

CATALINA COOL | LAGUNA ON FILM | FASHION: FLAVORS OF FALL

LAGUNA BEACH

Magazine

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the
EAT &
DRINK
ISSUE

30 OF THE BEST PLACES TO
EAT & DRINK IN LAGUNA

LOCAL CHEFS REVEAL
THEIR SECRETS

THE DISH ON LAGUNA'S
NEWEST RESTAURANTS

WINE TRENDS UNDER \$20

CRAIG STRONG,
EXECUTIVE CHEF
OF STUDIO, MONTAGE
LAGUNA BEACH



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it's the
EAT & DRINK
ISSUE!



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By LBM Staff

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Best of Laguna EAT & DRINK

We highlight our favorite places for everything from sundried soup to Bloody Marys. *By LBM Staff*

TASTES ARE BY DEFINITION SUBJECTIVE. BUT LAGUNA BEACH IS JUST TOO RICH AND FLAVORFUL FOR US NOT TO CELEBRATE ITS FINEST EATING AND DRINKING ESTABLISHMENTS. FIRST, WE ASKED YOU TO NOMINATE THE PLACES YOU LOVE FOR EACH OF THE CATEGORIES BELOW. THEN, WE ADDED OUR PERSONAL CHOICES. ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES, YOU WILL FIND OUR FAVORITE PLACES TO ...



ENJOY SUSHI AND SAKE: KATSUYA

The brash new kid from the City of Angels brings a holster full of attitude, pizzazz and an established high-end pedigree with it to Laguna. In addition to extensive and tempting sushi options, there are plenty of authentic sake offerings on the menu, from sweet to dry and ranging in price from moderate to jaw-dropping.. Katsuya offers enough varieties of sake and shochu (a stronger, distilled Japanese cousin to sake) to keep locals stumbling around Coast Highway asking each other, "Dude, where's my car?" (858 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-793-4030; sbe.com/katsuya/laguna-beach)

RUNNERS UP: SUSHI LAGUNA; 242 CAFE FUSION SUSHI; SAN SHI GO



STUDIO RESTAURANT AT MONTAGE

STUDY THE WINE LIST (FOR AN IMPOSSIBLE EXAM): STUDIO RESTAURANT AT MONTAGE

Studio's wine cellar includes well over 2,000 different options, whether it's a bottle, a glass or a half-bottle of whatever red, white or bubbles your heart desires. The focus of their exhaustive list is on not just the headliner wines from the most prominent wineries in the premier wine-producing regions—though there are plenty of those to choose from—but also on emerging vineyards and those that produce varietals that are rare or tougher to find. And the price points vary from a nice affordable bottle with dinner to the "Woo hoo! See honey, I told you we'd win the Lotto someday!" range. (30801 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-715-6420; studiolagunabeach.com)

RUNNERS UP: NIRVANA GRILLE; CLAES; K'YA BISTRO

GRAB A BITE WHEN YOU'RE COVERED IN SAND AND SALTWATER: WAHOO'S FISH TACO

There is something about sunbathing and sandcastle-building contests that exhaust even the most experienced Oak Street beach bums, and what better way to re-energize for oceanic activities than a fresh fish taco crowned with cabbage and pico de gallo? A convenient double staircase leads directly from the sand to open-air tables of Wahoo's, meaning you won't be the only one tracking sand. (1133 Coast Hwy.; 949-497-0033; wahoos.com)

RUNNERS UP: SOUTH SWELL DONUTS; TACO LOCO; ADOLFO'S MEXICAN FOOD; AVILA'S EL RANCHITO MEXICAN RESTAURANT

GO WITH THE KIDS IN TOW:

BJ'S RESTAURANT & BREWHOUSE

Upon entering the lively downtown restaurant with the kids, BJ's transforms into a haven of big-screen televisions, dynamic rock music and shiny, roomy booths. On the colorful menu, children can create their own kids meal by choosing a variety of favorite items, from deep-dish pizza to a quarter rack of ribs to a mini Pizookie, while decorating paper guitars. The bustling atmosphere means that not only can kids be themselves, but they can do so without disturbing the couple next to you enjoying their date night. Grab a drink from their cocktail menu while the kids rock out, and release your inner child. (280 S. Coast Hwy., 949-494-3802; bjsrestaurants.com)

RUNNERS UP: OLAMENDI'S; LUMBERYARD

INDULGE IN THE TASTIEST MARGARITA THIS SIDE OF THE BORDER:

COYOTE GRILL

Drinking a margarita in Mexico is an inimitably sublime experience, but it also has its drawbacks, like say too many of them or getting mistaken for the Arizona governor. No need to fret, this refreshing Mexican signature



COYOTE GRILL

is produced masterfully by the magic hands of mixology that staff the bar at Coyote Grill. Already a hit with their healthy and fresh takes on Mexican food, Coyote Grill draws a host of regulars to the bar for its spectacular margaritas, a local happy hour favorite. (31621 Coast Hwy.; 949-499-4033; coyotegrill.tv)

RUNNERS UP: AVILA'S EL RANCHITO MEXICAN RESTAURANT; ASADA

HOLD A LUNCH MEETING: WATERMARC RESTAURANT

Perpetually buzzing with people, Watermarc is the go-to for folks who want the hour (or so) respite from the fluorescent lighting and a solid menu of options to choose from. Known more for tapas-style nibbling plates of specialty items, Watermarc is also a natural choice for business martinis. One minute you're both in agreement that yes, indeed, bacon wrapped dates are the next great culinary breakthrough; the next you're passionately berating your broker for short-selling your blue chip holdings without so much as a text message. Ahhh, business lunches. (448 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-376-6272; watermarcrestaurant.com)

RUNNERS UP: LAS BRISAS; ZINC CAFÉ & MARKET; ROOFTOP LOUNGE; AVILA'S EL RANCHITO MEXICAN RESTAURANT; NICK'S; SUNDRIED TOMATO CAFÉ; 230 FOREST AVENUE RESTAURANT & BAR



CRAIG STRONG EXECUTIVE CHEF, STUDIO AT THE MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH

LBM: You grew up in a family of eight children and one of your family chores was managing the family garden. In what ways did that childhood experience influence your career choice and cooking style?

CS: When tending to the garden, you not only get to watch things grow from seeds and develop into ingredients that are made into flavorful, healthy dishes, but you are also responsible for cultivating and caring for them. Growing up, if we wanted a snack, we would go out to the garden and trees and pull a fresh, healthy and flavorful snack. My mom is also a great cook, and if we wanted cookies, she would bake them from scratch. She created this fascination and

passion for cooking for me. Now my job as a chef is to find the freshest and best ingredients and use them to spotlight my dishes.

LBM: You're known for your modern French cuisine with California influences. Tell us more specifically about your cooking style.

CS: I use modern techniques to interpret classic dishes. Today's dining guest wants a lighter and healthier dish with the classic taste. At Studio, I provide the lighter options without sacrificing the flavor. The backbone of cooking is classic, but modern techniques allow for change in presentation, texture and plate composition.