

# Tasteologie

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**Montage Laguna Beach Chefside Studio Dinner with a gorgeous view of... the kitchen! Soft shell crab with soba noodles, black truffle stuffed brie, Hudson Valley duck breast with bing cherries, and a fantastic blackberry tart!**

Studio at the Montage Laguna Beach offers a chefs table where you can eat within view of all the hustle and bustle of the kitchen. So far we've shown you the new [Studio Garden](#) located just steps away from the restaurant, and even a [cocktail made with their home grown lavender](#), but this is really what Studio is all about... fresh ingredients elegantly prepared. Chef Strong's garden tasting menu with wines paired by the sommeliers from the resort's extensive collection of 45,000+ bottles of wine combined with a unique behind the scenes look at the whole process takes fine dining to a whole new level.



Eating chefside is a unique dining experience. For those interested in food, the professional kitchen is a perfect backdrop to a meal. While Studio's kitchen does not quite have the theatrics of the arena in Iron Chef, this was definitely the best kind of dinner theater. The sights and sounds were engaging, but did not overly distract from conversation. The staff were both efficient and extremely friendly... offering insight into the food and answering questions as we dined.



We started the night off with an amuse-bouche of a tuna terrine. It slyly invokes the idea of a sushi roll, but without the rice or nori. It consists of layers of avocado and tuna. The fat from the avocado matches the lean tuna, its creamy texture also provides a nice contrast. The salad had just enough bitterness to cleanse the avocado off the palette and the edible flowers from Studio Garden outside were a nice touch.



The soft shell crab is served with a wonderfully playful presentation. They pair it with soba noodles and a curry sauce inspired by one of the chef's recent trips to Thailand. The shells and the noodles are a study in texture and the open kitchen allowed us to see the crabs trying to scuttle away before they hit the pan.



The Hudson Valley duck was the main course of this tasting menu and it was well paired with the 2008 Kistler Vineyard Pinot Noir. The wine's notes of fruit are an excellent accompaniment to the dish's poached Bing cherries. The combination was delicious! The tender duck breast... the big fruit flavors... and a little piece of confit as an extra treat.



The cheese course featured a brie which the chefs stuffed with black truffles. This was another in a long line of extremely well balanced dishes. The truffles are there and wonderful, but don't overwhelm those signature brie flavors. This earthy diversion was a great change of pace coming off the duck course.



One of the fringe benefits of dining in the kitchen is that you get to see most of the dishes on the menu as the night wears on. Here an order of the Monterey calamari is being assembled.



This line up of filets mignons, seen here as the front of house staff waits to pick up the order, was also an impressive bit of culinary voyeurism. Studio's "Meat and Potatoes" is a combination of filet mignon, fried crispy asparagus over creamed parsley, a pommes puree, and morel mushrooms.



After some serious plate watching we arrived at the dessert course... a blackberry tart on kataifi pastry with a goat frozen yogurt. This was my first time trying kataifi which is a Arabic shredded phyllo dough. It forms a crunchy base to the tart and immediately reminded me a sweeter Wheatabix. The berries were fresh and naturally sweet and the honeyed goat frozen yogurt had a slight nicely contrasting tang. The Graham's 2005 Late Bottled Vintage Port chosen by the sommelier is excellent and formed a lovely bass note which the other flavors built upon. Upon hearing my love of the port the sommelier brought out a little surprise... the Smith-Woodhouse 1980 Vintage Port! This wine is phenomenal and incredibly smooth.



Dinner finished in time to catch the end of sunset and a beautiful final view of the new [Studio Garden](#) at the lovely [Montage Laguna Beach](#).