* is proud to be the exclusive regional lifestyle magazine sponsor for the Stage 8 Overall Finish that rolls into the Conejo Valley on May 23. For a preview, including tips on the best places to view the cyclists, check out Mark Langton's feature on page 44. It'll inspire you to get on a bike as much as the rest of the issue will encourage you to revamp your immediate surroundings.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynne". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

*Lynne Andujar, Editor in Chief
and Associate Publisher
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Your domestic subscription includes 12 issues of 805 Living per year for \$25.95. If you have a question about your subscription, call us at 805-413-1141; write to Circulation Department, 805 Living, 3717 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd., Westlake Village, CA 91362; or reach us via e-mail at circulation@805living.com.



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after

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Westlake Village, CA 91362

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805 Living is published monthly and is
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A South Florida CPA firm completed an independent study concluding that GoldFellow®'s prices were indeed the highest among a group of their competitors. The study is available on the GoldFellow® website. Gusky says, "Consumers need to do their homework. Unfortunately too many companies make wild, untrue pricing claims to get you in their store. Don't be afraid to ask the actual amount you're being paid by pennyweight or gram before you hand over your gold."

Michael Gusky has appeared on CNN, CBS and Fox - as an unbiased expert on the gold industry. The Better Business Bureau (BBB) gives GoldFellow® a top rating, and consumers' testimonials always credit GoldFellow® for being "highly professional and honest". An honest approach, fair pricing and an excellent reputation are among the many reasons why people are visiting GoldFellow® to sell their gold.



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Behind the Scenes

GETTING OUR GREEN ON

From money- and water-saving habits like taking shorter showers to big investments like buying a hybrid vehicle, many of us are gradually greening our lives through eco-conscious efforts. This month, some of our contributors reveal the ways they're modifying their daily habits and home life for the greater good, as well as a couple things they're still working on.



BILLY GOODNICK, a Santa Barbara landscape design coach and landscape architect, debuts as an *805 Living* contributing writer this month (*In the Garden*, page 42). Given his field, it's fitting that vermiculture is one way Goodnick goes green. Worms! What could be greener than feeding cantaloupe rinds and coffee grounds to a seething box full of red wigglers? These pudgy critters turn "garbage" into nutritious soil and reduce impacts to landfill. They're

smart, too. I'm teaching them to use their bodies to spell "Good morning, Billy" when I open the lid. To see more of his work, visit www.billygoodnick.com.

Contributing editor **MARK LANGTON** (*Insider*, pages 26 and 28; *Hot Ticket*, page 30; "Wheels in Motion," page 44; and *Good Deeds*, pages 48 and 50) has only just begun efforts to save energy—but he's already noticing the payoff. About the only green thing we've done is replace all our incandescent light bulbs with the new fluorescent style. It's amazing how many light bulbs you discover when you replace them all at the same time! Not very revolutionary, but we did notice an immediate drop in our electricity bill.

Senior editor **LAURA SAMUEL MEYN** (*Social Savvy*, page 38; and *Taste Food*, page 70) says that for her, becoming more eco-conscious is an ongoing process. At my house we compost our vegetable scraps and coffee grounds, grow our own vegetables (sometimes more successfully than others), and collect rainwater to use on the garden. My big fail? Reusable shopping bags; I only remember to bring them to the market about half the time.

Contributing editor **SARENE WALLACE** (*Taste Food*, page 74) found environmental inspiration in a certain politician-turned-activist. Al Gore had me at "global warming." After watching *An Inconvenient Truth*, I vowed to drive a hybrid, recycle more, and use less—and I do all three. One black mark on my green record is that I still use paper plates when I'm feeling lazy. I do feel guilty about it, though. Wallace is an award-winning journalist whose work has appeared in more than 70 newspapers nationwide.

Contributing editor **JEMMA WILDERMUTH** (*Finds Style*, page 18) believes that when it comes to going green, little things help make big changes. Her checklist: Converted all bulbs to compact fluorescents; use cloth napkins, dish, and hand towels; downsized curbside trash to the smallest available container and added an extra free curbside recycle bin; and for extra greenness, all coffee grounds, fruit, veggie, and eggshell waste goes into our green curb bin.

Gary's Outtake

By Gary Moss, Photo Editor

Want to become a better photographer? Use your hand to make a border before you shoot. We live in a three-dimensional world, and our eyes and brain process visual information to show depth, height, and scale, automatically creating wonderful visuals. Unfortunately, our cameras don't have this processing power: Cameras see in two dimensions, so you return home with your great shot only to find that the subject is far away in the distance.

While on assignment at Casa del Herrero in Montecito ("Casa del Herrero," page 56), I framed the water fountain in the distance and determined that it wouldn't be a good shot—just look at the scale difference. Next time you're out taking pictures, use your hand to frame your composition and decide if it will work or if you need to move in closer.



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 www.camerawhisperer.com for more information. ■

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Finds

By Lynne Andujar

High Style

CX Design "Persia I Scavo" pendant light (\$450) has the aged look of excavated glass; The Malibu Colony Company, Malibu, www.malibuclonycy.com.



Beautiful Buffet

Entertain in style with Mariposa's napkin holder with fleur-de-lys weight (\$26) and Caspari "Grosgrain" napkins (\$7); Agoura Antique Mart, Agoura Hills, www.agouraantiquemart.com.



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Old World

Jan Barboglio "Fleur D'Lys Chalice" (\$175) is rustic yet elegant; Fortini Home, San Luis Obispo, www.fortinihome.com.

Birds of a Feather

Two ceramic parrots (\$40 each) sit perched in this "Bristol Birdcage" (\$100, moss rocks sold separately, \$20); Z Gallerie, The Promenade, Woodland Hills; and South Coast Plaza, Costa Mesa, www.zgallerie.com.



Botanical Beauties

Michael Aram "Tulip" enamel serving set (\$63) brings the outdoors in; Saks Fifth Avenue, Santa Barbara, www.saks.com.

'Round and 'Round It Goes

For a playful design accent, try these Herman Miller "Spinning Tops" carved from solid walnut (\$199 for set of three); Design Within Reach, Santa Barbara, www.dwr.com.



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Barton Perreira "Emmanuelle" sunglasses (\$415); **9026 EYES**, Westlake Village, 805-557-2700; and Malibu, 310-456-9991; or www.bartonperreira.com.

Anna Sui "Geographic" dress (\$440); **BLEU**, Westlake Village, 805-496-4578.

Alkemie "Feather" necklace (\$150); **PLANET BLUE** at The Promenade at Westlake, Westlake Village, 805-496-1969; or at The Malibu Country Mart, 310-317-9975; or www.shopplanetblue.com.

Beaded earrings (\$19); **SOTO**, Westlake Village, www.sotoboutique.com.

Treesje "Pouch" bag (\$345); **NORDSTROM** at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, 805-418-4500; or www.treesje.com.

Sigerson Morrison sandals (\$98); **THE CLOSET RESALE BOUTIQUE**, Westlake Village, 805-777-7070; and Santa Barbara, 805-963-8083.

Philip Stein "Two-Tone Gold Classic Tank" watch with gold patent leather strap (\$435 for both); **VAN GUNDY**, Camarillo, www.vangundys.com.



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» Finds ^{STYLE}



Beryll "Crystal" sunglasses (from \$330); **THEODORE MAN**, Malibu, 310-456-5940; or www.beryll.com.



Paul Smith "Panama" hat (\$195); **UPSTAIRS AT PIERRE LAFOND**, Montecito, www.upstairsatpierrelafond.com.



The Hundreds "Horizon" T-shirt (on top, \$38); **IG SKATEBOARDING SHOP**, Westlake Village, www.igbs.com.

"Punk Flynt" T-shirt (underneath, \$65); **SEVEN FOR ALL MANKIND** at The Malibu Country Mart, Malibu, www.7forallmankind.com.

"Standard BoHo wash" jeans (\$178); **SEVEN FOR ALL MANKIND** (see above).

Ettika "Turquoise" bracelet (\$68); **KITSON MALIBU** at The Malibu Lumberyard, Malibu, www.shopkitson.com.



Leather wallet (\$40); **BANANA REPUBLIC** at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, www.bananarepublic.com.

"Cotton Braided" belt (\$30); **J.CREW** at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, www.jcrew.com.

"Luz" deck shoes (\$140); **LACOSTE**, www.lacoste.com.

Nixon "Chronicle" watch (\$250); **VAL SURF**, Thousand Oaks, www.valsurf.com.





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By Mallory McCreary



HEAD DOWN TO NEWPORT BEACH ...

... for a three-day three-night “Balanced Wellness” program at The Spa at Pelican Hill, April 20–23 (starting at \$2,800 per person). Hollywood fitness expert Ashley Borden leads classes of 15 to 20 people focusing on improved health, fitness, nutrition, and spa treatments designed for personal growth and overall balanced wellness. The program includes accommodations in an ocean-view bungalow, all meals, spa treatments, and activities at this “resort within a resort,” which offers all the amenities of a large resort with the intimate attention of a smaller property. Check out the world’s largest circular pool (136 feet in diameter), golf, restaurants, and an Old-World Italian architectural feel. www.pelicanhill.com

While in Newport, attend the annual Newport Beach Film Festival (April 22–29) for studio and independent film screenings from around the world, galas and yacht parties, and the chance to interact with directors and screenwriters. www.newportbeachfilmfest.com



Inspired by the works of 16th-century architect Andrea Palladio, The Resort at Pelican Hill simulates a Northern Italian getaway with details such as Italian plaster finishes and handmade terra-cotta finials, plus groves of olive, cypress, fig, and pine trees.

CALLING ALL COWGIRLS

Alisal Guest Ranch & Resort’s annual “Cowgirl Bootcamp” takes place this year from May 2–5. Grab your girls and enjoy a rustic all-women adventure that includes horseback riding, archery, fishing, and hat shaping. The package (\$2,800) includes studio accommodations for four days and three



nights, a cowgirl amenity gift basket, nightly cocktail receptions, all meals plus wine with dinner, the Alisal Signature Massage for two, private winemaker’s presentation, line dancing, and nightly live entertainment. More experienced riders can try open-air barrel-racing lessons; others can relax in the quiet natural environment with no TVs or phones. www.alisal.com

In Honor of Earth Day

Ojai’s Blue Iguana Inn launches the “Wild Blue Iguana” package to help bring awareness (and money) to the endangered blue iguana from Grand Cayman Island. The package (from \$249; April 22 through year-end) includes two nights’ accommodations, continental breakfast, and a private self-guided tour of Taft Botanical Gardens, which showcases South African and Australian native plants and is not open to the general public. As part of the package, the Inn will make a donation to the Blue Iguana Recovery Program to help sustain this vanishing species.

Blue Iguana Inn features Southwest/vintage hacienda-style architecture and eclectic, artistic decor in its rooms, suites, and bungalows. Outdoor lawns, meadows, courtyards, and pool are decorated with unique mosaics, art, and statuary that speak to the creative flair associated with Ojai. www.blueiguanainn.com



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Follow for Freebies

Pueblo Bonito Oceanfront Resorts and Spas is offering many special packages and discounts in the coming months at its Los Cabos and Mazatlán properties, including 40-percent off at Pueblo Bonito Sunset Beach Resort & Spa (through May 31), third night free at Pueblo Bonito Pacifica Resort & Spa (through June 30), and rates from \$107 through April at Pueblo Bonito Mazatlán. But keep up-to-date through Twitter (www.twitter.com/pueblobonito) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/pueblobonitoresort) and receive special updates and offers—book three nights or more at any property, write on the Facebook wall, and receive a \$50 food-and-beverage voucher. The resorts have won many awards and offer distinct experiences: the all-suite all-ocean-view Sunset Beach; the adults-only Pacifica; and family-friendly Mazatlán. www.pueblobonito.com

Pueblo Bonito Mazatlán (left) and Pueblo Bonito Los Cabos offer spectacular ocean views from indoors and out, plus entertaining amenities such as water sports and fine dining.

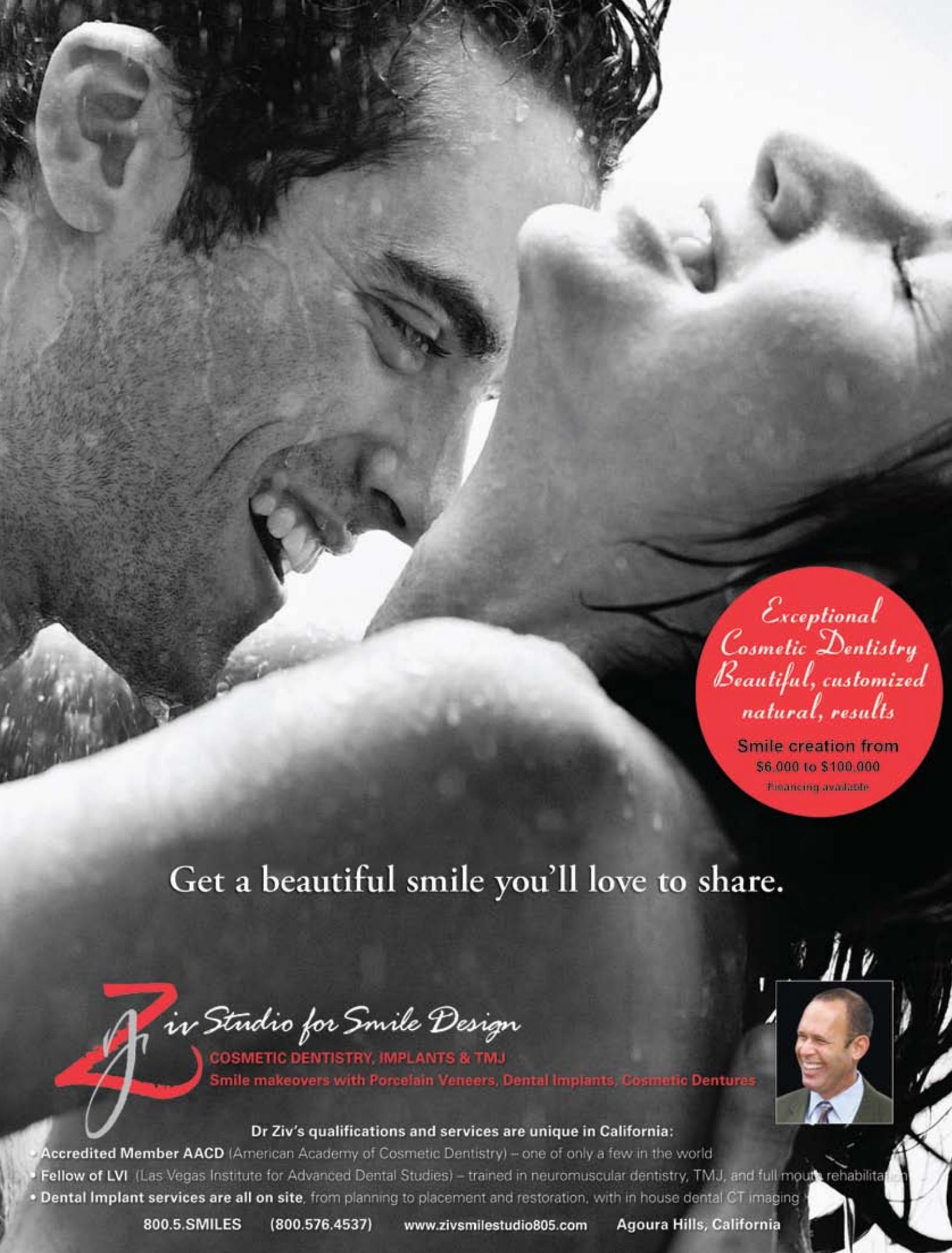


Hot Tip

The “Renewal Spa Package” at Fess Parker’s Doubletree Resort in Santa Barbara offers guests two 45-minute massages or one 90-minute massage Sunday through Thursday through April 30; package rates start at \$340 per night. www.fpdtr.com

GREAT FOR GOLF

The Half Moon Bay Lodge is offering an “Unlimited Golf Stay and Play” package through the end of the year (from \$185 per person). It includes three days of unlimited golf on Half Moon Bay Golf Links’ two championship 18-hole layouts, The Old and Ocean courses; two nights at Half Moon Bay Lodge; continental breakfast; one dinner at Mullins Bar & Grill; and door-to-door shuttle service between the hotel and clubhouse. The Old Course was originally designed by Arnold Palmer and features an American parkland-style layout, and the Ocean Course is reminiscent of Scottish-style links designed by Arthur Hills and features holes perched above the Pacific. Half Moon Bay is 23 miles south of the San Francisco airport; the courses are consistently ranked among the top in the country. www.halfmoonbaygolf.com; www.halfmoonbaylodge.com ■



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Agoura Hills, California

Insider APRIL EVENTS

By Mark Langton

THROUGH 6/20

Through June 20: **BECOMING ART AT THE SEAMS**

Museum of Ventura County. This juried exhibit of the quilt as art features a wide array of examples by quilters from Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara counties. Quilts on display include modern designs using a variety of materials and patterns. For more information call **805-653-0323** or go to www.venturamuseum.org.

April 11: **IN CONCERT WITH DELACROIX TO MONET**

Santa Barbara Museum of Art. Members of the Santa Barbara Symphony perform amid the current exhibit *Delacroix to Monet*. There will also be a performance on May 16. This is a unique opportunity to hear some of the country's best orchestral musicians surrounded by some of the world's most revered art treasures. For more information call **805-963-4364** or go to www.sbma.net.

April 13: **BOOKS 'N BRUNCH**

North Ranch Country Club, Westlake Village. Authors Frances Dinkelspiel and Alice Rene will speak at this Brandeis National Committee, Conejo Valley Chapter event. Dinkelspiel discusses her book *Towers of Gold: How One Jewish Immigrant Named Isaias Hellman Created California*; Rene discusses *Becoming Alice: A Memoir*, the story of her family's escape from Vienna during the Nazi invasion and her struggles growing up in a new country. For more information call **818-991-2667** or go to www.brandeisconejo.org.

April 17: **SANTA BARBARA COUNTY VINTNERS' FESTIVAL**

River Park, Lompoc. More than 130 members of the Santa Barbara Vintners' Association will be pouring their wines; some of the area's finest chefs will serve noshes; and there will also be live music. Attendees will have a chance to win large-format wines, special bottlings and verticals, and lifestyle items at the silent auction, with proceeds benefiting local charities. For more information call **805-688-0881** or go to www.sbcountywines.com.

April 17: **SIMI VALLEY BLUES FESTIVAL**

Hummingbird Nest Ranch, Simi Valley. Seven exceptional blues bands play all day long at this 140-acre ranch in the picturesque hills overlooking Simi Valley. The event also includes food, beverages, and a kids' play area. Presented by Kiwanis Club of Simi Valley, proceeds benefit the American Diabetes Association and several local charities including the Simi Valley Free Clinic and Boys & Girls Club. For more information call **805-404-1382** or go to www.simiblues.com.

April 24: **SANTA BARBARA DANCE DAY**

State Street, Santa Barbara. Roving performers from the Santa Barbara Dance Alliance will be performing a variety of dance styles between the streets of Gutierrez and Victoria. SBDA, a nonprofit organization, produces performances, provides community dance classes, and grants scholarships to young artists. For more information call **805-966-6950** or go to www.sbdancealliance.org.

April 25: **SUGARLAND**

Santa Barbara Bowl. Country music superstars Jennifer Nettles and Kristian Bush are Sugarland. Since their debut in 2004, they have sold millions of albums worldwide and received top honors from the National Recording Academy (Grammy), the American Music Awards, the Academy of Country Music, CMT Music Awards, and the Country Music Association. They have been oft-quoted regarding their love of performing live, so this show promises not to disappoint. For more information call **805-962-7411** or go to www.sbbowl.com.

May 1: **WOMEN'S LITERARY FESTIVAL**

Fess Parker's Doubletree Resort, Santa Barbara. Noted female authors (such as Lynne Cox, Katherine Forest, Carol Lay, and Lisa See) discuss women and their roles in the literary process. The event includes lunch, interactive opportunities, and book signings. For more information go to www.womensliteraryfestival.com. ■



Here's an idea:

Morro Bay in the springtime is not only beautiful, but this seaside community also has several events worth a trip. The **Morro Bay Kite Festival** (April 24; www.morrobay.org) showcases spectacular ornate kites flown with Morro Rock as the backdrop. **Cruisin' Morro Bay Car Show** (April 29-May 2; www.morrobaycarshow.org) is one of the largest classic car and hot rod shows in Southern California. Seafood fans have several restaurants in Morro Bay to try, featuring some of the freshest fare imaginable. And if you fancy fine wine, Paso Robles and its more than 180 wineries beckon just 28 miles to the northeast. Don't forget **Hearst Castle** (www.hearstcastle.org), with its amazing art and architecture from the early 20th century, and the city of San Luis Obispo for great shopping, nightlife, and entertainment.



4/25

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By Mark Langton

4/17

April 17: OJAI FARM-TO-TABLE TOUR

Soule Park, Ojai. Three working farms—Earthtrine Farm, Friend's Ranch, and Ojai Olive Oil—open their gates for narrated tours and product sampling. The tour then moves to Soule Park for an alfresco lunch prepared by six local chefs with wine from Ojai's Casa Barranca. Proceeds benefit the Ojai Music Festival's BRAVO! Music Education Program. For more information call **805-646-2094** or go to www.ojaifestival.org.

April 17: MILLER FAMILY YMCA HEALTHY KIDS DAY

Miller Family YMCA, Newbury Park. This free event encourages kids to make healthy lifestyle choices. Nutritious snacks will be served, and there will be fun activities including face painting, a climbing wall, and inner-tube water polo in the facility's pool. Entertainment for the day includes the Palpitating Panthers competitive double-Dutch jump rope team from Los Angeles, and a freestyle Frisbee demonstration. For more information call **805-480-0309** or go to www.sevymca.org/miller.

April 17–18: SCANDINAVIAN FESTIVAL

California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks. Fifty years ago, Lutheran Church leaders in California (many of them with Scandinavian roots) created the California Lutheran College on land donated by the son of Norwegian pioneers. In 1974, the first festival was created to celebrate the founding of the college and the history of the Conejo Valley, which was settled by Norwegians in the 1890s. The festival highlights the Nordic cultures of Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, and includes a huge smorgasbord. Art, crafts, and foods will also be for sale. For more information call **805-241-0391** or go to www.scandinaviacenter.org.

April 17–18: EARTH DAY FESTIVAL

Alameda Park, Santa Barbara. While there will be many local Earth Day events in and around the 805—including Oxnard (April 10), Ventura (April 17), and Thousand Oaks (April 24)—the preeminent gathering will be in Santa Barbara, where it all started 40 years ago. Born in part out of the creation of Santa Barbara's Community Environmental Council after the devastating oil spill off the Central Coast in 1969, Earth Day Festival is not only a celebration of the planet but also one of the best places in the state to learn about everything green. For more information call **805-963-0583** or go to www.sbearthday.org.



April 18: FAMILY KITE FESTIVAL

Rotary Centennial Park, Santa Maria. April is National Kite Month, and the Santa Maria Valley Discovery Museum encourages young and old alike to take part in this event. From the acrobatic to the whimsical, kites with all kinds of shapes and themes will fill the sky with their multicolored wings (and other appendages). Pros and amateurs will compete in flying, design, and art contests. Activities for kids include kite-flying and kite-making instruction. Kites will be available for purchase at the event, and there will also be food vendors. For more information call **805-928-8414** or go to www.smvdiscoverymuseum.org.

April 24: ANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES MARKET

Stagecoach Inn Museum, Newbury Park. Vendors take you back in time with antique clocks and watches, kitchen equipment and dining utensils, dolls, and other unusual antiques. An antiques expert will be on-site to evaluate your attic treasures. Admission (\$5) includes a tour of the museum and grounds. For more information call **805-498-9441** or go to www.stagecoachmuseum.org.

May 1–2: CALABASAS FINE ARTS FESTIVAL

Calabasas Civic Center and The Commons at Calabasas. Hundreds of artists will exhibit a wide variety of pieces, including mixed media, paintings, pre-fabricated and carved sculptures, glass, pottery, photography, and jewelry. There is also live entertainment and activities for kids. For more information call **818-224-1657** or go to www.calabasasartscouncil.com. ■



Here's an idea:

GARDEN CONSERVANCY OPEN DAYS.

For 15 years the Garden Conservancy has been coordinating viewing opportunities of magnificent private garden spaces all across the country. This is a unique experience to find gardening design and horticultural ideas or just revel in some of the most well-tended gardens in the country. This event encompasses 22 states and more than 350 private gardens, and it takes place from April to October, so even if you're on an out-of-town vacation, there may very well be gardens where you're visiting. The program is self-guided and you can find specific garden locations through the conservancy's *Open Days Directory* with descriptions, dates and hours, and driving directions. There are two nearby cities featured in this year's tour, with six gardens each available for viewing in Pasadena (April 25) and Los Angeles (May 8). For more information call **888-842-2442** or go to www.opendaysprogram.org.



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Insider

HOTticket

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APRIL

April 23: Presented by the California Lutheran University (CLU) music department, the works of **LIBBY LARSEN** will be performed by CLU faculty and student soloists and the CLU Choral Ensembles, conducted by Wyant Morton (Larsen will be in attendance). Also performing will be Morton's professional choral group Areté Vocal Ensemble. Larsen, a Grammy Award winner, has created a catalog of more than 400 works ranging from vocal and chamber music to pieces for concert orchestra, as well as more than 12 operas. More than 50 CDs of her work have been recorded, and she is noted as one of America's most-performed living composers. Larsen will also conduct a morning seminar in which she will discuss, among other things, the concert music tradition and the composer's role in it. For more information call 805-493-3306 or go to www.callutheran.edu/music.

April 23–May 2: The Cabrillo Music Theatre presents **LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS** at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. This crazy send-up of 1950s science-fiction stories features a score by Howard Ashman and Alan Menken, whose credits include Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladdin*. As the story goes, Seymour, a nerdy floral assistant, discovers an exotic talking and singing plant that is actually an alien bent on global domination. The plant must have human blood to thrive, and hilarity ensues. For more information call 805-449-2787 or go to www.toaks.org/cap.

April 29: Girls Inc. of Santa Barbara is celebrating the 25th anniversary of its **ONE HUNDRED COMMITTEE SCHOLARSHIP LUNCHEON**, which raises funds for its after-school and summer programs. The luncheon, hosted by Lotusland in Montecito, features an opportunity drawing and a special performance by Girls Inc. students. Two-time Emmy-nominated television and film producer Debra Martin Chase, the first female African-American to have her own producing deal at a major studio, will be the guest speaker. Guests will be able to stroll Lotusland's

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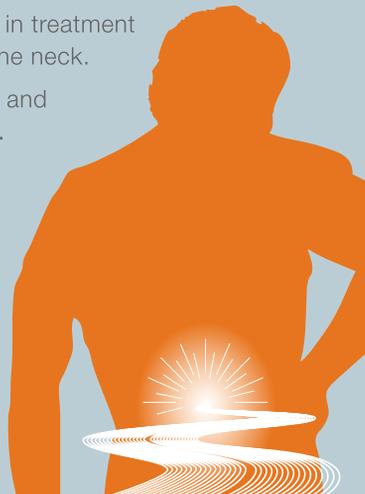


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April 30–May 8: Among the many world-class performances at the **VENTURA MUSIC FESTIVAL** will be violinist Itzhak Perlman, keyboardist Herbie Hancock, and classical guitarist Sharon Isbin. Perlman, considered one of the most important and talented violinists of the 20th century, is a four-time Emmy Award and 15-time Grammy Award winner. Hancock, a pioneer in the world of modern jazz, won the 2008 Grammy Award for best album of the year, only the second jazz album ever to achieve that distinction. Isbin has been called “the preeminent guitarist of our time” by *Boston* magazine, and she recently won a Grammy Award for best instrumental soloist performance for her work on the Joan Baez and Mark O’Connor album *Journey to the New World*. For more information call 805-648-3146 or go to www.venturamusicfestival.org.

MAY

May 1: The Arlington Theatre in Santa Barbara presents **THE MET: LIVE IN HD SERIES**, an innovative live broadcast from the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. This performance features Rossini’s *Armida*, the mythical story of an enchantress who enthralls men in her island prison. Tony Award-winner Mary Zimmerman directs, and the featured soloist is Grammy Award-winning soprano Renée Fleming. Multiple cameras capture the scenes in high definition, putting viewers virtually in the middle of the action. For more information call 805-963-4408 or go to www.thearlingtontheatre.com or www.metoperafamily.org.

May 16: The **RICHARD CARPENTER SCHOLARSHIP COMPETITION** takes the stage at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. This talent show, patterned after *American Idol*, features the best talent from local middle school, high school, and college-age artists. Performers will compete in dance, vocal, and instrumental categories for cash scholarships to pursue careers in performing arts. For more information call 805-449-2787 or go to www.toaks.org/cap.



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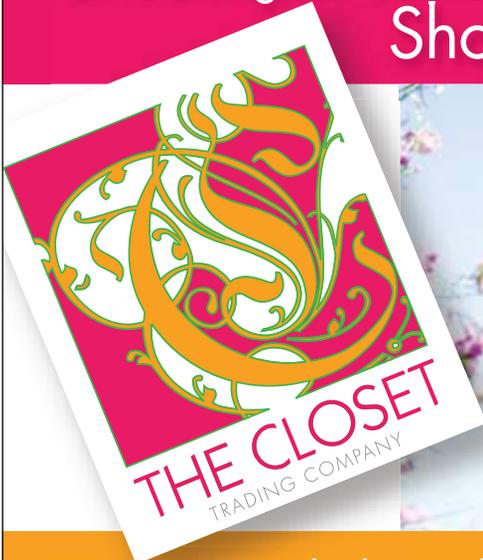
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Insider

May 21–23: One of the premier wine festivals of the Central Coast, the **PASO ROBLES WINE FESTIVAL** takes over Paso Robles Downtown City Park with more than 90 local wineries in attendance. In addition to plenty of samples, there will be winemaker dinners, food-pairing seminars, and cooking classes. Special winery and vineyard tours will also be available. The event concludes with the Wine Country Auction and Dinner, where attendees bid on wine auction lots only available at this event. For more information call 805-549-9463 or go to www.pasowine.com.

JUNE

June 3: **AMBROSIA**, the popular band of the 1970s and eighties, appears at The Canyon Club in Agoura Hills. While known mostly for their radio-friendly pop-rock tunes, the band's work also includes progressive rock and jazz-fusion influenced songs, mixing lush vocal harmonies and masterful musicianship. For more information call 818-879-5016 or go to www.canyonclub.net.

June 5: Garrison Keillor is once again at the Santa Barbara Bowl with his live broadcast of **A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION**. A variety-show format with an ensemble cast that has been entertaining audiences for 36 years, it features comedy skits and an eclectic mix of musical parodies—ranging from folk, bluegrass, classical, rock 'n' roll, and jazz—by The Guy's All-Star Shoe Band. And of course, there will be Keillor's signature monologue "The News from Lake Wobegon" (the little town that time forgot and decades can't improve). Droll, witty, and comically thought-provoking, this show has become ingrained in American pop culture and is heard on nearly 600 public radio stations nationwide, as well as on satellite radio. For more information call 805-962-7411 or go to www.sbbowl.com.

Save the Date

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APRIL

April 17: The Boys & Girls Club of Moorpark's annual fundraiser dinner and auction, **CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF SERVICE TO OUR KIDS**, takes place at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley. In addition to a cocktail reception and dinner, there will be silent and live auctions. For more information call 805-529-1140 or go to www.bgcmoorpark.org.



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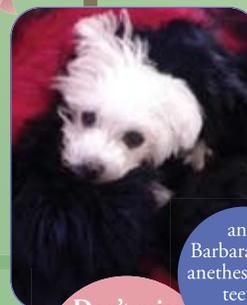
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April 19: The Meadowlark Service League (MSL) hosts its annual **CHARITY TENNIS TOURNAMENT AND LUNCHEON**. The event kicks off with a women's doubles tournament at various locations around Camarillo, including Las Posas Country Club and Spanish Hills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

April 24: **STORYFAIRE** is a collaborative effort by Child Abuse Listening and Mediation (CALM) and Storyteller, a preschool for homeless and at-risk children. This celebration of reading and books is held for children and their families at De la Guerra Plaza in Santa Barbara. Headlining the group of 18 children's book authors and illustrators is *American Girl* series author Valerie Tripp. There will also be dance and music performances, and art workshops presented by Art From Scrap. The free event is open to the public. For more information call Monica Intaglietta at CALM, 805-965-2376, or go to www.calm4kids.org.

April 24–25: **RELAY FOR LIFE AGOURA** holds its event to benefit the American Cancer Society at Willow Elementary School. Relay for Life has become the world's largest volunteer fundraiser for cancer research; teams of all ages walk, jog, or run for 24 hours. Volunteers are also needed for the event. For more information go to www.relayforlife.org/agouraca.

April 25: The Westlake Junior Women's Club celebrates spring with its **SIPPING IN SPRING-TIME** fundraiser at the Gardens of the World in Thousand Oaks. Fleming's, California Pizza Kitchen, Merlin's Kitchen, and other local restaurants provide food samples, while Wades Wines of Westlake Village will offer tastings of fine wines. The event also features live music and a chance to win a wine-country vacation travel package. All profits support charities in the Conejo Valley. For more information call 818-203-0633 or go to www.westlakejuniors.org.

April 27: The Westlake Village Garden Club hosts its 37th annual **WESTLAKE VILLAGE GARDEN TOUR**. Take a leisurely stroll through five beautiful home gardens, with examples including a drought-tolerant design and a terraced hillside garden. For more information call 818-889-7454 or go to www.westlakevillagegardenclub.com.



ENDLESS VIEWS SIMPLER TIMES



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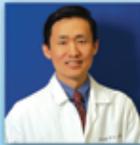


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Insider

April 27: Join the Conejo Valley Guild of Jonsson Cancer Center Foundation for its 12th annual **GAME DAY** at North Ranch Country Club in Westlake Village. Bring your mah-jongg, pan, or other card-playing groups, or take part in bingo. A buffet lunch will be served and there will be shopping boutiques and gift baskets. For more information call Pat Croner at 818-889-7712.

MAY

May 1: **RIDE ON THERAPEUTIC HORSE-MANSHIP** in Newbury Park will be having a free open house for those interested in therapeutic riding programs for children and adults with special needs. Volunteer opportunities are also available. There will be entertainment, lunch, and fun horsey activities for the kids. For more information call 805-375-9078 or go to www.rideon.org.

May 2: The CareNow Foundation will hold its annual **SAFARI NOW** fundraiser at the Ronald Reagan Library and Museum in Simi Valley. There will be live and silent auctions, a catered gourmet dinner, and African-themed music by noted jazz keyboardist and composer Tim Heintz and his band. CareNow is a nonprofit organization dedicated to establishing and supporting medical clinics in sub-Saharan Africa. For more information call 818-597-2451 or go to www.carenowfoundation.org.

May 7: Local residents who have made an impact on cancer patients through The Wellness Community Valley/Ventura's free cancer support programs will be honored at the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village with the 19th annual **ANNIVERSARY GALA**. The evening features entertainment, dinner, and a live auction. For more information call 805-379-4777 or go to www.twcvv.org.

JUNE

June 2: The Alliance for the Arts auxiliary group, Angels for the Alliance, holds its annual **ANGELS LUNCHEON** at the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village. The afternoon features a tablescape competition, where contestants decorate dining tables in a variety of elaborate themes. Proceeds support the Alliance for the Arts children and youth programs, including hands-on workshops and performances at local schools. For more information call 805-449-2590 or go to www.allianceforthearts.org.

June 6: The Zarley and Van Huisen families host **CASA PACIFICA ANGELS 17th ANNUAL WINE AND FOOD FESTIVAL** at the California State University at Channel Islands. With 75 of the area's top restaurants serving up gourmet bites, and more than 100 wineries and microbreweries

offering samples, this is the largest food and wine festival in Ventura County. *805 Living* will again be a sponsor, and will participate in judging the "Best in Fest" chef's competition. For more information go to www.cpwineandfoodfestival.com.

June 6: Senior Concerns sponsors the **LOVE RUN** 5K and 10K running races in Westlake Village. Proceeds go to the organization's Meals On Wheels program, which helps ensure that homebound seniors in the Conejo Valley receive warm, nutritious meals daily. For more information call 805-497-0189 or go to www.seniorconcerns.org.

June 26: Bunko, a simple parlor game, will help raise much-needed money for the Breast Cancer Research Foundation at the second annual **BUNKO 4 BREAST CANCER** tournament in Santa Rosa Valley. Former Bunko world champion Sue Stonehouse will again host the event. For more information call 805-277-9703 or go to www.bunko4breastcancer.com.

GIVEback

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HEARTS OF FIRE PROJECT: This past January the Hearts of Fire Project launched its Motor Home Housing Program, which collects and renovates motor homes for distribution to homeless families along the Central Coast. Late-model motor homes are being accepted, and your donation is tax deductible. The Hearts of Fire Project began three years ago to empower the homeless through music and art programs, and to change the public's attitude toward homeless individuals. A mobile recording studio with an on-site art workshop travels to local shelters to record artists' songs and create documentaries that show the face and humanity of the men, women, and children. Selected art and music is displayed and sold at galleries and other events, and the homeless or formerly homeless artists receive commissions on the sale of their work. Shelters also use funds to develop and present art and music programs. For more information call 877-827-2012 or 805-727-6005 or go to www.heartsoffireproject.org. ■

If you would like to submit your event or organization for possible inclusion in Insider, please e-mail the information and a contact number/e-mail to insider@805living.com. 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 Anthony Head



Clearing the air: When it comes to home interiors, it's important to remember the little things, like toxic chemicals.

HOME CHECKUP

Need a diagnosis for a sick house? Relax, these people make house calls.

DURING THE 1980S AND 1990S, it seemed that one of the biggest threats to public health was lead-based paint. Learning and respiratory disabilities and even deaths were blamed on the dust and the peeling paint chips inside our homes, prompting, quite literally, widespread panic. Thankfully, lead isn't usually added to paints anymore, so the whole thing isn't quite the hot-button health issue it once was.

There are strong reasons for remaining vigilant over the quality of our indoor air, however, even as growing sectors of today's interior design industry emphasize the use of sustainable and energy-efficient products. "There's a big difference between green for the environment and green for your health," says Camarillo interior designer Dawn Michael (www.dawnmichael.com). "Take bamboo. It's widely used on floors and windows and is considered

green because it's easy to grow. But maybe it was actually sprayed with pesticides instead of grown organically; or maybe it was later stained with chemicals. Those things matter."

Michael has worked for about 15 years as a designer and contractor, but a family member's fight with cancer prompted her to devote a lot of time to researching and publishing about the chemicals used in the textile industry. "It was not pretty," she says of her findings. So in her practice, Michael approaches design in ways that diminish the risks to skin, lungs, and other vulnerable and valuable organs. Her recommendations go right down to the carpets, even specifying the preferable types of adhesives to be used because she wants to lessen any threat they may pose.

She's not alone: The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) identifies indoor air pollution as an environmental risk to

public health. Some research points toward a correlation between the amount of pesticides and other toxic materials finding their way into the home with a rise in autism, asthma, and autoimmune diseases.

As it was for Michael, personal elements prompted Ellen Strickland to open Livingreen (www.livingreen.com) in Santa Barbara in 1999. (There are also locations in Montecito and Culver City.) Strickland lives with her own health issues, and her store features alternative building materials and furnishings selected for their sensitivity to the environment, both in how they were manufactured and within the context of their ultimate purpose.

“Everything we do in the store is based on a matrix of product selection determined by certain criteria,” explains Strickland. “If someone says, ‘I’m sensitive to sound *and* I don’t want to smell anything noxious,’ I would then suggest products based on that criteria. Someone says, ‘My child is asthmatic and her bedroom has to be as free from dust particles and allergy-producing materials,’ then I’m going to have a different set of criteria.”

A planner and designer by training, Strickland also makes house calls to help determine firsthand with the homeowner a healthy and appealing approach to design. “There are a lot of issues that come up that are very real. Sometimes it’s about chemical sensitivities. Sometimes they don’t even know what is causing them discomfort. We walk through the spaces and identify and red flag what we feel may not be healthy,” she says.

Strickland points out common pollutants such as sealers, finishes, and other treatments that have been applied to surfaces over the years. Tightly sealed (instead of properly vented) spaces generate problems of their own; carpet considerations are especially important when there are kids and pets around. They are harbingers of dust, dirt, and allergens. Repainting? Strickland recommends using low- or no-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints.

But there are also flooring and wall materials with varying degrees of toxicity to consider. There is the particleboard cabinetry in the kitchen and bathroom to pay attention to, along with the PVC pipes and the granite countertops—pretty much all standard materials during the 1980s.

“Homes from each era have unique issues that can affect one’s health. For example, homes prior to 1978 could have lead or asbestos. Post-World-War-II homes incorporate thousands of synthetic chemicals in their manufactured building

products. Newer homes are built very tightly and the lack of ventilation can lead to poor indoor air quality. Homes from any era that are poorly constructed or maintained could have issues with mold due to leaks,” says Cynthia Grier, co-owner of EcoLogic Life (www.ecologiclife.com), a green design build showroom in Ventura. “Older buildings seem to have been built a little more structurally sound, and if they’ve been maintained adequately, they can be more safe to live in than newer buildings with all these chemicals.”

Grier holds a degree in interior environmental design and is a certified green-building consultant. She says while mold and dust mites are common problems she sees, it’s today’s formaldehyde that has become the new lead-paint scare; it’s been blamed for a whole host of health problems: “It’s just plain dangerous. The EPA considers it to be the number-one most toxic thing in your home. Thank goodness the state of California is, by the end of this year, basically banning the use of adding formaldehyde into many products.”

The problem, however, is that formaldehyde is released via plywood particleboard cabinetry and furniture, floors, and wall materials. Most synthetic carpets have formaldehyde in their adhesives. It’s also found in some fabrics. “On a cumulative basis, all that exposure can make people really sick, and they don’t even know what’s happening,” says Grier.

She focuses her consulting on teaching ways of creating beautiful, healthy, natural environments that promote sustainability and can be a source of well-being. Grier’s partner, Jon Cotham, is a certified building biology consultant and environmental inspector as well as a licensed general contractor. His training includes work with the Institute for Bau-Biologie & Ecology (www.buildingbiology.net), an educational program developed in Germany based on scientific studies about how the systems in a building can cause health problems.

Cotham is hired to determine the relative health of homes or offices through extensive assessment and testing of the structural end of things for air pollution, electromagnetic radiation, or radioactivity produced by granite countertops, gas leaks, toxins from materials and finishes, and sound and vibration disturbances. He and Grier can then consult on construction techniques and materials to be used in remodeling in order to create a beautiful and healthy home or workplace. ■

Better Breathing

A FEW RECOMMENDATIONS TO KEEP THE AIR SAFE INSIDE YOUR HOME.

Install a carbon-monoxide detector.

Choose cabinets and furniture made from hardwoods and not particleboard.

Instead of carpeting, area rugs and carpets that can be removed and cleaned frequently are recommended.

Use low-toxic cleaning products, or better yet, use natural cleaners like lemon juice, boric acid, baking soda, and vinegar.

The tips above are adapted from the American Lung Association’s “Guide for Creating a Healthier Home.” For more information visit www.lungusa.org and click on “Healthy Air.”

Social Savvy

By Laura Samuel Meyn

My husband and I got together with friends for dinner, and I thought it was supposed to be adults only. They showed up with their kids. Their behavior—running around the restaurant, screaming, throwing food, and crying—was extremely distracting and embarrassing, not to mention that we left *our* kids at home with a babysitter. What do you do when you are dining out with friends—and their kids are creating total chaos?

A: Nobody can blame you for balking at the notion of arranging for and paying a sitter only to hang out with other people's children, much less poorly behaved ones. We'll get to the already-at-the-restaurant scenario in a minute, but preventative measures are key. Next time you make plans, be *very* specific. "I'm in desperate need of a grown-ups' night out," and "our babysitter is coming at six" should make clear what you have in mind.

But what to do the next time you find yourself sitting in a restaurant with such mischievous dining companions? You don't have to suffer through it: Suggest to the group that you ask the waiter to pack your orders to go and take your meal to either your home or to your friends' home (or even to a nearby park or beach)—somewhere the kids can play freely, and where everyone will feel less self-conscious while enjoying each other's company. If necessary, make your case for taking the meal to go by pointing out that you're getting the *feeling* (maybe from the stinky looks coming the way of your table?) that the restaurant isn't that "kid-friendly," and that you'd probably all feel more relaxed in a less formal setting. (Even if your friends don't get it, trust that the restaurant's other patrons are sending their silent, heartfelt thanks.)

Q: Our family has an annual potluck party every year, sending out about 100 invitations to family and friends. When we issue the invitations, we ask guests to RSVP, but we average a less-than-five-percent response. While having a potluck helps to offset the uncertainty of how much food will be needed, I never know how to adequately stock up on drinks, glassware, plates, cutlery, cocktail napkins, and the other necessities. Any suggestions?

A: Be sure to include your e-mail address in addition to a cell phone number on the invitation. These days, some people put off making phone calls, but will gladly shoot you an e-mail or text.

While it's perfectly correct for you to follow up by phone or e-mail, doing so would be very time-consuming for a party this size. Los Angeles caterer Denise Vivaldo, in her book *The Entertaining Encyclopedia*, writes that for big parties, she just assumes that 50 percent of invitees will show up, and plans accordingly. In your instance, it might also be instructive to think back on past years' attendance levels, and make an educated guess.

For smaller dinner parties, where you need to know how many places to set, definitely do call or e-mail a few days before the date to make sure that your invitation was received. In addition, you can always use such follow-up communications to ask if a guest has any food allergies or dislikes; it's useful information to have, and it spares the person on the other end the embarrassment of being called solely because he or she failed to RSVP.

For future parties, you might also consider trying a virtual invitation, such as those from Evite (www.evite.com). While lacking the charm of paper invitations, Evite does make following up easy: Two days before your party, an automatic reminder is sent out. Guests only have to check their e-mail, and then click on whether or not they're attending. (And if your guests can't handle the dumbed-down task of checking "yes" or "no," then you might want to reconsider your guest list.)

Q: What do you do about someone answering his cell phone or texting while out to dinner with you? Is there a good way to say, "Put that down, jerk, and look at me. I'm real and I'm right in front of you"?

A: Is your dining companion on-call emergency personnel? I'm guessing probably not, which means he doesn't get a free pass. The bad habit of favoring virtual communication over face-to-face communication is becoming common, but that doesn't mean it's okay. Simply put, ignoring those who *have* taken time out of their day to get together with you in favor of those who *haven't* is rude, as your reaction to such treatment attests.

I would wait for a break in the talking and texting, and then start by taking your dining companion's hand, if appropriate, or making eye contact; just be sure you have his full attention. Tell him how much you've been looking forward to catching up, but that the interruptions are making it hard for you to remember all that you wanted to share. You might even ask if "we" should put our phones on buzz and only pick up if a critical number pops up (like the hospital or a babysitter). You can even pose it as a dare—might he, for the rest of dinner, be able to resist answering that darn thing? While texting is all the rage, attempting to live in the moment is a pretty popular concept even with multitasking modern folks. It might make for an interesting philosophical discussion with your dinner companion: If he's texting and talking, is he really in the restaurant at all? If someone calls and nobody answers it, did the phone, in fact, make a sound? ■

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Need advice on how to navigate awkward social situations—when you're torn between what you'd like to do and what you think you should do? Send us your quandaries (don't worry, we won't print your name) to edit@805living.com and put "Social Savvy" in the subject line of the e-mail.*



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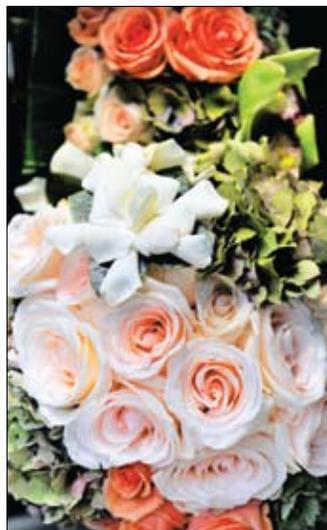
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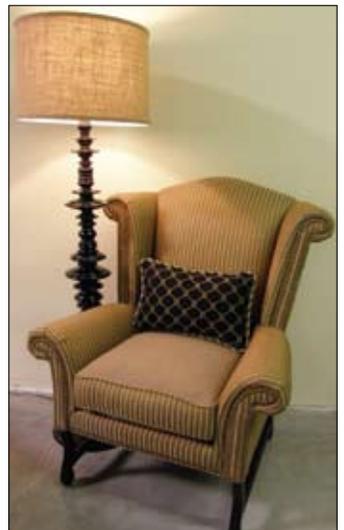
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MAKING A RACQUET

Area players bond over the game of squash.

“SQUASH—THAT’S NOT EXERCISE, IT’S FLAGELLATION.”

— *English playwright Sir Noël Coward, describing the indoor racquet sport that originated in his homeland*

Tom Mullaney, one of 200 squash-playing members at Santa Barbara Athletic Club (SBAC), began playing the sport as an undergrad at Princeton, and smiles in agreement with Coward’s assessment. “Squash is an easy sport to pick up, but it’s diabolically difficult to master,” Mullaney says. “You have to be fit as a fiddle and quick as a cat. It’s one of the most taxing aerobic activities around.”

Mullaney plays squash four times a week at SBAC, home to monthly leagues (mixed/men/women/juniors), challenge events, in-house club championships, and four annual weekend tournaments that attract competitors from Seattle to San Diego, plus Canada.

Although other squash courts can be found throughout the Southland (see sidebar), the number of venues in this part of the country is nowhere near the total found on the East Coast and in Great Britain. Their colder, wetter climates drive many indoors for exercise, whereas California tennis courts are filled year-round. It doesn’t mean, though, that the 805 is short on squash potential *or* talent.

Squash’s popularity in Santa Barbara continues to grow in large part due to UCSB and the burgeoning high-tech industry, says Mullaney. “Our area [has] attracted many PhD students and other professionals from India, South Africa, and Australia, where squash is commonly played. And of course, others, like me, relocate from back East, where we were exposed to the game.”

Squash is a very collegial sport, adds Mullaney: “There’s an instant bond when you meet someone who plays, no matter their gender or skill level. We’re a friendly group and often go out after games and end up replenishing the calories we burned over pitchers of beer.”

A few years ago, Mullaney introduced squash to his then-13-year-old son, Tommy. “I think it’s a great sport for kids because life is competitive and in order to progress, you better be geared up for it, just like in squash,” says Mullaney. “Kids learn that progress isn’t always steady, but if they stick with squash, and work hard, they get better and better. My son has proven to have a bit of a knack for it.”

Tommy’s “knack” has led him to a current ranking of number one in California and number nine nationally in the boys under-19 division. He’s also been SBAC male squash-club champion for two years running. “Everything just clicked when I tried squash,” says Tommy, 17, a senior at Laguna Blanca School in Santa Barbara.

"I've always been a racquet-sport person and grew up playing a lot of tennis and Ping-Pong, but quickly discovered I enjoy squash even more. It's a ton of fun and a great stress reliever."

Academic heavyweights including Harvard, Princeton, and Stanford have expressed interest in having Tommy join their reputable squash programs this fall, which shows how dedicated and advanced his skills are—not that the game hasn't unnerved him on occasion. "Things get really tense on the court, which brings out different sides of people," Tommy says. "It's just you and another player, and only one wins." (Each match is decided by the best of five games.) "Your inner character is revealed. I've learned a lot about what people can deal with and how they react under pressure, including myself," Tommy says.

"If you want to play on a college sports team, squash is probably one of the best things to pick," says Debbie Brown, co-squash director at SBAC. "It's a door-opener." Brown has had some success of her own in the squash world. She played college tennis, but hung up her racquet 15 years ago after watching a men's pro-squash tour event. Now she spreads her passion about a game that's "played in a box from all angles and is faster than tennis. It's more of a lower-body workout," she says. "You play from the center of the court, and you have to go get the 'squashable' ball wherever it goes."

Although the small rubber ball barely bounces (unlike its racquetball cousin), it can reach up to 150 miles per hour. "There's no time to lose focus," says Brown, former U.S. National over-35 squash champion and two-time U.S. National over-40 winner. "Squash requires mental and physical prowess, which is perfect for type-A personalities like me!"

Dory Turk of Santa Barbara learned the basics of squash from her husband and then turned to Brown for instruction. "Debbie's an incredible coach; she focuses on each student's particular needs. She gets to know you, watches how you move, and helps accordingly," says Turk. "She explains things clearly and in a relatable manner."

When Orla O'Doherty (U.S. women's pro-squash doubles tour member currently ranked number 11) joined SBAC last year

as Brown's counterpart, Turk also took a lesson from her. "Like Debbie, Orla is an amazing coach," says Turk. "She gets very specific and helps students visualize what they need to do."

Both Brown and O'Doherty compete this month at the U.S. Squash Championships in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. As for Turk, she's discovered benefits that go beyond intense workouts. "Squash has enabled me and my husband to spend more quality time together; we've met wonderful friends; and we both appreciate that we're taking care of ourselves. I can go on and on about the benefits of squash," she laughs. "But simply put: It was love at first stroke." ■

Squash Urban Education Program

In 2006, a committed group from Santa Barbara Athletic Club (SBAC) set up the Santa Barbara School of Squash (SBSOS), a 501(c)3-registered charity. This program is designed to provide a focus on the sport of squash for local underprivileged children while also helping to develop study habits and discipline on and off the court. The program currently includes 23 boys and girls, ranging in grades from 6 to 12. Twice a week, the students are provided one hour of squash and one hour of academic tutoring at SBAC. For more information visit www.sbsos.org.

Wanna Play Squash? Grab your racquet and head out.

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www.wcaclubs.com

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Ventura, www.pierpontclub.com

Kennedy Club Fitness
San Luis Obispo, www.kennedyclubs.com

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In the Garden

By Billy Goodnick

FROM THE LAND DOWN UNDER Aussie plants for 805 gardens.



I DON'T MEAN TO CAUSE ANYONE CONCERN, but there are probably a few Aussies living in your yard at this moment. No, don't look *behind* the bushes—look *at* the bushes. While you're at it, check the trees and ground cover because Australian plants have played a prominent role in Southern California landscapes for a long time: towering eucalyptus windbreaks, brilliant red bottle-brush trees lining residential neighborhoods, and clipped eucenia hedges screening busy streets.

Australian plants have come a long way since the Gondwana supercontinent broke up about 200 million years ago, isolating the flora of Australia and allowing it to evolve into more than 200,000 species of ferns, shrubs, and trees. Like others from the world's five Mediterranean climate zones, many of these plants are right at home in 805 gardens. They have adapted to mild, wet winters and hot, dry summers. Many attract butterflies and hummingbirds to animate any garden. And oh, the luscious otherworldly blooms!

Before You Buy

Florists might charge \$15 per stem for an exotic *Bankisia* flower, but just a little more money buys a long-lived plant that will produce hundreds over its lifetime. But don't stuff the backseat with every variety of kangaroo paw (*Anigozanthos*), zigzag wattle (*Acacia merinthophora*), and Billy buttons (*Craspedia globosa*) just yet. There are bound to be good, better, and best choices, depending on the plant's final destination.

With so many plants to choose from, a visit to Jo O'Connell's Australian Native Plants Nursery (www.australianplants.com)—just off Highway 33 in Casitas Springs, near Ojai—is a great place to start a crash course in Aussie plants.

Born and raised in Sydney, Australia, O'Connell began studying horticulture in her 30s. "I had always loved plants and knew I didn't want to work in an office for the rest of my life," she tells me. "After I earned my degree, I was a zoo horticulturist, did field work for a mining company 'repairing the scars' on the land, and worked with Australian native plants for the floral industry."

O'Connell was summoned to the States to design an ambitious estate garden near Ojai, based on Australian and South African plants. Afterward, she stayed on to study garden design through the extension program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. There she met her future husband, Byron Cox, and in the early 1990s, opened her retail nursery specializing in the native flora of her homeland.



This page: Fanciful pinwheel flowers of *Grevillea* are attractive to hummingbirds (top); grass tree makes a unique focal point or can be massed for a bold effect (bottom). Opposite page: At 3 feet high and wide, there is room for *Leucadendron teretifolium* in almost any garden.

MEADOW GARDENS

WESTLAKE VILLAGE

On my first visit to O'Connell's retail garden center a few years ago, I was thrilled to find a helpful in-ground demonstration garden, where plants were allowed to grow to their natural size and shape. No need to rely on vague, written descriptions or thumbnail pictures on a website. Visits are by appointment, "but Byron and I are usually around," she says.

I asked O'Connell for a few favorites she'd like to see in local gardens. "Well, you can't beat woollybush (*Adenanthos sericeus*) as a big background foliage shrub," O'Connell says. "It grows about 8 feet tall and equally wide, with wispy stems and cool gray needle-like foliage that's soft to touch."

And when asked for something dainty that would be right at home in a traditional garden, she recommended the exotic sounding emu bush: "*Eremophila decipiens* forms a compact, spreading mound about 3 feet high and wide. Brilliant scarlet, tubular blossoms appear throughout winter and after a couple of years in the ground, it gets along without irrigation."



I've incorporated quite a few of O'Connell's plants into my own designs. One that finds its way into many of my gardens is Australian fuchsia (*Correa Ivory Bells*'), a well-behaved mounding shrub that grows 4 feet high. It withstands bright sun, but also tolerates a good deal of shade. It packs a triple-whammy: Light-gray leaves enliven shady beds; it's happy with very little irrigation; and pests tend to leave it alone. Other favorites from the species include the delicate looking 'Western Pink Star', a ground cover suited to tough conditions, and 'Dusky Bells' with its dark rose-pink tubular blossoms and olive-green leaves.

Winter's generous rains have gone, leaving the soil refreshed and ready to plant. It's April and spring is in high gear, luring plant lovers outside to get dirty and explore new ideas. Now is a great time to invite a few more Aussies into the garden. ■

Planting Tips:

Right plant/right place: Know the mature size of each plant and space them far enough apart to avoid crowding and unnecessary pruning.

Provide good drainage for the roots: Sandy, well-drained soil is best. In clay soil, plant atop a slight mound or on a slope.

Mulch is good: It helps prevent weeds, reduces evaporation, and eventually breaks down to enrich the soil. One caution: Don't let mulch touch the woody bark of trees and shrubs.

Phosphorus is the enemy: Australian soils are naturally low in this element. If fertilizer is needed, use low-phosphorus plant food. A 17-3-6 formula is good.

Easy on the water: Though most are drought-resistant, Aussies still require some supplemental moisture. Deep and infrequent irrigation does the trick.

Yellow leaves: Discolored foliage is a sign of chlorosis, caused by too much alkalinity. Apply horticultural iron chelate per package directions.



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Preview:

Amgen Tour of California

WHEELS IN MOTION

America's biggest bicycle race comes to the Conejo Valley.

BY MARK LANGTON

IN THE PAST FOUR YEARS, the Amgen Tour of California has become America's premier cycling "stage race." For eight straight days, riders tackle eight different routes around the state; the rider with the best overall cumulative time wins. There are also several races within the race in which riders compete (see "Races Within the Race").

The day before the Stage 8 Overall Finish in the Conejo Valley, riders will blaze the streets of downtown Los Angeles in an individual time trial. But the most anticipated stage starts in Thousand Oaks at The Oaks on May 23 and finishes in Westlake Village on Townsgate Road. The Oaks Shopping Center is not only the starting point, but is

also the site of a health fair, an "autograph alley" where riders will congregate to sign autographs, and a military flyover in honor of Memorial Day. Riders will roll out for a "neutral" five miles before the official start on Townsgate Road. For information on more race-related activities at The Oaks, visit www.shoptheoaksmall.com.

The course first makes its way east to Agoura Hills and onto Mulholland Highway for the main climb past the Rock Store, and then along the spine of the mountains to the thrilling descent of Westlake Boulevard. Riders tackle this 21-mile lap four times, packing more than 7,000 feet of tortuous climbing into just 84 miles.





Amgen Tour of California Stage 8 Overall Finish

Best Places to Watch

Thousands of spectators will be on hand for the Stage 8 Overall Finish, and most of it will be open for viewing. Westlake Boulevard between Potrero Road and Mulholland Highway is the only section of the course that will be closed to traffic during the entire race. The rest of the course will be controlled with “rolling closures”: as the race moves along and racers spread out, course officials will hold up traffic. At press time there were still many details being worked out to accommodate spectators. There will also be several premium spectator packages available such as ride-alongs in an official race vehicle, VIP suite passes, and private hospitality tents. Check the website for pricing and other details. There will be several parking areas and shuttles, but check www.amgentourofcalifornia.com closer to the event date for specifics.

Two distinct locations offer some of the best viewing. For fans of the climbers, the

stretch of Mulholland Highway just before it tops out at Kanan Dume Road affords views of approximately half a mile of road, where these amazing athletes power up the climb.

Another prime viewing location is the northbound stretch of Westlake Boulevard as it descends from Mulholland Highway. Near the bottom, about a half-mile south of the intersection with East Carlisle Road, there’s a steep, serpentine section of road with a hair-raising corkscrew that should make for some exciting displays of high-speed bicycle riding.

The finish line is also an excellent place to view the race. While waiting for the riders to arrive, spectators can explore the MBT Lifestyle Festival, which features a JumboTron (providing live action from the race course), a health and fitness expo, cancer awareness education materials, cycling gear, and family activities.

WINE AND WHEELS

Malibu Family Wines will host two exclusive events during the final two days of the tour. The “Taste of the Tour” on May 22 showcases many of their wines, among them the limited-release King of the Mountains Cuvée, created especially for this event. On hand will be a great variety of area restaurants with food to complement the wine, cycling vendors showcasing their products, a silent auction to benefit *Breakaway from Cancer*, and the 805 Living Lounge. There will also be a JumboTron broadcasting the Stage 7 Time Trial from the streets of downtown Los Angeles.

On May 23 it’s “Race Day at the Ranch,” where guests can watch the race on the JumboTron then walk out to the road and see the riders as they compete for King of the Mountain points (see “Races Within the Race”). For more information call 818-889-0120 or go to www.malibufamilywines.com.

»» Preview:

Amgen Tour of California

Races Within the Race

After each stage, the rider with the lowest cumulative time (called “general classification”) is awarded the yellow Amgen Race Leader Jersey. Although, in the stage race format, such as this event, a rider can have the lowest overall time to win the race without having won a stage.

Since the inception of stage racing with the Tour de France in 1903, other category distinctions have been identified over the years, primarily to make the races more interesting to both riders and fans. The Amgen Tour of California awards the following four category jerseys each day in addition to the Race Leader.

BREAKAWAY FROM CANCER MOST COURAGEOUS: Awarded to the cyclist who best exemplifies the character of those engaged in the fight against cancer. The jersey will not necessarily be awarded to the fastest or best cyclist of the day, but rather to the rider who best demonstrates courage, sacrifice, inspiration, determination, and perseverance.

KING OF THE MOUNTAIN: Awarded to the strongest climber. The first three riders across designated locations at the tops of major climbs are awarded points.

SPRINTER: Awarded to the rider who accumulates the most points based on designated sprint-line performances on course and at the finish line. It uses a similar scoring system: The first three riders across the designated line receive points.

BEST YOUNG RIDER: Awarded to the best rider under 23 years old, based on cumulative time, similar to the Race Leader Jersey.



RIDE THE ROUTE

Local recreational riders will have a chance to ride the Stage 8 course through Amgen’s “Breakaway Ride Presented by Specialized” on April 11 to raise funds for Amgen’s *Breakaway from Cancer* nonprofit partners. Actor Patrick Dempsey of *Grey’s Anatomy* will participate in the fundraiser; for more information go to www.breakawayride.com. And as part of the Conejo Valley Cyclists’ 26th annual Cruisin’ the Conejo event on May 8, the metric century (62-mile) route (one of six of varying lengths) will include the Rock Store climb. For more information call 805-273-9545 or go to www.cvcbike.org.

CYCLING LINGO

Like most sports, cycling has a language all its own. Here are a few terms associated with road bicycle racing.

Attack—a sudden acceleration to move ahead of another rider or group of riders

Breakaway—one or more riders who sprints away from the main group (peloton) in an effort to build a lead

Bridge—a rider or riders who sprints away from the peloton and catches the breakaway

Circuit Race—a multiple-lap race around a course of two miles or more

Domestique—a rider whose main job is to help the team’s strongest rider (team captain), either by letting him draft so as to save energy or bridge up to a breakaway, or pace him up a steep climb; a domestique will also drop back to the team car for water and food for other team members, or may offer up a wheel if the captain gets a flat

Drafting—one or more riders ride single file to save energy as the rider in front breaks the wind; when the wind is coming from an angle (crosswind), riders will stagger themselves behind the rider in front, known as an “echelon” formation

Field Sprint—a mass sprint at the finish by the peloton

Hammer—to expend a high volume of energy

Jump—a quick burst of speed, usually to create a breakaway, or to catch up to a rider in front who is going faster and getting away

Lead Out—nearing the finish line for an anticipated sprint, rider(s) on a team will lead the team’s designated sprinter at a high rate of speed, peeling off one by one until the sprinter has a clear shot at the finish line

Off the Front—when a rider or riders breaks away from the peloton

Peloton—the main group of racers; also called the “pack”

Sprint—the mad dash for the finish or points line

Time Cut—during each stage all riders must finish within a certain percentage of the winner’s time to remain in the race, otherwise they are disqualified from the race

Time Trial—riders or teams are sent on a course at timed intervals (usually one minute) and try to achieve the best time over that route; each rider’s individual time is added to the general classification

Wheelsucker—considered poor sportsmanship, a rider who stays behind other riders and does not lead, preventing other riders from taking advantage of the draft ■

For a comprehensive glossary of terms go to www.amgentourofcalifornia.com.

Wine & Waves

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Good Deeds

By Mark Langton Photographs by Judi Bumstead



Arvin Brown, Dana Delaney



Sandra Oh, Sonya Walger



Sally Field



Jim Katz, Marty Wyle, Noah Wyle



Liza, Jim, and Beth Preminger

THE PLAY'S THE THING

Raising funds for the Ojai Playwrights Conference.

THE EVENT: The Ojai Playwrights Conference Benefit Gala brings in top actors from stage, screen, and television to perform readings of noted playwrights. This year's event, dubbed "Hearts On Fire," honored Tony-Award and Emmy-Award winner Terrence McNally in late January. Several scenes from different McNally scripts were sequenced together to create a story celebrating the passion and power of the human heart. Sally Field, Sandra Oh, Dana Delaney, Noah Wyle, and other actors performed the readings. The Ojai Playwrights Conference Awards and Auction followed the performance, with dancing, a live auction, and a gourmet dinner prepared by chef Michael Hollingsworth.

THE CAUSE: In 1998, the first Ojai Playwrights Conference was held with the idea of bringing together the country's best emerging and established playwrights in a supportive, creative workshop environment. The goal: to develop new plays for the American theater that would focus on compelling social, political, and moral issues. This two-week in-residence program culminates with conference attendees presenting their works for first-time public readings. This year's Ojai Playwrights Conference takes place August 10 to 15, and purchasing tickets in advanced is strongly recommended. *For more information on the Ojai Playwrights Conference, call 805-640-0400 or go to www.ojaiplays.org.* ■



Terrence McNally, Michael Morris



Robert Egan



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Book signing event at the oscars, Fabio, Dawn Christie, and Johnny Christie

This book is to inspire and encourage the reason why God has created us. It is very important to realize there is a reason for everything in this life. This book is a compilation of true stories about a gift that helped people become fulfilled and have a higher understanding about the birth of life, purpose of life, and to know that everyone is loved. When people are about to die, they realize that the most important thing in life is love. God created all of us through love; and wants us to know that he will always be there for us. This book tries to inspire and encourage people through the miracles born every minute. We all need to take the time and realize that birth of life, death of life, and every little thing in between, are very important.

Book Signing Event April 18th

www.dawnchristie.net

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Good Deeds

Story and photographs by Mark Langton



John, Colin, and Suzanne Duffy



Sue and John Stonehouse, Scot and Jennifer Chastain



Paula and Jeff Breeher



Mike and Anne Scioscia



Lesley and Troy Williams

A SAINTLY CELEBRATION

St. Paschal Baylon School nears a half-century of service.

THE EVENT: St. Paschal Baylon School (SPBS) in Thousand Oaks held its gala in January to support its endowment fund and other programs, including a variety of campus improvements. This year's event, held at the Hyatt Westlake Plaza, was once again a well-attended affair featuring cocktails, dinner, Bears bingo (the school's mascot), silent and live auctions, and dancing to live music. Mike Scioscia, manager of The Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, presided over the live auction. Scioscia's wife, Anne, and their two children are graduates of SPBS, and they donated 13 big-screen TVs to the bingo contest.

THE CAUSE: For 47 years SPBS has provided excellence in education and sports programs for grades K-8 at reasonable tuition fees. Not only does the gala raise funds to keep tuition fees affordable, proceeds also help fund Catholic students regardless of their families' financial situation. *For more information about St. Paschal Baylon School, call 805-495-9340 or go to www.stpaschalbaylonschool.org.* ■



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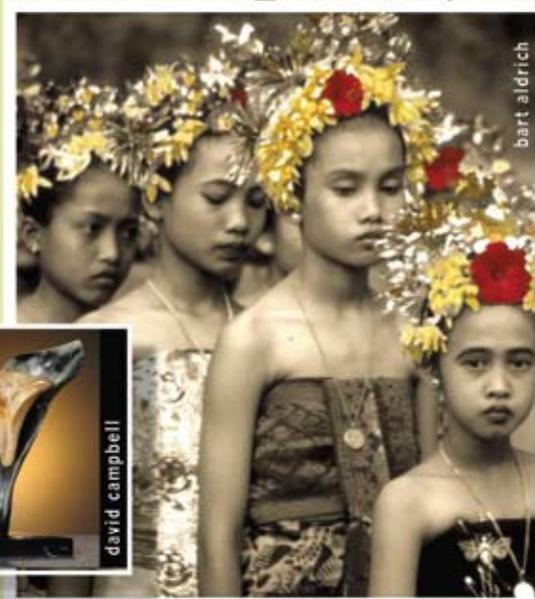
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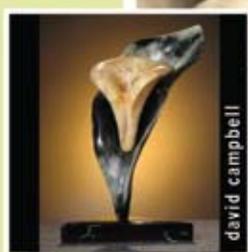


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KEEP IT CONTAINED

Pots for beautiful outdoor gardening.

Tips from a Pro

"Containers personalize a landscape," says Donna Lynn of Lynn Landscape Design in Santa Barbara. "It's one step toward [transforming your outdoor space into] more of a garden room, which is something I lean toward—making it personal. Pots make it cozy."

Containers run the gamut from strong and sturdy (made of natural stone and concrete) to lightweight (resin) to everything in-between: terracotta, glazed ceramic, wood. "Glazed ceramic [pots] hold in moisture better than non-glazed clay, which will absorb moisture," Lynn says.

While containers can help keep some pests at bay (such as burrowing animals that attack root systems), it's a myth that container gardening is easier overall. Plants in containers need to be watered regularly, fertilized more frequently, and trimmed, Lynn says. But many plants adapt well to containers, and they can be an effective corral for plants with invasive root systems that want to spread.

Lynn cites California natives, dwarf citrus, ficus, ferns, orchids, geraniums, begonias, kalanchoe, and New Zealand flax as excellent candidates for container gardening—not to mention succulents. "People who are limited space-wise might consider vegetable container gardening," Lynn adds. "It's easier [and there's] less maintenance."

When choosing containers, Lynn suggests first looking to the architecture of the house for design cues, and then coordinating the plantings. She recently gave a Montecito carriage house with a New England feel classic white box planters with white iceberg roses and trailing plants. "It's a classic design, and white and green is very fresh," she says.

In March, a subtropical front yard Lynn designed was awarded the "Goleta Valley Beautiful House of the Month." She created it to feel "welcoming, with pots at the entrance and a little sitting area next to the entryway. It's colorful, green, and lush-looking, but the plants have moderate water usage." Lynn adds that in Mediterranean-inspired design the focus is often more on contrasting foliage than on color. "I attract people who like color to me," she says. "I like using flower color, such as contrasting perennials. It works and it is very pretty but it is not for everyone."

For more information on Donna Lynn and Lynn Landscape Design, visit www.lynnlandscapedesign.com.

Salt Lake City-based Ore Containers handcrafts outdoor architectural elements using recyclable materials and eco-friendly methods. The **SKINNY TAPER PLANTER** (\$695) is made of aluminum or steel (several finish options available) and has a 40-inch depth to accommodate deep-rooted plants or filler. Available at *Seaside Gardens, Carpinteria, 805-684-6001*.





1. The **BRUGGE CONTAINERS** (\$495 to \$595) from Restoration Hardware are made of weathered Norwegian pine trimmed with lead, and styled after containers used in 19th-century European orangeries. The thick wood planks help shield tender roots from dehydration in summer. Available at Restoration Hardware, www.restorationhardware.com.



2. Cradle your green babies in the **BULLET PLANTER** (\$155), a fiberglass shell that rests in a tripod of powder-coated steel. Available at Design Within Reach, Santa Barbara, www.dwr.com.

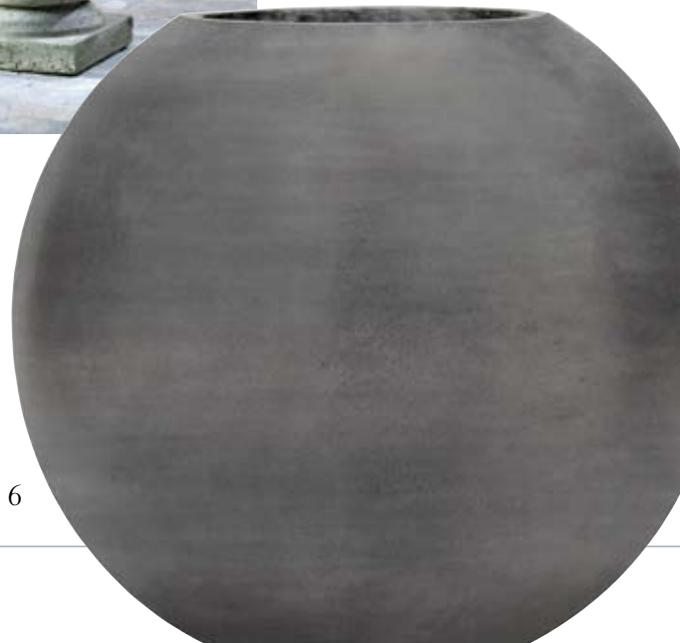
3. Natural **SLATE PLANTERS** from Stone Forest come in square and rectangular sizes (\$140 to \$195), complete with a drain hole in the bottom. Available at www.stoneforest.com.

4. Campania's **RUSTIC HAMPTON URN** (\$485) in "Alpine Stone" offers classic style in a hefty 201-pound container: no wind worries here! Available at Cabana Home, Santa Barbara, www.cabanahome.com.

5. For the window-box look without the window, the **HEAVILY TEXTURED RECTANGULAR GARDEN PLANTER** (\$315) from Aidan Gray adds Old-World style to pretty posies. The planter is hand-bent and welded and purposely rough to the touch. A natural rust patina will develop over time. Available at Rue de Lillie Antiques, Summerland, 805-695-8180.



6. For a striking contrast to angular plants, the spherical shape of the **AVALON BALL PLANTER** (\$325) creates an interesting silhouette. Available at Design Within Reach, Santa Barbara, www.dwr.com.



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Help the fight against cancer- Sunday August 1, 2010. 3-7pm - Joie De Vivre, Evening of Hope 2010

Limiting to 300 tickets, holding the price this year to \$125 (More details to come)



I have been asked to chair an event with a wonderful group of dedicated American Cancer Society volunteers to create a special occasion to support the community work and scientific research of the American Cancer Society by creating Ventura County's second annual American Cancer Society gala. This year's theme is Joire de Vivre, Evening of Hope 2010. This event is an opportunity to make a difference in the health of our community. It is a chance to join the American Cancer Society in the fight against cancer. We look forward to welcoming you to Joire de Vivre, Evening of Hope 2010 on **Sunday, August 1, 2010**. Plans are underway to transform a villa in Santa Rosa Valley into an inviting corner of the French Countryside. You won't want to miss this event! Beginning with a poolside reception, the evening will include a meal of signature dishes prepared by some of our finest local chefs, silent & live auction, and capped off with dancing under the stars! Call Rosemary for ticket and sponsorship information.

Call Rosemary at (805) 491-2100 email: RosemaryAllison@aol.com

CADRE # 005-45184



Casa del Herrero offers surprising visual delights if you know where to look. **OPPOSITE PAGE:**

This frieze, painted by Channing Peake, is in the book tower and is based on *Speculum Humanae, Salvation's Block Book*, circa 1470 (top middle).

An intricate Byzantine door surround leads from the herb garden to the garage court; Steedman purchased it in Italy in 1924 (top right). A mischievous Bacchus statue is at home in the Saints' and Sinners' Garden (bottom left); tile and painted detail in the loggia.



CASA DEL HERRERO: LIFE AT THE TOP, MODESTLY

SANTA BARBARA'S SUPREME EXAMPLE OF SPANISH COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE.

BY ROBERT SWEENEY PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY MOSS



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HISTORIC LANDMARK,
CASA DEL HERRERO,
STANDS TODAY AS ONE
OF THE MOST FULLY
DEVELOPED, RICHLY
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INTACT EXAMPLES OF
SPANISH COLONIAL
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TURE, SEEMINGLY
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It was designed and built between 1922 and 1925 as a second house for George Fox Steedman, a St. Louis industrialist, and his wife, Carrie. Many hands were involved in its creation, principally George Washington Smith, the architect; Ralph T. Stevens, a landscape architect who had a significant role in the history of Santa Barbara gardens, and who laid out and planted the grounds; Arthur Byne, an American expatriate architect living in Madrid, and, of most importance, Steedman himself.

Eight decades hence, it is clear that Steedman's vision prevailed, both in the house and gardens. He was an engaged client, generating an enormity of information during the initial design phase that was at once a blessing and a curse to his designers. Steedman continued to rework both the house and garden for a decade after they were first completed, engaging the architects Lulah Maria Riggs, Edwards, Plunkett & Howell, and Floyd Brewster; and garden designers Francis T. Underhill and Lockwood de Forest Jr., (who, like Smith, has become a local deity).

Steedman made his money at Curtis & Co. producing hydraulic equipment; his real break came during World War I, when he produced munitions first for the British government, then the American. In Steedman's words, "...our contracts were doubled, and after a few additional months, redoubled ... Our total combined output for both governments was over two and a half

million projectile forgings. ..."¹ Steedman retired on Armistice Day, 1918, refocusing his energies and spending less and less time in St. Louis. In 1921, he and his wife spent several months in Montecito, an unincorporated community adjacent to Santa Barbara that had developed during the 1910s as a colony for the affluent.

The Steedmans returned the next year and purchased an 8-acre trapezoidal parcel of land on Valley Road, which dropped off sharply to the south. Two creeks meandered through and the ocean was on the horizon. The choice of Smith as architect is unexplained, though he and Steedman had met the previous May at a Harvard Club dinner in Santa Barbara, and Smith's own house, completed in 1918, fueled the passion for Spanish vernacular architecture in the area.

Smith's work was dependent on—and delayed by—a six-week trip to Spain Steedman took in 1922 to purchase furniture, decorative arts, and building fragments for his new house. Steedman's advisors were Byne and his wife Mildred Stapley, who by then were working as "antiquarios." Stapley explained, "...if we can't build Spanish residences, we can furnish them. Our opportunities for disposing of good old private collections were so numerous that it seemed a pity not to take advantage of them."² At the same time they were working—on a much grander scale—with William Randolph Hearst and his architect, Julia Morgan, on the construction and furnishing of Hearst's "village on a mountain-top" at San Simeon.³ Steedman's initial purchases filled 87 cases but many more were on the horizon. By December 1923, the plan of the house was essentially complete; one drawing includes notations for the placement of each of the Spanish pieces.

Work on the garden paralleled the design and construction of the house. The strategy, as laid out by Stevens, was a combination of formal garden, orchard, and wilderness. Two entrances from Valley Road lead to a circular drive in front of the house and a major axis extended to the south, oriented to the ocean view. The axis was defined by eugenia hedges and terminated in a small pool and an exedra on the far horizon. Orchards lay beyond the hedges and a "palm jungle" was planted along the eastern creek. Flowers were abundant in cutting gardens: There were more than 30 varieties of roses, fuschias were much in favor, and hundreds of gladioli were planted annually, in addition to a wide assortment of other perennials and annuals.

Early in the planning process, Steedman stated his intention that "One gardener is supposed to easily handle garden, wash car, and do janitor work. ... I ... insist on 'one man' place after the planting is established."⁴ In fact, during the

Chemla tile, made by hand by a Spanish family in Tunis, decorates the stairway designed by architect Arthur Byne.



THIS PAGE: Delightful garden views pop up in the most unexpected places. **OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE:** An ornate iron gate purchased in Italy in 1924; a Catalonian chair graces the dining room; another 1924 Italy purchase: a grand stone garden ornament; Carrie Steedman's bedroom showcases a "modern" bed made by Los Angeles cabinetmaker Marshall Laird in 1925.





garden's heyday in the thirties, as many as 13 gardeners worked under the supervision of Joe Acquistapace, who was head gardener at the Casa for 49 years. Many years later the Steedmans' granddaughter, Margaret Hinckley, recalled "... wandering the grounds alone (although one was never really alone because there was almost always a gardener about...)." ⁵

The house was first occupied on June 29, 1925, the day of the great Santa Barbara earthquake. By the time the Steedmans returned to St. Louis in September, they had formulated plans for a series of changes that set precedent for larger work that continued for the next decade; construction became a way of life at the Casa. Initially, the most visible undertaking was in the garden, with which Steedman had expressed dissatisfaction early on. Under the supervision of Underhill and de Forest, brick paths and paved platforms—later roofed as pergolas—were added. In 1927, de Forest replaced the circular drive in front with the walled, paved court seen today. An equally important contemporary project was the installation of the star pool in the south garden; an early incarnation was in place by June 1928, though it was reworked repeatedly by Steedman. That same year, the butler's cottage to the west of the service court was added by Edwards, Plunkett & Howell, another Santa Barbara firm working in the Spanish Colonial idiom.

The Steedmans moved to the Casa permanently in 1930 and almost immediately undertook far more ambitious work on the house itself. In 1931, the service areas were remodeled by Riggs. Riggs followed up in 1933 with a minor tour de force, a "book tower" addition projecting diagonally from the living room and linked to it by a gently curved passage. Octagonal in plan and just over half the height of the main building, it has the diminutive quality of a playhouse. With its gilded trim, the interior is gothic in spirit, a quality enhanced by the frieze of panels inspired by *Speculum Humanae, Salvation's Block Book*, circa 1470, hand-painted by Channing Peake.

The final major construction at Casa del Herrero was a new workshop to replace the first one completed in 1925. Brewster, who was working in Smith's office during construction of the Casa, designed the new building. Two stories high, the shop itself was on the upper level and equipped to accommodate a variety of activities, most notably silversmithing (Steedman's chief artistic avocation). Rooms for producing and storing wine were below. Construction continued from May to November 1934 at a cost of \$22,000. Bantering, Steedman's brother Edwin commented, "It is perfectly apparent that you should employ me on an annual retainer to act as your guardian. For

example, my advice was sound to have you build a new shop and wine cellar, but I did not expect you to have it inlaid with mosaics and probably bronze centaurs for decorations; otherwise I don't see how you could spend the 20 grand."⁶

When Ted Steedman referred to "mosaics," he probably had tile in mind. Although in 1923 Steedman stated that he wanted very little tile and his purchases in Spain were limited, his appetite soon became insatiable. When the need for more tile became apparent, Smith responded,

WORK ON THE GARDEN PARALLELED THE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE HOUSE. THE STRATEGY, AS LAID OUT BY STEVENS, WAS A COMBINATION OF FORMAL GARDEN, ORCHARD, AND WILDERNESS.

"...the only tile I have ever found that I can use satisfactorily other than antique tile, is a tile made in Tunis by, I understand, an old Spanish family, made by hand."⁷ He was referring to the firm Les Fils de J. Chemla; on Steedman's behalf, Byne traveled to North Africa in January 1924 to work with Chemla. Three substantial orders were placed between 1924 and 1927; the display of tile at the Casa is nothing short of astonishing.

At 7,000 square feet, Casa del Herrero was modest by Montecito standards; the garden as well—expanded to 11 acres in 1925—was dwarfed by neighboring properties. Steedman expressed his expectations early on. In 1923, he wrote to Byne, "...I want to keep things simple and don't want to do anything needlessly extravagant, and I always try to lean toward the simple, conservative thing rather than the highly organized or showy." He followed up in 1924 in a letter to Smith, "I don't want anything showy, but I want it good."⁸

These words belie the almost compulsive passion Steedman demonstrated in the Casa. He knew he had done something fine. In 1931 he wrote to his wife, who was visiting in the East, encouraging a rapid return, "...so we can enjoy our good luck in living in such a place." He followed up a short time later, "Hurry up ... and come and enjoy the garden, sun-shine and peaches here."⁹ ■

Editor's note: Go to www.805living.com for quotation sources.

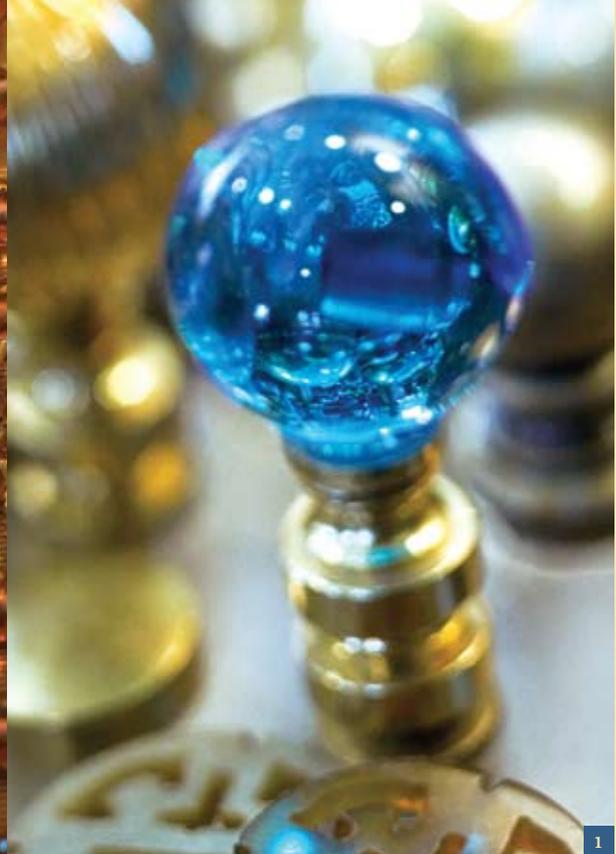
FURTHER READING

"The past year has been pivotal for the Casa. Our new book has been well received and we are honored by our National Historic Landmark designation," says Molly Barker, executive director of the Casa del Herrero Foundation. "With all this attention, we may shed our status as the community's best-kept secret."

The book, *Casa del Herrero: The Romance of Spanish Colonial* (Rizzoli International, 2009), was written by Robert Sweeney, the author of this exclusive story for *805 Living*. With photography by Matt Walla, this book provides a much more in-depth look at how the Steedman estate became a nationally recognized icon of "California Style" in both landscape design and Spanish Colonial Revival architecture.



Ralph T. Stevens planned this garden axis to point toward the ocean on the horizon. Steedman added the star pool around 1928; Arthur Byne designed the pepper tree fountain in the far distance.



THE ART & CRAFT OF A BEAUTIFUL HOME

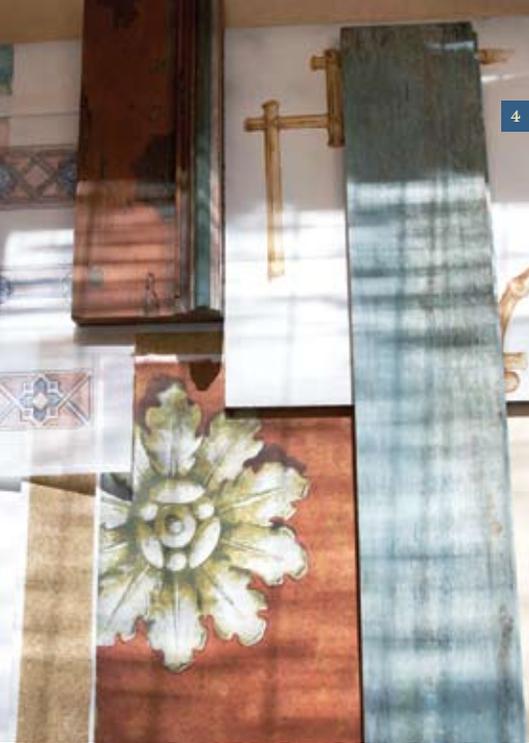
Artisans, craftspeople, and design experts who beautify our homes.

NOTHING SPEAKS TO OUR PERSONALITIES—to the very essence of who we are—as much as the way we choose to decorate our homes, both inside and out. But oftentimes we are unable to express ourselves the way we'd like on our own, so that's when we call in the experts. Whether it's painting or tile, custom lampshades or furnishings, these design pros know how to bring out our best selves when it comes to home design—and they're right here in our own backyard.



TILE MAKERS RICHARD THOMAS
KEIT AND MARY CATHERINE
KENNEDY OF RTK STUDIOS IN OJAI.

BY MARYANN HAMMERS
PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY MOSS



1. M. FREEBORN STUDIOS, Montecito

Custom lampshades and soft furnishings

Who says lampshades need to be boring beige? Not Mona Freeborn. From the time she was a child, Freeborn loved to sew, and later learned to spin and dye wool to weave rugs and fabrics. While studying for a master's degree in textile arts, she began restoring lampshades for an antique shop, a craft she has practiced since 1978. Later, she opened her own studio, which has stood for the past six years in Montecito's Upper Village. "I have fabrics from all the top houses for custom upholstery, bedding, window coverings, pillows—all soft furnishings. I also stock Simon Pearce hand-blown glass table lamps and other custom fabricated lamps, beautiful candlesticks, and objets d'art," Freeborn says.

"But custom lampshades are the heart of my business," she continues. "I am one of the country's few lampshade makers who creates them in the traditional manner—hand sewn with silk linings. I put in a lot of pink and gold and copper linings to give a beautiful glow when lit. I offer pleating, shirring, smocking, [and] couture detailing. I'm all about color when given the chance, although lovely white or cream shades are practical and give off the most light. I'm often asked to create something I've never done before, which is fun, challenging, and extremely gratifying." *For more information call 805-695-0373.*



2. AGOURA ANTIQUE MART

Antiques, reproductions, gifts, and new treasures

The words "antique mart" connote china locked behind glass cabinets in a fusty, musty, dusty store with crammed booths and narrow aisles. Agoura Antique Mart, on the other hand, is bright, airy, and spacious, with inviting, inspirational displays. "I want to draw you in," says owner Maria Bartolet, "and I want you to say 'wow' when you step through the door."

In every corner there's something new, unexpected, and irresistible: vintage vases, fabulous fireplace screens, 1950s chandeliers. There's a replica of grandma's kitchen, with cookbooks, country cupboards, milk bottles, and antique scales. First-edition books, old phones, and manual typewriters adorn an antique desk. A romantic settee is nestled under a crystal chandelier. *For more information visit www.agouraantiquemart.com.*



3. RTK STUDIOS, Ojai Old-World-style tile makers

When the Royal Family of Jordan was planning the design for fountains for the Royal Palace, they embarked on a quest for the world's finest tile makers. They chose RTK Studios in Ojai. "For 16 months, Queen Noor traveled with our tiles, comparing our work with the world's most beautiful tiles," says Richard Thomas Keit, who along with his wife, Mary Catherine Kennedy, designs and produces exquisite tile murals and tile for tables, urns, floors, kitchens, baths, and fireplaces.

"Our tile is visibly textural and sensuously tactile, with Old-World character," Keit says. "But we don't simply reproduce historic tiles: We produce new designs and concepts. We have the world's most extensive line of glazes with [more than] 50,000 colors and textures. We are currently developing decorative handmade glass tiles and pavers from post-consumer window and bottle glass. Some pretty cool stuff."

Over the years, RTK Studios has created notable projects, such as Catalina Island's 20-foot-tall mermaid mural and tile rugs similar to those at Adamson House in Malibu. Clients have included Kareem Abdul-Jabar, Larry Hagman, Phil Collins, George Lucas, and Jane Fonda. *For more information visit www.rtkstudios.com.*

4. MARC DECORATIVE FINISHES, Summerland

Painting, stenciling, detailing

With a painter mother and photographer father, Beda Marc, owner of Marc Decorative Finishes, has art in her blood. She attended San Francisco Art Institute at age 11. During college, she began painting and wallpapering homes and painting murals. "I moved to Montecito to work on a two-year project, and decided to stay when the job was done," she says.

The catchall term "Decorative Finishes" hardly does her justice, but it's tough to put a label on or pigeonhole her work. "We can do anything, from gilding to stenciling, classic wall finishes, murals, hand-painted detailing, to furniture," Marc says.

Historic restoration and re-creation—custom work modeled after classic finishes—has become her company's main focus. She has restructured wall panels from a Moroccan palace, restored and gilded detail from a Mexican church, and painted a mural based on an antique French wallpaper pattern.



“We restored the amazing paintwork done by Giovanni Smeraldi in 1928 on the Santa Barbara Courthouse ceiling. Everything is painted with amazing detailing and shading that you really can’t appreciate from the ground. In fact, we may have been the only other people to see its beauty. His passion shows. I hope that that is what people say about our work.” *For more information call 805-969-0584.*

5. GIATI, Santa Barbara

Outdoor furniture

Mark Singer started crafting furniture at age 10 in his parents’ basement. Today, he works from a 10,000-square-foot Santa Barbara studio, designing prototypes of the deep-seated, large-scale, outdoor furniture Giati is known for.

Giati means “teak” in Indonesian. In the beginning, that was the company’s mainstay material. Over the years, however, Singer added stainless steel, aluminum, stone, and woven materials. “But we still manufacture almost every line we’ve ever made, because nothing we do is faddy,” he says. “Our furniture is extraordinarily comfortable with wonderful architectural form and beautiful textiles that complement the home.” *For more information visit www.giati.com.*

6. LANTERN MASTERS,

Westlake Village

Fine-lighting manufacturer

With more than 1,000 beautifully forged chandeliers, pendants, and sconces, Lantern Masters is a lighting treasure trove. “Clients say our fixtures are pieces of art. They are tomorrow’s antiques,” says Jackie Olesker, president of the family-owned business, which specializes in 17th- to 20th-century replicas, along with modern 21st-century designs. *For more information visit www.lanternmasters.com.*

7. HOLROYD STUDIOS,

Santa Barbara

Architectural leaded glass

Raised in London by architect parents, Tanya Holroyd Stevenson grew up surrounded by Europe’s great historic buildings. Now she and her partner, Dave Polarek, bring the timeless European designs of architectural leaded glass to California’s most beautiful, historic, and classic homes and buildings. “We specialize in historic design as found in Tuscany, Andalusia, and France. Most of our windows use very little color or small amounts of very pale colors,” Stevenson says. “I like to tie things together to make a pattern repeat

through the house. We use the traditional ways wherever possible, even mixing our own centuries-old cement recipes.” *For more information visit www.holroydstudios.com.*

8. CARVED CUSTOM CABINETS, Santa Barbara

Hand-carved, custom-installed cabinets and millwork

Working with an artisan woodworker in Central Mexico, husband-and-wife team Chris Clemens and Lannie Loeks custom design, build, and install hand-carved cabinets in Spanish Revival, Mission Revival, Tuscan, and other Old-World styles, with intricate historical motifs and a rich distressed finish that extends to the backs of the cabinet doors. “With the carving detail and quality of the finish, the transformation in a home is remarkable,” Clemens says. *For more information visit www.carvedcustomcabinets.com.*

9. JOHN HALL DESIGNS, Oxnard

Handcrafted furniture

Master furniture maker John Hall personally conceives and draws each design, and he works with a staff of craftsmen and artisans to oversee each piece as it is meticulously crafted using exotic hardwoods. “From start to finish, each piece is executed by hand [using] time-honored methods, and hand-finished in exacting detail,” Hall says. “Our furniture has the feel of a fine 18th-century antique, an heirloom to be passed to the next generation.” *For more information visit www.johnhalldesigns.com.*

10. GARY JAMES PAPERHANGING SERVICES,

Santa Barbara

Wallpaper artist

“Wallcoverings have always been popular in high-end and showcase homes,” says Gary James, when asked if wallpaper is experiencing a resurgence. Not to be confused with 1980s pre-pasted vinyl, today’s focus is on interesting textures and fabrics, which dramatically transform a room. He should know: James has installed 25,000 rolls of wallpaper since 1980. “Wallcoverings are made from gold or silver leaf, wood veneers, and even metals like oxidized copper. There are glass bead wallcoverings with thousands of tiny beads. Pure-paper coverings from England, with no vinylizing, are elegant. Grass cloths, silks, and coconut fiber wallcoverings add terrific character,” he says. *For more information visit www.goodseams.com.* ■

VIA COLINAS DESIGN CENTER

Westlake Village

Unique boutiques, one-of-a-kind finds

As in-the-know designers attest, this is home-and-garden heaven with more than a dozen shops and unique boutiques. Here are some highlights:

À la Maison inspires shoppers to create a European home with sunny Provençal-themed linens, kitchen goods, and tableware, plus Mediterranean-style kitchen and bath design (*www.alamaisonwlv.com*).

Casa Mexicana Imports specializes in wrought iron, sculptures, Talavera pottery, and rustic mesquite furnishings, such as a gorgeous blue side table made from an old door (*www.casamexicanaimports.com*).

A stroll through **Asian Furnishings** feels like an exotic journey to a Far East palace, with a 200-year-old carved daybed, dragon ships, cloisonné horses, and Tibetan silk (818-865-8257).

Pacific Rim Home continues the theme, with sleek furnishings and a stunning collection of antique hand-carved chests and cabinets (*www.pacificrimhome.com*).

Despite its name, everything at **Vintage Villa** is new, but faithfully reproduced in Old World, rural Mediterranean, and Spanish Colonial styles (*www.vintagevillahomecollection.com*).

At **Designer Lighting**, shoppers find candles to candelabras, crystal chandeliers to rustic lanterns (818-575-9560).

Every inch of **Meadow Gardens** is packed with whimsical garden art, with the sound of hundreds of fountains trickling in unison (818-879-9555).

Heather Fields Home & Garden welcomes spring with custom ironwork, bistro sets, patio furniture, benches and arbors, along with live plants, pots, and urns (818-991-0441).

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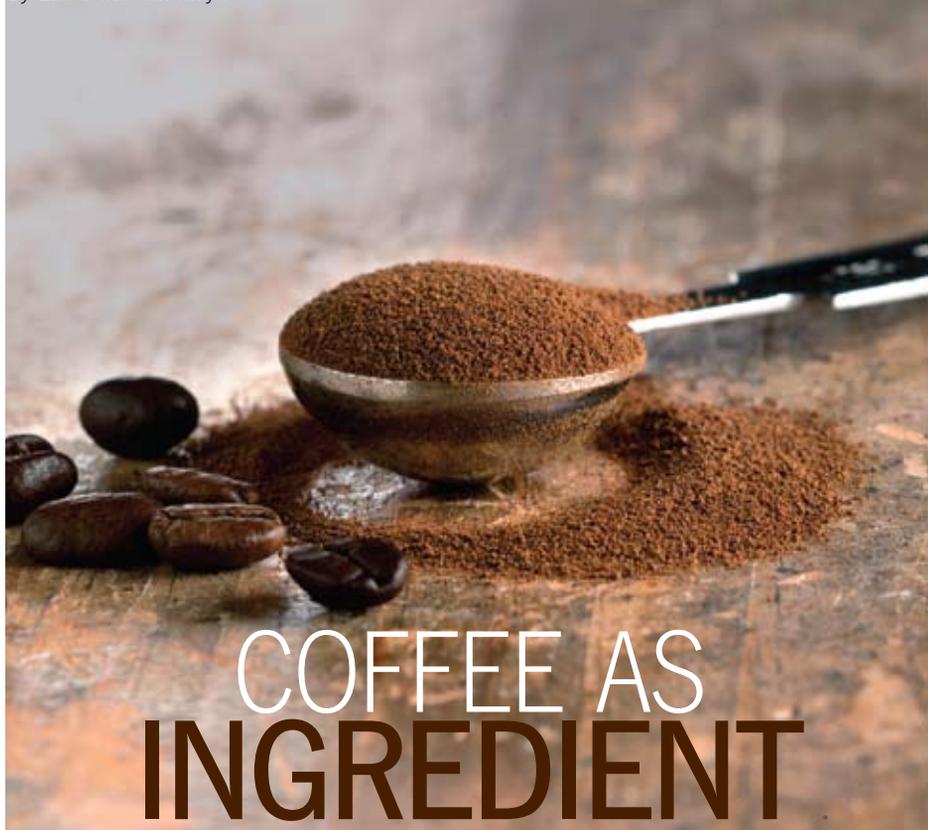


8



9

By Laura Samuel Meyn



From leftover morning brew to instant versions, coffee brings sophisticated flavor to sweets and savories.

BACK IN THE DAY, it was my job to answer the phone for *Bon Appétit* magazine and help readers solve their cooking quandaries. Themes regularly emerged from among the many messages left for me each day. One was that if you deviate significantly from the recipe, it won't work as well (seriously). Another thing? A fresh jar of quick-dissolving instant espresso powder—a great ingredient for bringing the deep, rich flavor of coffee to certain recipes—can be difficult to track down at your local supermarket. I sent many a cook off in search of that elusive jar that would give a concentrated kick of coffee to their crème brûlée, cheesecake, tiramisu, and so much more.

These were, after all, the recipes they wanted to make again and again. Sweets tempered with a shot of coffee are less cloying and more interesting than their counterparts—not to mention more caffeinated. Coffee can also add depth to savory chilis, marinades, and even barbecue sauces. Our resident restaurant expert Angela Pettera loves the braised beef rubbed with coffee and spices at Leila's in Oak Park (www.leilasrestaurant.com), and contributing editor Sarene Wallace makes her own recipe for espresso shortbread cookies with espresso, cacao nibs, and Kahlua. Come warm weather, espresso powder is a great addition to homemade ice cream and spice rubs used for grilling.

So when Starbucks introduced its take on instant coffee, called VIA Ready Brew, the first thing I thought of was what its culinary uses might be. This ultra-concentrated coffee powder dissolves easily, and it has a fresh, strong taste that makes freeze-dried pale in comparison. As for availability—well, we all know how ridiculously easy that is.

My first experiment with VIA was the Fudgy Chocolate Layer Cake with Coffee-Chocolate Frosting from *Bon Appétit*, of course (www.epicurious.com). With a packet of VIA in the frosting and another in the cake, this chocolate-coffee layer cake is fantastic. Read on for other coffee-as-ingredient resources and coffee-spiked recipes that take coffee, whether in powdered or liquid form, beyond the morning mug.

At the Market

Regular brewed coffee can make a great substitute for water when cooking (add some to chili, for instance) or baking (use coffee in place of water in brownie mixes). Coffee flavor can also be added without the liquid, but while some people bake with very finely ground coffee beans, others won't be happy with the texture that they add. Freeze-dried instant coffee granules don't offer the best flavor—nor do they dissolve easily in some mixtures. That's why instant espresso powder is such a sought-after ingredient: It dissolves easily and brings concentrated coffee flavor to sweets and savories alike. Here's what to look for.

Medaglia d'Oro (www.medagliadoro.com) makes an instant espresso (about \$4 for 2 ounces) that can be found in some grocery stores; this was the gold standard for bakers a decade ago, when it was also the only such product widely available. It's also sold at some Target locations (including the Thousand Oaks store) and online through www.amazon.com.

King Arthur Flour sells its espresso powder (about \$6 for 2 ounces) online at www.kingarthurfLOUR.com; reviews show that many bakers consider this to be a favorite secret ingredient, even almost magically making chocolate more chocolatey. Used sparingly, it can have that effect without revealing any coffee flavor at all (see King Arthur's brownie recipe page 72).



Starbucks' VIA Ready Brew (about \$10 for 12 packets totaling 1.4 ounces), while pricey, is a convenient way to add a shot of coffee flavor to recipes. It's available at cafés everywhere (www.starbucks.com/via).

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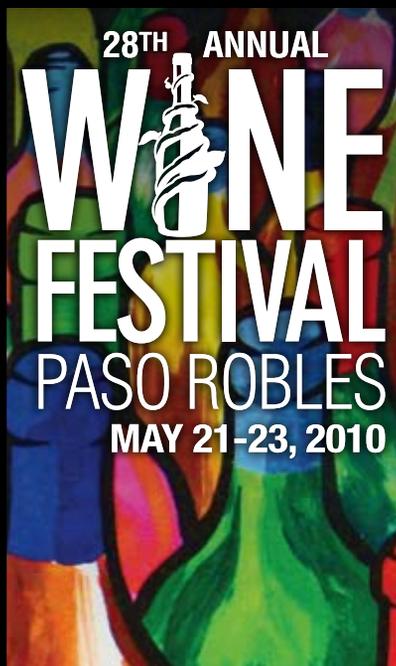
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IN THE KITCHEN



CHILI

805 Living reader Teine Rebane Kenney recommended this chili to us via Facebook, writing that the recipe gets passed from friend to friend because it's so delicious. The recipe is reprinted courtesy of Allrecipes.com; it was posted there (under the name "Chili I") by user ROBTX99, and has been reviewed favorably hundreds of times. Garnish it with shredded cheese and any of your other favorite chili toppings, such as diced chiles, diced red onions, fresh cilantro, or sour cream.

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 onions, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 pound ground beef
- $\frac{3}{4}$ pound beef sirloin, cubed
- 1 14½-ounce can peeled and diced tomatoes with juice
- 1 12-fluid-ounce can or bottle dark beer
- 1 cup strong brewed coffee
- 2 6-ounce cans tomato paste
- 1 14-ounce can beef broth
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup packed brown sugar
- $3\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons chili powder
- 1 tablespoon cumin seeds
- 1 tablespoon unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 15-ounce cans kidney beans
- 4 fresh hot chile peppers, seeded and chopped

Heat oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Cook onions, garlic, ground beef, and cubed sirloin in oil for 10 minutes, or until the meat is well browned and the onions are tender.

Mix in the diced tomatoes with juice, dark beer, coffee, tomato paste, and beef broth. Season with brown sugar, chili powder, cumin, cocoa powder, oregano, cayenne pepper, coriander, and salt. Stir in 2 cans of the beans and hot chile peppers. Reduce heat to low, and simmer for 1½ hours.

Stir in the 2 remaining cans of beans, and simmer for another 30 minutes.

Makes 8 servings.

FUDGE BROWNIES

This recipe comes courtesy of King Arthur Flour (www.kingarthurflour.com); on the website these brownies are described as being somewhere between cakey and fudgy. The small amount of espresso powder intensifies the chocolate; you could increase the amount of espresso for a more pronounced mocha flavor.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter
- $2\frac{1}{4}$ cups sugar
- 4 large eggs
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cups Dutch-process cocoa
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon espresso powder
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 2 cups chocolate chips

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly grease a 9x13-inch pan.

In a medium-sized microwave-safe bowl, or in a saucepan set over low heat, melt the butter, then add the sugar and stir to combine. Return the mixture to the heat (or microwave) briefly, just until it's hot (about 110°F to 120°F) but not bubbling; it'll become shiny looking as you stir it. Heating this mixture a second time will dissolve more of the sugar, which will yield a shiny top crust on your brownies.

While the sugar heats a second time, crack the 4 eggs into a bowl, and beat them with the cocoa, salt, baking powder, espresso powder, and vanilla until smooth.

Add the hot butter/sugar mixture, stirring until smooth.

Add the flour and chips, again stirring until smooth. Note: If you want the chips to remain intact in the baked brownies, rather than melting in, let the batter cool in the bowl for about 20 minutes before stirring in the chips.

Spoon the batter into the 9x13-inch pan.

Bake the brownies for about 30 minutes, until a cake tester inserted into the center comes out clean, or with just a few moist crumbs clinging to it. The brownies should feel set on the edges, and the center should look very moist, but not uncooked. Remove them from the oven and cool on a rack before cutting and serving.

Makes about 2 dozen 2-inch brownies. ■

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Artichokes add flower power to spring meals.

ARTICHOKES ARE, IN FACT, the flowering buds of a thistle plant. When cooked, they bloom with a deliciousness that's to be savored, leaf by leaf. Diners grab each leaf and scrape the base through their teeth to get a tease of sweet, delicately nutty flesh. When those are gone, and the fuzzy choke is removed, diners reach their prize: a flavorful heart that's big enough for complete bites.

"For anyone with a refined palate, artichokes are one of this life's true delights," says Geraldine Duncann, author of *Artichoke Extravaganza* (Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2009). "For pure, unadulterated artichoke joy, just boil them and enjoy by dipping the leaves in a judicious amount of melted butter or homemade mayonnaise." These two rich dips nicely play off the artichoke's mild flavor, and cooks can also give store-bought or homemade mayonnaise a lift with garlic and lemon. Experiment with a touch of wasabi or pesto, too; or make a batch of aioli (a French garlic mayonnaise) for dipping. As a twist on the theme, dip leaves in hazelnut or lemon-olive oil and dust with sea salt; and liven up the buttery base with fresh lemon, garlic, fresh basil shreds, or a sprinkling of lemon pepper.

Artichokes are available year-round, but spring is their peak season, followed by fall. Since Steve Jordan, owner of Lompoc's Baroda Farms (www.artichokes.net), started growing artichokes in 1986, he's seen an increase in demand for the larger ones, such as his popular Lyon Jumbo Artichoke. This proprietary French variety is 6 inches across; it's widely available at farmers' markets and

grocers. Jordan also grows baby to full-size artichokes in striking hues of deep red wine, purple, and red.

By the way, baby artichokes are not really babies. Their petite size results from growing on a lower portion of the plant. They don't have a prickly choke, so trimmed baby artichokes can be eaten whole, halved, or quartered in a variety of dishes. Start by sautéing prepared baby artichokes with garlic, tomatoes, kalamata olives, and a splash of white wine and serve with chicken, halibut, or pasta. Or deep-fry and serve them in place of french fries.

Artichokes are usually cooked, but they're "really delicious" raw, says Rachel Main, partner and executive chef of Main Course California Catering and Restaurant (www.maincourseca.com) in Ventura. She describes the raw flavor and texture as a blend of chestnut, potato, and jicama. Main uses them raw in a salad inspired by one she had in Rome. She shaves cleaned artichoke hearts, fennel, and whole lemons with a mandoline, then tosses the mixture with olive oil and herbs to serve with grilled meat.

Other uses include diced large artichoke hearts tossed with roasted-veggie-studded pastas, or used whole as a cradle for a poached egg with hollandaise sauce. (Save the leaves to snack on later.) Finishing cooked artichokes on the grill is a lovely way to concentrate their nuttiness. Seasoned with olive oil, mint, and lemon, grilled artichokes are a springy, healthful starter for Easter brunch.

Artichoke Artistry

AREA EATERIES TO GET YOUR FIX.

Castroville, in Monterey County, may be the self-proclaimed "Artichoke Center of the World," but 805-area restaurants know how to put this attractive vegetable at center stage. In casual delis and upscale restaurants, diners can find artichokes prepared a number of different ways. San Luis Obispo's Vieni Vai Trattoria (www.vienivai.com) even uses canned artichokes with great results on its Quattro Stagioni and Sorrento pizzas. In Agoura Hills, Italia Deli & Bakery (www.italiadeli.com) combines veggies and provolone cheese with house-made marinated artichokes and mushrooms for a terrific sandwich.

OTHERS TO TRY

California Grill (Camarillo, www.californiagrillcamarillo.com) starts with halved artichokes that are rubbed with balsamic vinegar and sprinkled with toasted bread crumbs seasoned with parsley and lemon zest, then grills them for a popular appetizer. Garlic mayonnaise arrives on the side.

Justin West, chef and co-owner of **Julienne** restaurant (Santa Barbara, www.restaurantjulienne.com) makes a delicately flavored broth-based artichoke soup in spring that's finished with a touch of cream. A lemon oil drizzle completes the dish. The soup isn't always on the menu, so call ahead.

A quick, gourmet addition to spring menus comes from **Bristol Farms** (Westlake Village, www.bristolfarms.com). In the deli, shoppers will find grilled and marinated quartered artichokes.

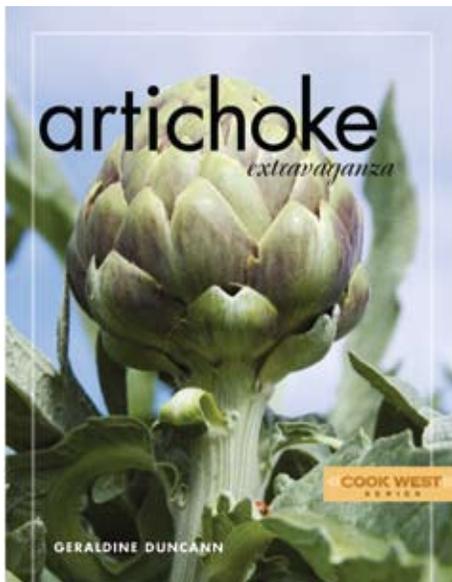
At **Aloha Steakhouse** (Camarillo and Ventura, www.alohasteakhouse.com), diners enjoy steamed artichokes with the center removed, stuffed with sautéed fresh mushrooms and topped with Parmesan cheese. Diners can also order a whole artichoke sans mushrooms. Both dishes arrive with drawn butter and aioli.

Chef Brandon Hughes' seasonal menu at **Bouchon Santa Barbara** (Santa Barbara, www.bouchonsantabarbara.com) includes an olive-oil-and-rosemary-marinated pork chop with port demi-glace that shares the plate with mascarpone-whipped Yukon Gold potatoes and roasted artichoke hearts (see www.805living.com for the recipe). Hughes simmers whole artichokes in a seasoned white-wine broth, then removes the leaves and choke before roasting the hearts with lemon zest and butter.



All hail the artichoke as a harbinger of spring.

RECIPES



Cooking Artichokes

Geraldine Duncann (www.thequestingfeast.com) is the author of *Artichoke Extravaganza* (Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2009) and offers this basic technique for cooking artichokes: Cut the stem off flush with the bottom of the artichoke so that it can sit flat. (Don't discard the stem; cook it along with the artichoke. If the artichoke is young the stem may be tender for an inch or two and will taste like the heart.) Pull off the tiny, superficial leaves that are growing around the bottom of the artichoke. With a sharp knife, trim off only about the top ½ to 1 inch of the artichoke. Then take a pair of kitchen scissors and snip off the very tip of each leaf. This will remove the tiny stickers. Boil or steam the artichokes until they are tender. They are done when you can easily pull off one of the leaves. Remove them from the pot, turn upside down, and allow to completely drain.

EASY GRILLED ARTICHOKE

Recipe comes courtesy of Geraldine Duncann, author of *Artichoke Extravaganza* (Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2009).

- 4 large artichokes
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon sweet-and-hot brown mustard (recipe at www.805living.com, or use store-bought)
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- ½ teaspoon sesame oil

Trim, cook, and drain the artichokes (see directions, left). When artichokes are cool enough to handle, slice in half lengthwise and remove the choke. Put all remaining ingredients into a large plastic bag and mix well. Add the artichoke halves, seal the bag, and refrigerate overnight. Gently agitate the bag occasionally to insure even marinating.

Drain well and reserve the marinade. Place the artichokes cut-side down over a bed of coals (or on a gas grill) and cook for 5 or 6 minutes, or until the tips of the leaves just begin to char. Turn the artichokes and grill for another 3 or 4 minutes on the other side. Serve warm or at room temperature with a bit of the marinade for dipping.

Makes 8 servings of half an artichoke each.

AIOLI

"Aioli is a superb enhancement for many dishes," writes Geraldine Duncann, author of *Artichoke Extravaganza* (Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2009).

- 2 egg yolks*
- 4-6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon dry powdered mustard
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- Salt
- Sugar
- Finely minced fresh tarragon or dill weed
- ¼ cup fresh white bread crumbs
- 2 cups extra-virgin olive oil

If you have a large mortar and pestle, that is the best thing to use. Put the egg yolks, garlic, mustard, lemon juice, salt and sugar to taste, herbs, and bread crumbs in the bottom of the mortar and, using the pestle, begin pounding and mixing until you have a very smooth paste, then begin slowly adding the oil while still pounding and mixing.

If you don't have a mortar and pestle, put all ingredients except the oil in a bowl and blend into submission with a handheld electric rotary mixer. When the mixture is smooth and thickened, begin adding the oil, 1 tablespoon at a time only, beating it in well after each addition. Continue in this manner until the mixture has thickened. At this point you may begin adding the oil a bit faster.

*If cooks are not comfortable using raw eggs, substitute with pasteurized ones. Bristol Farms (Westlake Village, www.bristolfarms.com) carries Davidson brand pasteurized eggs.

Makes about 2 cups.

COUSCOUS-STUFFED ARTICHOKE

Recipe comes courtesy of Geraldine Duncann, author of *Artichoke Extravaganza* (Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2009).

- 4 large artichokes
- 1 can (14½ ounces or about 2 cups) chicken broth
- 1 cup instant couscous
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium-size onion, coarsely chopped
- 3-4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 ripe tomato, diced
- 1 teaspoon curry powder
- ½ teaspoon dry dill weed
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ cup currants
- ¼ cup pine nuts or slivered almonds
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 green onion, finely chopped, including most of the green
- Juice and zest of 1 lemon
- 2-3 tablespoons additional olive oil
- Salt and freshly coarse-ground black pepper
- Lemon wedges, for garnish
- Plain yogurt

Trim, cook, and drain the artichokes (see directions, left) and set aside. Bring the chicken broth to a boil. Put the couscous in a bowl and pour the boiling chicken broth over it, cover and set aside for about 30 minutes. Heat the olive oil in a heavy skillet and gently sauté the onion and garlic until the onion is pinkish but not yet beginning to brown. Add the tomato, curry, dill weed, and cumin, and continue to sauté for another minute or two. Using a table fork, fluff the couscous and add the tomato and onion mixture. Add the currants, pine nuts or almonds, sugar, green onion, and lemon juice and zest. Fluff gently. Add the additional olive oil and season to taste with salt and pepper. Fluff again and set aside.

Carefully spread the leaves of each artichoke apart and remove the choke. Gently pack some of the couscous mixture into the center of each artichoke and among some of the leaves. Place the stuffed artichokes on individual serving plates. Garnish with wedges of lemon and accompany with a bowl of plain yogurt.

Serves 4. ■



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GINEROSITY

No need to be stingy: Gin is for everyone.

In preparing a Gin and Tonic ... put the tonic and the ice and a thick slice of lemon in first and pour on them a thimbleful of gin—over the back of a spoon, so it will linger near the surface and give a strong-tasting first sip, which is the one that counts.

—Kingsley Amis, *Every Day Drinking*

AS THE ABOVE PASSAGE REFLECTS, the late and the great British novelist Kingsley Amis was a noted exception to the generosity of gin-lovers. We love gin because gin loves us back, after all, and it's okay to spread that love around.

Gin is made simply from the neutral, flavorless spirit distilled from common cereal grains, then flavored with juniper berries (with a citrusy pine taste as delightful as all outdoors in the springtime) and a few other botanicals, like lemon, coriander, licorice root, and orange peel, for example.

Although commonly associated with the British, gin's invention is typically credited to Holland (although, in truth, it was probably the Italians who first flavored alcohol with juniper, back in the 11th century.) Since the 17th century, though, gin and England have been together like bangers and mash. Gin joints are in the backgrounds of novels by Charles Dickens and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; gin has been sold in pharmacies to alleviate stomach ailments and gout; it was also sometimes distributed to common laborers as part of their wages.

Gin was also given to British troops in India during the 1800s, not as payment, but as medicine. Quinine-laced tonic was being prescribed to save soldiers' lives from malaria, but the taste was horrible. Adding gin to the mix made the whole thing much more palatable—and lo—the Gin and Tonic was invented.

The Gin and Tonic has saved more Englishmen's lives, and minds, than all the doctors in the Empire. —Winston Churchill

There's an old man sitting next to me/making love to his tonic and gin. —Billy Joel "Piano Man"

Today, gin is produced around the world, and therefore enjoyed around the world. Because it was the original spirit for the Martini, it's not out of place being served by someone in a white tuxedo jacket. Because it goes into all sorts of casual cocktails, it might arrive poolside by someone in a tank top and flip-flops. And, because of its light refreshing flavors, gin is a great way to celebrate spring with friends, whether enjoyed inside the house or outside in the garden.

The classic G&T recipe (2 ounces gin, 3 ounces tonic water, ice, and a lime wedge) can be expanded to include nearly any citrus in the house. Try lemon instead of lime, for example, or, as is being enjoyed in my house these days, with the juice of Cuties oranges.

By the way, some people claim gin doesn't produce raging hangovers like other liquors. If that's so (and remember, we love gin because gin loves us back) it's probably because gin has low amounts of congeners—impurities formed during fermentation—that may be responsible for day-after headaches. If that's not enough of a reason to be generous with the gin, here are some other cocktail recipes to try and to share with others.





GARY HOWLAND

The Armchair Oenophile®

CENTRAL COAST WINES MADE EASY.

By Anthony Head

You know what I'd like to find? A good, everyday pinot noir. It would be very approachable, smooth, and low maintenance. It would remind me of the world's great pinots, but it wouldn't insist upon calling too much attention to itself. (I certainly wouldn't want to feel pressure to hold onto the bottle for a special occasion.) I *would* want big flavors, but presented softly so that I could enjoy them with whatever the wife puts in front of me, or if I'm just relaxing on the front porch with Brix, my dog. And, most importantly, it'd cost about 10 bucks, so that I could enjoy it every day.



I haven't found that bottle yet. But I did find Lucas & Lewellen's pinot from Santa Barbara County. It's got all that stuff I mentioned above. At 20 bucks a bottle, I can afford to drink it every other day. So you see, the world's not perfect, but judging by this wine, I think we're about halfway there. ■

Lucas & Lewellen 2007 Pinot Noir, Santa Barbara County (\$20) www.llwine.com

PLYMOUTH MULE

I'm drinking Plymouth Gin these days. It's one of the granddaddies of all English gins: full-bodied with great depth and wonderful juniper and lemon notes. This easy recipe from Plymouth's website (www.plymouthgin.com) is a great cocktail for parties or leisurely Sunday afternoons.

- 1½ ounces gin
- 1½ ounces apple juice
- 1 ounce ginger ale
- Lime wedge
- Mint sprig

Fill a tall or highball glass with ice. Add gin and apple juice. Top with ginger ale. Squeeze and add a lime wedge. Stir. Add mint sprig.

FRENCH 75

French 75 is a classic cocktail dating to World War I. Joel Luna, the bar manager at Bogie's Bar & Lounge (located at the Westlake Village Inn, www.bogies-bar.com.com), says that this drink "has been tested on people that say they don't like gin—and they loved it."

- ½ ounce lemon juice
- 1½ ounces gin
- 1 ounce Cointreau
- Champagne

Mix lemon juice, gin, and Cointreau with cracked ice in a chilled cocktail shaker. Strain into a champagne flute or Collins glass half-full of cracked ice. Top off with champagne. ■

PEPPER DELICIOUS

Sean Faries, owner of Native Lounge (www.nativelounge.com) in San Luis Obispo, says he's always looking for creative and innovative ways to inspire cocktail service. "I have been on a big gin kick for the last few years because it is one of the most difficult spirits to get the consumer engaged in. Most people would never think to add bell pepper to a cocktail but when used here, it really provides a fresh, pleasing flavor."

- 2 red bell pepper rings
- 7 fresh mint leaves
- 2 ounces gin (Native Lounge uses Aviation Gin)
- ¼ ounce lemon juice
- ¼ ounce honey

Muddle bell pepper and mint. Shake all ingredients in a shaker with 5 ice cubes. Strain into glass filled with fresh ice. Garnish with bell pepper ring and one mint leaf.

The classic Gin and Tonic has been around since the late 1800s (opposite). Juniper berries are the foundation of flavor for gin (this page).



Taste of the Town

By Angela Pettera

GARDEN DINING

For an extra-beautiful meal, don't forget to invite Mother Nature.

NOW THAT SPRING IS HERE, ALFRESCO DINING IS BACK. There are plenty of standout locations to enjoy great meals and great views. Of course **Geoffrey's** (*Malibu*; www.geoffreysmalibu.com) ocean-side outdoor dining room ringed with bougainvillea bushes is gorgeous, and the terraced patio of **Saddle Peak Lodge** (*Calabasas*, www.saddlepeaklodge.com) with its hillside views can't be beat. There's also the **Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village** (www.fourseasons.com/westlakevillage), which has a flowery walking trail near its parking structure that provides a fine stroll before or after lunch. A two-story rock waterfall is visible from tables inside both Onyx and Hampton's restaurants.

Westlake Village Inn has acres of trees and lawns to explore, not to mention a small lake. A lunch on the patio at Mediterraneo (www.med-rest.com) provides a view of most of the grounds. I'm partial to chef Alberto Vasquez's wonderful pastas and seafood, but there are plenty of meat dishes and sandwiches, too.

There are also a few less obvious restaurant choices with great garden dining, so don't forget to check out these spots.

Nothing says "spring" like eating lunch in a field of flowers. Starting this month that's actually an option at **Rose Story Farm** in Carpinteria (www.rosestoryfarm.com). This 15-acre farm grows 150 rose varieties, which bloom into about 18,000 plants. Owners Danielle and Bill Hahn and docents lead tours through the rose farm every Wednesday and Saturday, concluding with either tea or a picnic lunch. Picnics include a salad, sandwich, seasonal fruit, homemade dessert, and rose tea or lemonade. Tours (\$38 to \$45) run through November and must be booked in advance.

Set across the road from Andree Clark Bird Refuge, **Stella Mare's** (*Montecito*, www.stellamares.com) is a picturesque house with charming country French decor. The glass greenhouse room has the

best views of the outdoors, but most tables allow sights of the birds wheeling over the small lake in the refuge. A front patio has hedges, umbrellas, and a pergola. Brunch and lunch offer delicious salads, sandwiches, and seafood dishes like coquilles St. Jacques. Don't miss the heavenly desserts.

The Ranch House (*Ojai*, www.theranchhouse.com) features tables set along a wandering path that winds through an herb garden,

trellises, bushes, flowers, streams, and even an oriental teahouse. The only daytime dining happens on Sunday, which is always heavily booked. For years, The Ranch has led the way in local, sustainable, and seasonal cuisine.

Inside **The Secret Garden** (*Moorpark*, www.thesecretgardenrestaurant.com) there are polished wooden tables and glass chandeliers in the dining room. But most people want to sit outside under the tent or smack in the middle of the huge garden, which blooms abundantly in springtime. A small white wooden gazebo has seen its share of brides and grooms. Lunch

has salads, fish, and chops. The Sunday brunch menu is the best deal with three courses for \$23.

The Vineyard House (*Santa Ynez*, www.thevineyardhouse.com) is actually a Victorian-style house with a long, wraparound porch. Fortunately, there are no neighbors to obstruct the expansive view of the Santa Ynez Valley, with its rolling verdant hills. The huge lunch and brunch menus are studded with tasty choices like albacore tuna salad, grilled-chicken Brie sandwich, venison chile verde, and crab cake Benedict. ■



The gazebo and blooming gardens (plus a new vineyard) on the grounds of the Westlake Village Inn offer serene respite for after-meal strolls.



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DIALED IN

News from the local dining scene.

MAKING WINE IN THE CITY

Another stop has been added to the Santa Barbara Urban Wine Trail (www.urbanwinetrailsb.com). David Potter, a member of the winemaking team at Fess Parker Winery and Epiphany Cellars, has “a little wine brand”—as he puts it—called **Municipal Winemakers**. The tasting room, in the Funk Zone (industrial waterfront) of Santa Barbara (on Anacapa Street near the beach) is decorated with industrial machinery and old office furniture to play off the muni theme. Some of Potter’s releases include a sparkling shiraz called FIZZ, a dry riesling called Bright White, and Bright Red, a Côtes-du-Rhône-inspired blend of grenache, cinsault, and syrah. Taste five Municipal Winemakers wines for \$10. *Open Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Municipal Winemakers tasting room is located at 28 Anacapa St. in Santa Barbara. Call 805-931-6864 or visit www.municipalwinemakers.com for more information.*



A pour of FIZZ, a sparkling shiraz (top); David Potter oversees the tasting room at Municipal Winemakers in Santa Barbara.

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

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

Rhône Extravaganza in Paso

From April 29 to May 1, fans of Rhône wines converge on the Paso Robles Event Center to attend seminars and taste their way through Rhône wines from 130 different producers from around the world. Brought together by **Hospice du Rhône**, an international vintners association, the 2010 Rhône Hearts Club is designed to raise funds to benefit Rhône producers worldwide.

The weekend begins on Thursday evening at Paso Robles Bowl & Grill with a bowling tournament (\$100). On Friday, attend seminars about winemaking and then a rosé lunch (\$100) followed by a tasting event in the afternoon (\$100), where Rhône producers pour their products. On Friday night, the Sommelier Soiree (\$125) has sommeliers pouring their favorite Rhône wines to go along with food by chef John Toulze from The Girl & the Fig restaurant in Sonoma. On Saturday, there’s a live auction and luncheon (\$100) followed by a Grand Tasting (\$100) in the afternoon. A farewell barbecue (\$100) takes place Saturday night for anyone left standing. *Tickets to each event may be purchased separately at www.hospicedurhone.com.*

Larsen's Grill Replaces Dakota's

The Dakota's Steakhouse space in the Simi Valley Town Center has been taken over by another steakhouse—a better steakhouse, in my opinion—**Larsen's Grill**. The owner, Flemming Larsen, lives in Simi Valley. (He has no affiliation with Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar in Woodland Hills, but he does own Larsen's Steakhouse in Encino.) Larsen's Grill has great ambience thanks to decorative modifications such as new black-leather booths, walls padded with suede to keep the noise level down, tile flooring, and a partially enclosed kitchen. "This is not a steakhouse, this is a grill," Larsen told me. "I understand what guests want out here."

Food-wise, that translates into a fearless approach with butter, garlic salt, and thick steaks, which are prime but much less expensive than at Morton's or Mastro's. Cuts like New York, filet mignon, and porterhouse cost between \$30 and \$37 and come with a side dish, like creamed spinach, mac and cheese with chives, or sautéed mushrooms. Delicious cheeseburger sliders cost \$10 for a plate of three; there are full-size salads, pasta dishes (like spicy shrimp jambalaya), fish entrées (including sushi rolls), and even barbecued tri-tip and baby back ribs. The wine list has all the usual suspects from California (lots of local picks) and France, especially the steak-perfect varietals of cabernet franc and petite sirah. *Open for dinner daily, Larsen's Grill is located in the Simi Valley Town Center at 1555 Town Center Way. Call 805-522-4800 for reservations. Visit www.larsensteakhouse.com for more information.* ■

805 DINING GUIDE

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

KEY TO SYMBOLS:

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

LOCK Indicates an update to an existing listing.

Restaurant information is subject to change without notice.

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

FINE DINING

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

71 PALM FRENCH & AMERICAN BRASSERIE

71 N. Palm St.
Ventura, 805-653-7222
www.71palm.com
French-American
Entrées \$8–\$28
Romantic

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

NEW BELLINI OSTERIA BAR & LOUNGE

951 S. Westlake Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-497-8482
www.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.

BOCCACCIO'S

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

Saturday & Sunday Brunch, Great View

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

BOUCHON

9 W. Victoria St.
Santa Barbara, 805-730-1160
www.bouchonsantabarbara.com
Wine Country
Entrées \$24–\$35
Romantic

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

CA' DARIO

37 E. Victoria St.
Santa Barbara, 805-884-9419
www.cadario.net
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.

CAFÉ PROVENÇAL

2310 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-496-7121
www.cafeprovençal.biz
French
Entrées \$16–\$37
Romantic

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

CHAPTER 8 STEAKHOUSE & DANCE LOUNGE

29020 Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-889-2088
www.678dine.com
Steakhouse
Entrées \$17–\$39

Live Music, DJ, Dancing

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

LOOK CHARLIE'S MALIBU

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

Romantic

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

NEW CIGALE CAFÉ

702 Lindero Canyon Road
Oak Park, 818-991-2442
www.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.

COAST RESTAURANT & BAR

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

Romantic, Sunday Brunch

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

ELEMENTS

129 E. Anapamu St.
Santa Barbara, 805-884-9218
www.elementsrestaurantandbar.com

Eclectic
Entrées \$19–\$36

Romantic, Great View

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

ENOTECA TOSCANA WINE BISTRO

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

Live Music

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

ERIC'S RESTAURANT & BAR

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

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

FINS CREEKSIDE

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

Live Music

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

FLEMING'S PRIME STEAKHOUSE & WINE BAR

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

Romantic

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

GEOFFREY'S MALIBU

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

Great View, Saturday & Sunday Brunch

The 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
www.thegrill.com
American
Entrées \$19–\$42

Sunday Brunch

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

NEW GRISSINI RISTORANTE ITALIANO

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

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

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

2 Dole Drive
Westlake Village, 818-575-3000
www.fourseasons.com/westlakevillage/dining.html
Californian

Entrées \$23-\$50

Romantic, Great View, Sunday Brunch

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

HOLDREN'S STEAKS & SEAFOOD

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

American

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

Romantic

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

MASTRO'S STEAKHOUSE

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

American

Entrées \$26-\$76

Live Music

For an extravagant night out, try this expensive and posh steakhouse. The cocktails are huge and potent. The salads serve at least two (unless you ask for a half-portion) and the seafood tower starter is a showstopper. For your entrée, stick with the meats unless you want to eye your date's dinner with envy. The veal porterhouse is fantastic. All the cuts are thick and outsized. Sides are à la carte, and the list of potatoes and veggies is long but unremarkable.

CUPCAKERY
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Thousand Oaks, Ca 91362
(behind Roxy's Deli)
805.496.0123 www.cupcakeryonline.com

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805.445.9057 GreatRoomsDesign.com

>>> 805 DINING GUIDE

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

www.med-rest.com

Mediterranean

Entrées \$14–\$33

Kid-Friendly, Great View, Sunday Brunch

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

MOZ BUDDHA LOUNGE

30105 W. Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-735-0091

www.mozbar.com

Pan-Asian

Entrées \$17–\$36

Live Music

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

www.nobumatsuhisa.com

Asian-Fusion

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

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

ONYX AT THE FOUR SEASONS HOTEL WESTLAKE VILLAGE

2 Dole Drive

Westlake Village, 818-575-3000

www.fourseasons.com/westlakevillage/dining.html

Japanese

Entrées \$10–\$45

Romantic, Great View

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

PADRI CUCINA ITALIANA & MARTINI BAR

29008 Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-865-3700

www.padrirrestaurant.net

Cal-Italian

Entrées \$11–\$26

Live Music

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

RIVIERA RESTAURANT & LOUNGE

23683 Calabasas Road
Calabasas, 818-224-2163

www.rivieracalabasas.com

Continental

Entrées \$14–\$39

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

ROY'S

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

www.roysrestaurant.com

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-crusting 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

www.seagrassrestaurant.com

Seafood

Entrées \$25–\$36

Romantic

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

NEW THE SECRET GARDEN RESTAURANT

255 E. High St.
Moorpark, 805-552-9523

www.thesecondgardenrestaurant.com

French

Entrées \$18–\$31

Romantic

Chandeliers grace the dining room of this French restaurant with slightly formal service in downtown Moorpark. In warm weather, most opt to sit outside on the patio with a view of the garden's roses. The dishes are seasoned with a very light hand by chef and owner Michel Bardavid. Expensive ingredients lead to pricey menu items, like a colossal prawn over lobster mashed potatoes or a venison tenderloin.

THE SIDECAR RESTAURANT

3029 E. Main St.

Ventura, 805-653-7433

www.thesidecarrestaurant.com

Continental

Entrées \$10–\$25

Sunday Brunch, Live Music

Set in a 1910 Pullman train car, this restaurant has been around since 1933. The current owners have a devotion to fresh, locally grown produce; artisanal cheeses; and farm-fresh eggs. Chef Tim Kilcoyne turns out beautiful steaks, creamy polenta, and a build-your-own salad with options like organic greens, niçoise olives, roasted 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

www.sparkredfish.com

Seafood

Entrées \$14–\$28

Live Music

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

SUZANNE'S CUISINE

502 W. Ojai Ave.

Ojai, 805-640-1961

www.suzannescuisine.com

Cal-Med

Entrées \$15–\$28

Romantic

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

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

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

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

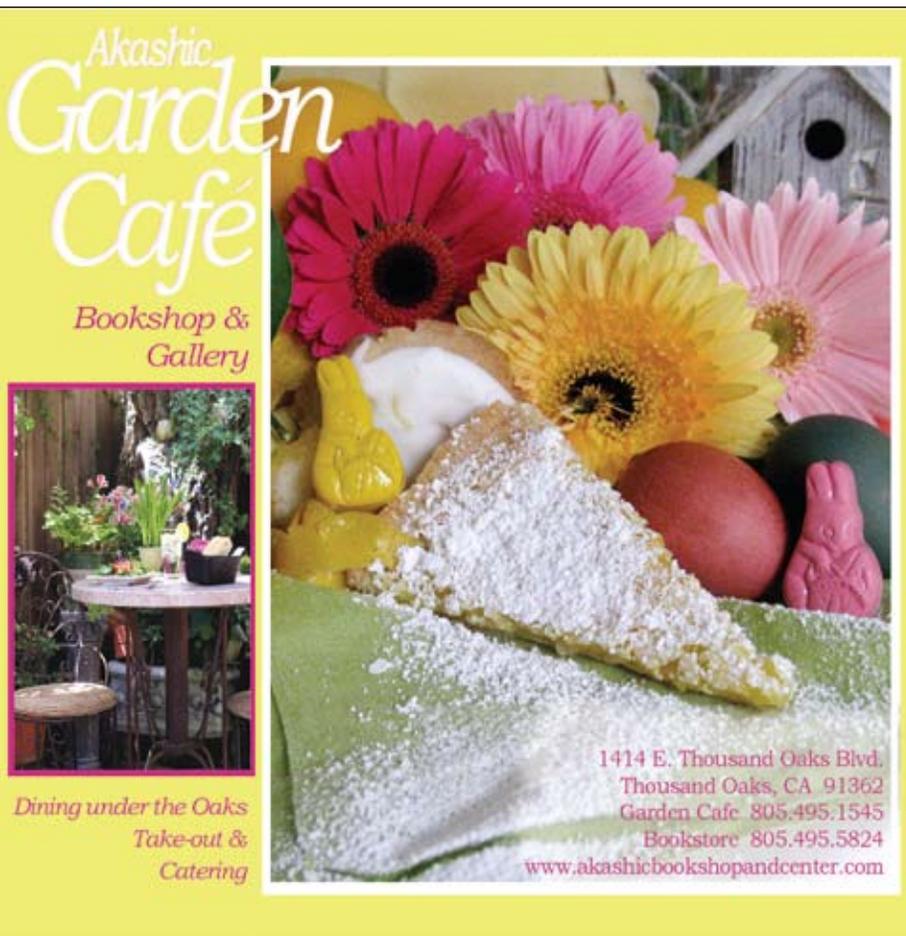
The warm and sexy environs here make this a superb spot for a date. The lighting is flattering at the high pub tables in the lounge, at the brown leather booths running the length of the restaurant along the open kitchen, and on the tented patio. The cooking from chef-owner Santino Coccia is good enough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

TUSCANY IL RISTORANTE
968 S. Westlake Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-495-2768
Italian
Entrées \$18–\$32
Romantic

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

NEW VINEYARD HOUSE
3631 Sagunto St.
Santa Ynez, 805-688-2886
www.thevineyardhouse.com
Eclectic
Entrées \$11–\$28
Sunday Brunch, Kid-Friendly

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



Akashic
**Garden
Café**

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WATERMARK

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

Romantic

Gorgeous Art Deco surroundings make for a “swellegant” evening at this posh downtown Ventura landmark. Large tables and oversized booths plus friendly service keep the atmosphere comfortable and inviting, not stuffy or snooty. Drag out the vintage duds and you’ll enjoy the evening even more. The menu isn’t inexpensive but the cuts of meat are excellent, especially the 18-ounce bone-in rib eye and the herb-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
www.zinbistroamericana.com

American

Entrées \$15–\$35

Great View, Romantic

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

FOODIE

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

BROOKS

545 E. Thompson Blvd.
Ventura, 805-652-7070
www.restaurantbrooks.com

New American

Entrées \$17–\$28

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

CAFÉ 14

30315 Canwood St.
Agoura Hills, 818-991-9560
www.cafe-14.com

Eclectic

Entrées \$24–\$34

Chefs and co-owners Neil Kramer and Claudine Bernard turn out very nice eclectic cuisine in this small space, tucked in the corner of the Reyes Adobe Plaza. The patio feels a bit more expansive than the main dining room if you like a little elbow room around your table. The menu changes frequently but you’ll always be treated to a mélange of flavors and styles from around the world. A steak au poivre might be listed next to short ribs in hoisin sauce with sticky rice; or seasonal fish might vie for your

attention with a bouillabaisse or Parisian chicken fricassee. Desserts tend toward hearty American crumbles and dense flourless cakes with ice creams made daily. The full bar mixes cocktails with fresh fruits and herbs. Café 14 is open for dinner Wednesday through Sunday nights.

LOOK CAFÉ FIRENZE

563 W. Los Angeles Ave.
Moorpark, 805-532-0048
www.cafefirenze.net

Italian

Entrées \$15–\$39

Romantic, Live Music

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

DOWNEY’S

1305 State St.
Santa Barbara, 805-966-5006
www.downeyssb.com

Cal-French

Entrées \$29–\$37

Romantic

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

THE HUNGRY CAT

1134 Chapala St.
Santa Barbara, 805-884-4701
www.thehungrycat.com

Seafood

Entrées \$16–28

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

LEILA’S RESTAURANT & WINE BAR

752 Lindero Canyon Road
Oak Park, 818-707-6939
www.leilasrestaurant.com

Cal-Eclectic

Entrées \$15–\$30

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

MANDARIN EXPRESS

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

Chinese Fusion

Entrées \$10–\$27

It’s not much to look at (think Formica tables and mirrored walls) but the owners of this tiny storefront are dedicated to keeping Chinese food interesting, fresh, and as organic as possible. Chef Dan Chang creates fusion dishes like filet

mignon in a bourbon, basil, and black bean sauce and shrimp with nuts and balsamic vinegar over rice. The food isn’t cheap by any stretch, but you’ve never had Chinese takeout like this before. The choices are almost endless considering the chef will pair just about any sauce you like with any meat, fish, vegetable, or mock meat (made of tofu or seitan) you want. He’ll also adjust the heat (as in spice) level to your liking. When you want something different and delicious and delivered, this is definitely the place to get it.

MARCELLO RISTORANTE

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

Italian

Entrées \$13–\$29

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

LOOK OLIO E LIMONE

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

Sicilian

Entrées \$16–\$34

Romantic

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

ROOT 246

420 Alisal Road
Solvang, 805-686-8681
www.root-246.com

New American

Entrées \$14–\$35

Romantic, Sunday Brunch

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians tapped celebrity chef Bradley Ogden to create this temple to New American dining in downtown Solvang. The decor is modern and whimsical with oversized armchairs in one of the bar areas, lounge furniture on the outdoor patio, flat-screen televisions in a subdued interior lounge, a mixture of sleek booths and tables in the main dining room, and a glass-walled chef’s table adjoining the huge kitchen. Executive chef Jonny Hall collaborates with Ogden on the seasonal menu, which changes ever so slightly each day. Fresh vegetables are the stars of the show here, along with artisanal cheeses and sustainably raised meats. The New American creations aren’t exotic, but they do bring together familiar tastes in new ways. For example, a Maytag blue cheese soufflé is paired with Bing cherries while ahi tuna gets a companion five-bean salad, olive tapenade, and a quail egg on the plate. Everything from the small collection of breads that hit the table at the start of the meal to the diminutive desserts is top-notch. The entire menu is available in all of the different seating areas. The collection of wines is impressive, with 90 percent coming from California. Every Wednesday night a different local vintner plays guest sommelier. Root 246 is open for dinner nightly, for lunch on Saturday, and for brunch on Sunday.

SADDLE PEAK LODGE

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

Entrées \$37-\$47, Tasting Menus \$80-\$200
Romantic, Sunday Brunch

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

SAFIRE

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

Entrées \$12-\$40
Romantic

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

SLY'S

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

Entrées \$12-\$55

Saturday & Sunday Brunch

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

NEW WINE CASK

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

BELLA TERRAZA RESTAURANT AT THE HYATT WESTLAKE PLAZA

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

Entrées \$10-\$28

Kid-Friendly

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

BODEE'S

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

Entrées \$18-\$34

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

BRENT'S DELI

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

Entrées \$6-\$20

Kid-Friendly

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

CHOLADA THAI CUISINE

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

Entrées \$9-\$17

Kid-Friendly

The Malibu location has been a well-kept secret for years. The second location, in Newbury Park, is equally unassuming; the attention goes into the food. Thick juicy chicken strips are grilled on skewers and served with very tasty peanut sauce and cucumber relish as the satay appetizer. The fried spring rolls are sliced and given a fancy presentation.

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You can find curries and steamed fish dishes here alongside unusual offerings like roasted duck salad and fried rice with pumpkin and Chinese broccoli. Most entrée prices are around \$10. Beer, wine, and soju cocktails are available.

THE COUNTER

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

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

C-STREET RESTAURANT

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

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

DARBAND GRILL

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

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

ELADIO'S

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

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

LOOK EXOTIC THAI CAFÉ

29045 W. Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-991-8147
and at 1145 Lindero Canyon Road
Westlake Village, 818-575-3248
and at 2705 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-373-9231
and at 2205 Michael Drive
Newbury Park, 805-375-0272
and at 1145 S. Victoria Ave.
Ventura, 805-658-4861
and at 22776 Ventura Blvd.
Woodland Hills, 818-225-0789
and at 1555 Simi Town Center Way
Simi Valley, 805-306-1255
and at 849 E. Ojai Ave.
Ojai, 805-646-6618
Thai
Entrées \$10–\$16

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

FEAST BISTRO

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

This small bistro in Ojai's arcade has a long open kitchen near the front with counter seating. At it, patrons can partake of espresso and pastries, taste wine or beer, and eat a full lunch or dinner. Tables scattered inside and out back on the patio provide more seating options. Chef and owner Susan Coulter turns out seasonal New American eats like crispy oysters on polenta cakes, shrimp Louis salad, five-spice duck, and flat-iron 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
www.ginosbistro.net
Italian
Entrées \$13–\$29
Kid-Friendly

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

KING'S FISH HOUSE

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

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

KUMO SUSHI

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

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

THE LANDING GRILL AND SUSHI BAR

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

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

MARMALADE CAFE

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

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

MI PIACE ITALIAN KITCHEN

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

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

MY FLORIST CAFÉ & BAKERY

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

The name of this chain is confusing, but it hearkens back to the Phoenix location that opened in a historic building originally housing a florist. Here in Ventura there aren't any flowers for sale but there are freshly baked breads and pastries (not on display—only on the menu). The menu is casual with breakfast dishes like baked oatmeal

or two poached eggs on ciabatta (available from 8 to 11 a.m. Monday through Friday and until noon on the weekends). The delicious pastries sell out fast. The lunch/dinner menu is served from 11 a.m. to midnight daily. It features an assortment of fresh and large salads like the Caprese with pesto dressing and roasted garlic cloves or The Asparagus with its namesake plus feta cheese and artichoke hearts. Each salad gets its own two slices of toasted bread so carbaholics don't have to be jealous of the sandwiches. On Saturday nights, take advantage of the full bar and live piano music while snacking on a cheese plate or mini tuna melt.

THE NATURAL CAFE

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

Healthy
Entrées \$5–\$9
Kid-Friendly

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

PIERRE LAFOND WINE BISTRO

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

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

POOKIE'S THAI CUISINE

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

Downstairs in the Water Court Plaza office complex, owner Pookie creates delicious Thai dishes for lunch and dinner daily. Lunch specials are a steal at \$7 to \$8 each. She also has a wide selection of interesting salads like the Outrageous Beef Salad with a spicy lime dressing and the protein-rich Yam Yai salad with shrimp, chicken, egg, and peanuts in a sweet-and-sour dressing. Noodle dishes are generously sized and include the classic pad thai and the interesting Hi Yo Silver with fried noodles, shrimp, and bean sprouts. Curries, vegetarian options, and fish dishes (such as the crispy sole with tamarind and chili sauce) give diners lots of great choices not found elsewhere.

THE RANCH CATERING

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

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

STELLA'S RESTAURANT

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

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

THE SUNSET RESTAURANT

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

Great View, Saturday & Sunday Brunch

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

SUSHI AGOURA

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

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

TERRI'S CAFÉ

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

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.



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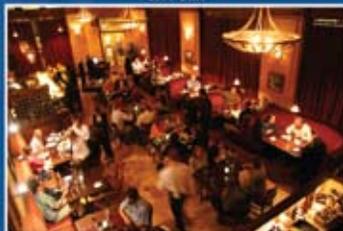


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TRA DI NOI

Malibu Country Mart
3835 Cross Creek Road
Malibu, 310-456-0169
Italian

Entrées \$12–\$29

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

TUTTI'S OFF MAIN

34 N. Palm St.
Ventura, 805-643-0880
www.tuttisoffmain.com

Mediterranean

Entrées \$13–\$33

Kid-Friendly, Saturday & Sunday Brunch

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

VIVOLI CAFÉ & TRATTORIA

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

Italian

Entrées \$10–\$24

Kid-Friendly

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

THE WHALE'S TAIL

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

Seafood

Entrées \$10–\$43

Great View, Sunday Brunch

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

WILLY'S SMOKEHOUSE

28434 Roadside Drive
Agoura Hills, 818-991-7227

Barbecue

Entrées \$9–\$24

Kid-Friendly

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

WOLFGANG PUCK L.A. BISTRO

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

Californian

Entrées \$9–\$15

Kid-Friendly, Sunday Brunch

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

THE CHAIN GANG

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

CALIFORNIA PIZZA KITCHEN

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

Cal-Italian

Entrées \$9–\$15

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

CHAMPAGNE FRENCH BAKERY CAFÉ

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

French

Entrées \$7–\$9

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

THE CHEESECAKE FACTORY

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

American

Entrées \$9–\$32

Kid-Friendly, Sunday Brunch

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

CLAIM JUMPER

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

American

Entrées \$10–\$31

Kid-Friendly

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

DAMON & PYTHIAS

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

American

Entrées \$8–\$13

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

P.F. CHANG'S CHINA BISTRO

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

Chinese-American

Entrées \$6–\$18

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

WOOD RANCH BBQ & GRILL

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

and 1101 E. Daily Drive
Camarillo, 805-482-1202

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

www.woodranch.com

Barbecue

Entrées \$11–\$27

Kid-Friendly

Many find it worth waiting in line for the slowly roasted meats and grilled steaks at this beloved local chain. The barbecue-sauced ribs, chicken, and tri-tip are tender and flavorful. The Original BBQ Chopped Salad with black beans, crunchy tortilla strips, and ranch dressing is perfect when topped with tri-tip. The turkey sliders on the appetizer menu make a satisfying meal for a low price, especially at happy hour when the full bar offers drink specials (except in the Ventura location, which offers half-priced appetizers). They will soon add Ily 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 achote pork fajitas, crab enchiladas, shrimp in a tequila-cream sauce, fish tacos, or even baby back ribs or a pulled-pork plate.

LOOKALOHA STEAKHOUSE

5800 Santa Rosa Road
Camarillo, 805-484-1422
and at 364 S. California St.
Ventura, 805-652-1799

www.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
www.azuojai.com

Mediterranean
Tapas \$6–\$17; Entrées \$24–\$31

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

BANDITS' GRILL & BAR

589 N. Moorpark Road
Thousand Oaks, 805-497-7427
and 1980 Ventura Blvd.
Camarillo, 805-445-4742
www.banditsbbq.com

American
Entrées \$10–\$20
Kid-Friendly

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

THE BEACHCOMBER MALIBU PIER

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

American
Entrées \$19–\$45
Great View, Kid-Friendly

The fantastic decor here celebrates seaside life in the 1940s when tiki bars were first trendy. Waiters deliver old-fashioned wide-mouthed bottles of purified water to set the tone. Wooden tables keep things casual. Jazz and swing music on the sound system is low enough to hear the waves crashing below. Food here, like in the forties, is decadent—rich with flavor and calories but new in style and ingredients. Clam chowder is creamy. The velvety mac and cheese has flecks of black truffle along with a touch of white truffle oil. The lobster potpie has chunks of tender seafood in a fantastic brandy sauce with a slice of crust sticking out. The s'mores dessert is brilliant: scoops of vanilla ice cream pierced with graham crackers and drenched in hardening chocolate and a torched marshmallow. It's hard not to have fun here, and a walk on the pier or the beach after a meal makes it even better.

BELLA VICTORIAN VINEYARD WINERY & BISTRO

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

Entrées \$9–\$12; Specials \$17–\$35
Part tasting room for the Bella Victorian Winery, part lingerie boutique (tastefully done), and part bistro. Chef Gael Lecolley works the tiny open kitchen to create small plates like sushi and thin-crust pizzas to go with flights of wine. If you stop by at lunchtime, there are a few tables on the sidewalk out front to settle into for dishes like Chinese chicken salad and roasted leg of lamb sandwich topped with caramelized onions and feta cheese. The bistro is open Wednesday through Saturday from 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Tuesday and Sunday from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

BOGIES NIGHTCLUB AND LOUNGE

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

American
Small plates \$8–\$15
Live Music

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

BROPHY BROS. CLAM BAR & RESTAURANT

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

Seafood
Entrées \$10–\$21
Great View



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

CAFÉ FIORE RESTAURANT & MARTINI LOUNGE

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

Italian
Entrées \$14–\$28

Romantic, Live Music

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

CHAR FASL

5843 Kanan Road
Agoura Hills, 818-889-9495

Persian
Entrées \$13–\$20

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

COSMOS GRILL

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

Eclectic
Entrées \$10–\$20

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

DON CUCO MEXICAN RESTAURANT

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

Mexican
Entrées \$8–\$19

Kid-Friendly, Sunday Brunch

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

DUKE'S MALIBU

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

Hawaiian/Seafood
Entrées \$17–\$30

Great View

The gorgeous ocean views are maximized in the dining rooms and bars of this large Hawaiian-themed seafood and steak house. Every staff member sports a laid-back smile and friendly demeanor. Skip the starters and go straight for the main courses. The seasonal fish choices are prepared six different ways—the Parmesan-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.

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NEW EL REY CANTINA

2302 Ventura Blvd.
Camarillo, 805-484-4433
and at 294 E. Main St.
Ventura, 805-653-1111
www.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
www.fiammerestaurant.com

Italian/American
Entrées \$12–\$26

Live Music

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

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

NEW FOX SPORTS GRILL

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

American
Entrées \$6–\$27

Sports on 20 screens

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

LOOK GALLETTO BAR & GRILL

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

Italian/Brazilian
Entrées \$15–\$26

Live Music

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

GINO'S TRATTORIA

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

Italian
Entrées \$10–\$17

Kid-Friendly

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

KABUKI JAPANESE RESTAURANT

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

Japanese
Entrées \$10–\$18

Kid-Friendly

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

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

NEW LADYFACE ALEHOUSE & BRASSERIE

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

With the feel of a French brasserie, this uniquely Californian alehouse provides a one-of-a-kind dining experience. The communal table allows camaraderie to develop, and the proprietary wheat beers and ales make this seem like an 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
www.lazydogcafe.com
American
Entrées \$8–\$24

Saturday & Sunday Brunch

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

LIMÓN LATIN GRILL

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

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

Live Music

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

THE MELTING POT

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

Fondue

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

Kid-Friendly

Swirl, swish, and dip your way through cheese fondue, hot broth fondue, and chocolate fondue for an interactive meal

that will keep even your kids interested. For the adults, a full bar and a large wine list make the night fun. The sauces, salads, and sides round out the meal nicely.

MOONSHADOWS

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

Cal-Asian

Entrées \$19–\$30

Great View, Saturday & Sunday Brunch

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

NEW OLD PLACE RESTAURANT

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

American

Entrées \$11–\$34

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

SHECK & SHAY'S ROCKIN' DINER

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

American

Entrées \$7–\$12

Kid-Friendly

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

LOOK SHEILA'S PLACE WINE BAR & RESTAURANT

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

TAVERNA TONY

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

Greek

Entrées \$11–\$29

Live Music

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

TUPELO JUNCTION CAFE

1218 State St.
Santa Barbara, 805-899-3100
www.tupelocation.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. ■

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.

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P.S.

WHAT'S HOT, WHAT'S NOT

Local designers get the last word on revamping today's home.

Steve Thompson

Cabana Home, Santa Barbara
www.cabanahome.com
HOT: The newest outdoor furniture release from Lee Furniture—"Uncovered, The Upholstered Garden" (see below). It's fully upholstered outdoor furniture that looks like your family room sofa!
NOT: Oversized sofas and chairs that are too deep and too long to fit into today's homes.

Neil Korpinen and Rick Erickson

Korpinen-Erickson, Inc.,
Santa Barbara
www.k-e-inc.com
HOT: Simple glass or Lucite furniture; mirrored walls.
NOT: Hollywood Regency is gone for another 50 years, and Mid-Century Modern Revival is soon to follow.

Todd Mossman

Montecito
www.toddmossman.com
HOT: Simple individualistic design with quality (and quality is rarely about price); anything Belgian-inspired; Fortuny fabric pillows. (Maison K in Montecito has the best I've seen.)
NOT: Shabby flea-market chic; coral branches and zebra; faux finishes, of any kind, anywhere.

Joan Duling

Model Interiors, Newbury Park
www.modelinteriors.net
HOT: Natural reclaimed woods with a well-traveled look; cooler, fresh colors; contemporary art; fun area rugs (long shags are my favorite).
NOT: Heavily carved furniture, drapery swags, heavy earth tones, and heavy oil paintings.

Ann James

Ann James Interior Design,
Santa Barbara
www.annjamesinteriors.com
HOT: Anything from India; incredible embroidered fabrics and inlaid furniture that show the hand of the artist.
NOT: I try not to follow trends so there are no colors or styles that I necessarily consider passé.

Kelly Azzarello

Kelly Azzarello Design,
Thousand Oaks
www.kellyazzarellodesign.com
HOT: French emblems; printed texture of stripes and graphic florals on linen.
NOT: Heavy, dark tapestry; brocade and damask fabrics; and those bulky tassels.

Elyssa Parton

Pacific Rim Home, Westlake Village
www.pacificrimhome.com
HOT: Zen is in; deep, rich color for the walls.
NOT: Clutter is out; pale colors.

Christy Martin

Studio Encanto, Santa Barbara
805-722-4338
HOT: The mix—real antiques with strikingly classic pieces.
NOT: The match—sad, predictable interiors composed only of "new" vintage/retro pieces plus fabrics everywhere.

Kathryne Dahlman

Kathryne Designs, Montecito
www.kathrynedesigns.com
HOT: Natural and citrus colors; "green" products like reclaimed wood, recycled glass and plastic, and cottons with no formaldehyde.
NOT: Dark, heavy materials; big and bulky furniture; uncontrolled clutter.

Wendy Weiner

Wendy Weiner Interior Design,
Westlake Village
www.wendyweiner.com
HOT: Having an element of surprise—something unexpected, like an accent of color.
NOT: Everything matching—too predictable. ■





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Talia Emery, MD (right) and Laqueta Gajewski, RN (left)

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