

RIVIERA

ORANGE COUNTY

[THE RESTAURANT ISSUE 2011]

OUR ANNUAL FOOD FAVES & RAVES

THE NEW NAPA: FULL OF SURPRISES

O.C. TAKES ON BROADWAY

REVEALED: RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR AND MORE!

PLUS:

GET RACE-READY FOR DEL MAR

INSIDE O.C.'S SENSATIONAL SOIRÉES

ULTIMATE SUMMER ENTERTAINMENT



HEIRLOOM TOMATO SALAD TEMPURA FROM RAYA

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Chapter One's Mexican-inspired version of the classic Bloody Mary.

LIP-SMACKING LIBATIONS

O.C. mixologists continue to raise the bar on what passes for a cocktail that kicks. **Chapter One's** (227 N. Broadway, Santa Ana, 714.352.2225, chapteronerm.com) Mexican-esque Bloody Mary has bacon-infused bourbon and an ancho-chile-mole mix. **Mesa** (The Camp, 714.557.6700, mesacostamesa.com) infuses Latin flavors into The Clash: tangerine and arbol-chile-infused vodka, cilantro, lime and Tuaca. **Watermarc** (448 S. Coast Highway, Laguna Beach, 949.376.6272, watermarcrestaurant.com) offers an Italian take on the Caprese: a blend of vodka, tomato water and fresh basil with a Gorgonzola-stuffed olive and a tomatolive (pickled tomato).

Haute Buns

O.C., meet the "burger bar"—the newest trend to simultaneously whet and satiate our appetite for classic American fare. Here, the burgers we've flipped for: **The Counter** (Irvine; Newport Beach, thecounterburger.com) and **Slater's 50/50** (6362 E. Santa Ana Canyon Road, Anaheim Hills, 714.685.1103, slaters5050.com) both offer mountains of choices so that when you do indulge, you get exactly what you want, down to the last topping. At **25 Degrees** (412 Walnut Ave., Huntington Beach, 714.960.2525, 25degreesrestaurant.com) order a more sophisticated burger, with toppings like jalapeño bacon and prelibato Gorgonzola. Or, settle your beef at **Memphis at Santora** (201 N. Broadway, Santa Ana, 714.564.1064, santora.memphiscafe.com) where Tuesday is build-your-own-burger night.

Taco the Town

Mexican food has come a long way—from the 1AM taco stands (yeah, we've indulged in a late-night taco or two) to The Camp's newest addition, **Taco Asylum** (714.922.6010, tacoasylum.com). With a menu designed by Haven Gastropub chef Greg Daniels, the global taco selection at this hip joint ranges from the traditional to the unheard of (like the grilled octopus tacos). The pan-Latin cuisine at **Raya** (1 Ritz Carlton Drive, Laguna Niguel, 949.240.2000, ritzcarlton.com) provides a sophisticated take on Mexican fare, with an exotic Taco Tuesday bar that includes wonton smoked swordfish and short rib adobo tacos. For more authentic Mexican cuisine, **Sol Cocina** (251 Pacific Coast Highway, Newport Beach, 949.675.9800, solcocina.com) can't be beat. We love the classic carne asada street tacos and the chipotle-garlic shrimp tacos with mango salsa. **La Sirena Grill** (Laguna Beach, Irvine, lasirenagrill.com) is another great traditional Mexican eatery that boasts organic, sustainable food with a healthy twist.

Crown Royalty

Going into the family business couldn't have been a better fit for our fave up-and-comer **Ryan O'Melveny Wilson**, the new executive chef at the venerable **Five Crowns** (3801 E. Coast Highway, Corona del Mar, 949.760.0331, lawrysonline.com). He wowed us with his seasonal gastro grub and charcuterie at **SideDoor**, located right next door (hence the name), and, now, the fourth-generation gourmand is two months into his new post as top chef. Wilson began his culinary career as a prep cook at Five Crowns before working at Napa Valley's La Toque and Quince in San Francisco. Today, he is dishing out innovative cuisine right along with our beloved mainstays—and that keeps him on our radar.

Best Service

The waitstaff, clad in white steward jackets at Balboa Bay Club & Resort's **First Cabin Restaurant** (1221 W. Coast Highway, Newport Beach, 949.630.4145,

balboabayclub.com) is first-class in the service department—setting the gold standard. Expect effortless catering to every request and only one rule: no cell phones, please.

Vintage Points

When the oenophile within craves a night out, **Andrea** (22701 S. Pelican Hill Road, Newport Beach, 949.467.6800, pelicanhill.com) is the place to go. Its floor-to-ceiling wall of wines features the best Italian and Californian labels. The unique food-driven wine list at **Old Vine Café** (The Camp, 714.545.1411, oldvinecafe.com) pairs wine with a prix fixe menu. At **Mr. Stox** (1105 E. Karella Ave., Anaheim, 714.634.2994, mrstox.com), you can choose from 1,100 wines. And **The Winery** (2647 Park Ave., Tustin, 714.258.7600, thewineryrestaurant.net) stocks its 800-square-foot wine cellar with 5,000 bottles—all stored at the perfect temperature.

BEST PRESENTATION

At **Montage Resort's Studio**, every dish is a work of art. Plating perfection is chef Craig Strong, whose savory gourmet masterpieces are a feast for the eyes and the palate. With a clean white plate doubling as a blank canvas, he carefully arranges his culinary treasures with meticulous attention to even the most minute details. Enter the divine crab and melon salad, which looks so beautiful that it seems a shame to dive in for a bite. But you will, and we won't blame you. 30801 S. Coast Highway, Laguna Beach,

949.715.6420, studiolagunabeach.com



Chef-turned-culinary artist Craig Strong of Montage Resort's Studio wraps tender crab meat in delicately sliced pieces of melon for his beautiful-beyond-wards crab and melon salad.

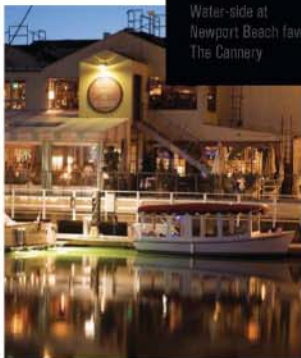
Bar's Keeper

Ryan Velilla of Chapter

One (227 N. Broadway, Santa Ana, 714.352.2225, chapteronetml.com) seduced us with libations like his Druid Divination—muddled strawberry, thyme and basil with Irish whiskey, BarSol pisco and 25-year aged balsamic. The dapper SoCal native picked up his liquid tricks in New York—from mixologist guru Eben Freeman. Now, he mans the bar at O.C.'s modern local hangout with a cocktail menu that regularly rotates through six different infusions.

For Goodness Bake!

We can't get enough of chef Timothy Kast's addictive custom flatbreads at **Seasons 52** (South Coast Plaza, 714.437.5252, seasons52.com)—all at only 475 calories. Two of our faves: the classic with plum tomatoes, fresh basil and Parmesan cheese, and the garlic chicken with balsamic onions, roasted red peppers and melted mozzarella. The thin, crisp crust can only be achieved with Seasons' special brick ovens.



Water-side at Newport Beach fave, The Cannery

Riviera Hall of Fame

Ron Salisbury may have been born into restaurant royalty—his family owns the 88-year-old El Cholo restaurant chain—but he earned his spot in *Riviera's* Hall of Fame with O.C. faves **The Cat and the Custard Cup** and **The Cannery** (Newport Beach, cannerynewport.com; La Habra, catandcustardcup.com, Irvine, El Cholo, elcholo.com).

Scene Stealers

To truly experience California's Riviera, you have to take it outdoors.

Casa del Camino's Rooftop (1289 S. Coast Highway, Laguna Beach, 949.497.2446, rooftoplagunabeach.com) offers unbeatable ocean views and a relaxed atmosphere for sipping Laguna's best mojitos.

Shades (21100 Pacific Coast Highway, Huntington Beach, 714.845.8000, waterfrontresort.com) offers panoramic views inside and out, from their dining room to their sunny patio. Or go to

Las Brisas (361 Cliff Drive, Laguna Beach, 949.497.5434, lasbrisaslagunabeach.com) for hilltop views of the coastline and gourmet Mexican cuisine. If it's harbor views you're after, head to **Bayside** (900 Bayside Drive, Newport Beach, 949.721.1222, baysiderestaurant.com) for a charming outdoor patio surrounded by greenery, or to **The Cannery** (3010 Lafayette Road, Newport Beach, 949.566.0060, cannerynewport.com), with its outdoor patio nestled in Newport Harbor. If that's still not close enough to the water

for you, try **Beachcomber Café** (15 Crystal Cove, Newport Beach, 949.376.6900, thebeachcombercafe.com). It's situated—quite literally—on the beach in historic Crystal Cove.

Naughty But Nice

Javier's (Newport Beach, Irvine Spectrum, javiers-cantina.com) is so good, it's sinful. Its sexy atmosphere draws in throngs of pretty faces who mingle around fire pits, indoor trees and Coastal Mexican accents. Added bonus: The food is good, too!

Mamma Mia

We aren't sure where **Pizzeria Ortica** (650 Anton Blvd., Costa Mesa, 714.445.4900, pizzeriaortica.com) found 300-year-old biga to make their pizza dough, but we are so happy they did. We suspect it's the secret to the extraordinary pies. Also on our favorite's list: **Il Dolce** (1902 Harbor Blvd., Costa Mesa, 949.200.9107, ildolceoc.com), with its Naples-inspired pizza. The bold flavors and textured crust will have you in pizza heaven.

BEST DESIGN

It's no wonder **Mesa** is the chosen venue for The SUN Grp's artistically inclined C.A.M.M. (Cinema, Art, Music, Movement) events, held every Tuesday evening. Its innovative design, wows every time. From the open-sky retractable roof and vine-covered walls to stone fire pits and sleek low-slung lounge seating, Mesa oozes earthy-chic coolness. Take in the vibe from a perch at the solid-wood bar—the best spot to screen the silent movie playing in the background while watching the house DJ spin the latest beats. (Now that's atmosphere, O.C.) *The Camp*,

714.557.6700, mesacostamesa.com

Garden's Variety

Restaurants are planting roots in O.C. (literally!) Recently unveiled, the garden at **Studio** (30801 S. Coast Highway, Laguna Beach, 949.715.6420, studiologunabeach.com) yields seasonal fruit, herbs and vegetables for the famous chef Craig Strong's award-winning dishes. Customers can take advantage too by renting out the not-so-humble space for private events. Naples-inspired eatery **Ecco** (2937 Bristol St., Costa Mesa, 714.444.3226, eccocom.com) plucks fresh herbs from their own garden, which explains the authentic Italian flavors found in their homemade pastas and pizzas. Much of the organic, seasonal produce used in **Onotria's** (2831 Bristol St., Costa Mesa, 714.641.5952, onotria.com) classic Italian dishes is harvested from their in-house garden. For the shortest distance from garden to table, we give a nod to **Park Ave** (11200 Beach

Blvd., Stanton, 714.901.4400, parkavedining.com) whose large vegetable garden is located right outside the kitchen doors. And those olive trees rooted at **Pelican Resort**? They're used to make olive oil for **Andrea** (22701 S. Pelican Hill Road, Newport Beach, 949.746.6800, pelicanhill.com), the resort's restaurant. Delish!

Best Makeover

Five Crowns' (3801 E. Coast Highway, Corona del Mar, 949.760.0331, lawrysonline.com) recent revamp may have been one of the quickest—a month-long closure—but the transformation tops our restaurant flip list. Design Director Susie Frank's careful selection has turned the once stuffy English inn into a modernized space with newly added sepia-toned silver prints by photog David Halliday.