

TRAVEL: DINING ACROSS MEXICO | ARTIST HUGO RIVERA | TALKING SHOP WITH MODERN POP

# LAGUNA BEACH

MARCH 2014 » OCINSITE.COM

## Magazine



EXECUTIVE CHEF DAVID FUÑE  
AND CHEF DE CUISINE JULIO  
AGUILAR MAKE A SPLASH AT  
SURF & SAND RESORT

*special section:*

# Eat + Drink

DYNAMIC  
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SIX CULINARY  
PAIRS KILLIN' IT IN  
THE KITCHEN

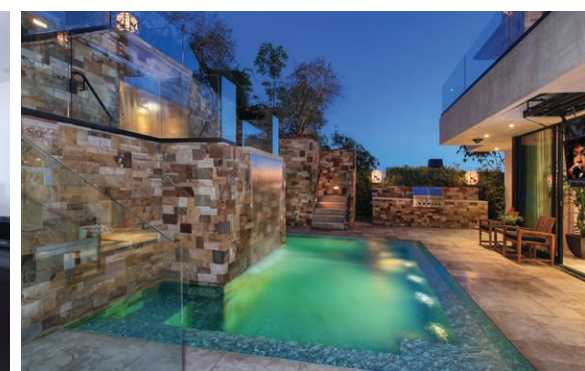
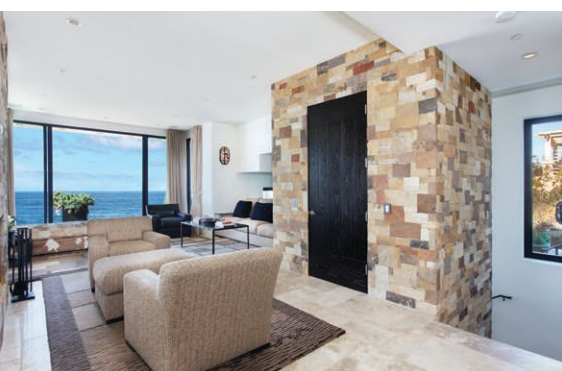
CRAFT OF THE  
COCKTAIL  
FARM-FRESH  
DRINKS AROUND  
TOWN

KEEP ON  
TRUCKIN'  
OC'S TOP  
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*By Peter A. Balaskas*

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*By Kirsti Correa*

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*By Ryan Ritchie*

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*By Debbie Miller*

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*By Kelly Shannon*

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*By Sharael Kolberg*

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*By Somer Tejwani*



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DHRUMIL DESAI

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*By Cheryl Pruett*

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*By Micaela Myers and Allison Hata*

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*By Sharael Kolberg*

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*By Ashley Ryan*





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ON THE COVER: SPLASHES CHEFS DAVID FUÑE (LEFT) AND JULIO AGUILAR AT SURF & SAND RESORT; PHOTOGRAPHER: DHRUMIL DESAI



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POWERED BY TAGGAR

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# EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY

*"Tell me what you eat, and I'll tell you who you are." —renowned gastronome Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, 1825*

FOOD HAS ALWAYS BEEN AT THE CENTER OF MY FAMILY GATHERINGS, AS IT IS FOR MOST families, I'm sure. Especially on my father's side, food is typically the main event of daily activities at reunions. All of us—aunts, uncles, parents, grandparents and cousins—would gather for what we deem the "epic meal" of the day.



Some of the most memorable experiences I've had with family, as well as with friends, have been attached to food. At a recent family reunion last December in Hong Kong, my cousins and I held a creative pizza-making party at our uncle's house, where we served up innovative pies to our relatives, including a baked potato, Chinese sausage and oyster-and-barbecue pizza that was—interestingly enough—a hit!

In fact, eating and sharing meals together dates back to the beginnings of the human race, when hunter-gatherers would share game and other food. Of course, as humans evolved over time, our relationships with food and how we "gather," cook and eat it have changed as well. While most of us don't spear our USDA-approved prime rib anymore, we've developed relationships with food that go beyond just sustenance—they're about experiences, traditions and cultural values.

For example, in India and some Middle Eastern and African cultures, people don't use cutlery when eating. Rather, the process is seen as a multisensory experience, with the more staunch traditionalists consuming foods such as curry, rice and naan bread using their hands. In many other cultures, food is an integral part, or a symbol, of cultural celebrations. In France, a "buche de noel," a classic yule log cake, is likely to be found on family dinner tables on Christmas, while in Mexico, "bacalao," or salted, dried cod, captures the essence of the holiday. In the same breath, Thanksgiving for Americans wouldn't be the same without the signature turkey with all the fixings.

As James Beard, a chef and central figure in establishing gourmet food in America during the 1950s, said, "Food is our common ground, a universal experience." This couldn't be a truer statement—food brings people together and transcends cultural and linguistic barriers. Likewise, it's the universal "language" in kitchens across the world, where chefs make statements through masterful dishes. This is evident in our feature (page 44) that looks at some of the best chefs in town who seamlessly work together to make culinary visions come to life.

These days, our culture altogether is more conscious of what we eat and where it comes from. As seen in "Green Cuisine," (page 60) consumers and chefs alike here in Laguna Beach are making concerted efforts to ensure the food we eat—as well as how it's prepared—is sustainable.

From what we eat to how we consume it, food is a form of communication rich with meaning—a symbol of love, traditions and values. So this season, eat, drink and be merry. We're sure you can find a reason to celebrate.

Cheers,  
Alli Tong  
Editor, Laguna Beach Magazine  
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# LAGUNA BEACH<sup>TM</sup> Magazine

“Everyone indulges in guilty pleasures. What’s your food vice?”

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“I don’t really have a food vice, but I am a soda drinker.  
It’s horrible. I’ve tried to kick the addiction numerous times,  
but I keep falling off the wagon.”

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“Cupcakes.  
Put one in  
front of me  
and it will  
be gone in  
a matter of  
seconds.”



“PIZZZZA!  
I just consider  
that an  
ingredient  
in my daily  
recipe.”



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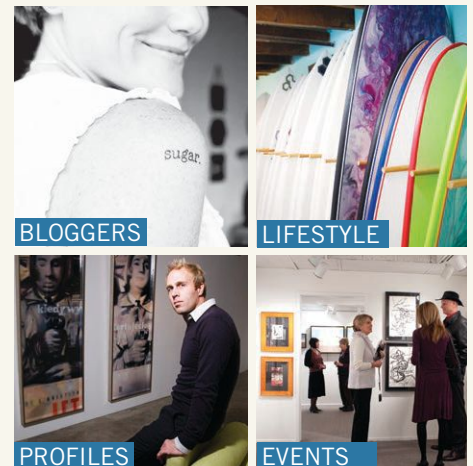
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# calendar *of* events

ART | ACTIVITIES | ENTERTAINMENT

MARCH



Chinese culture comes alive with Shen Yun's dance performance, featuring stunning costumes and backdrops.

SHEN YUN 2014

**MARCH 11-16; SEGERSTROM CENTER FOR THE ARTS, COSTA MESA**

Shen Yun, the visually spectacular performance that celebrates 5,000 years of China's history, will arrive at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts this spring during its world tour. Breathtaking backdrops, handmade costumes and flawless dancing truly set this performance apart from any other. Accompanied by a live orchestra that fuses Eastern and Western influences, the performers enchant the audience with ancient fables and tales of modern heroes. Help the Shen Yun family keep the rich culture of China alive with this beautiful event that's fun for the entire family. (714-556-2787; scfta.org)

## ART

"AMERICAN MEMORIES: DRAWINGS, PAINTINGS AND PRINTS BY WAYNE THIEBAUD"

**THROUGH JUNE 1; LAGUNA ART MUSEUM**

The sequel to Laguna Art Museum's first exhibition of Wayne Thiebaud's work, "American Memories: Drawings, Paintings and Prints by Wayne Thiebaud," will display between 60 and 70 pieces from the celebrated artist's oeuvre. Born in 1920, Wayne has cultivated a style of painting that remains enchantingly youthful, as illustrated by his use of bright, primary colors and choice of subjects. Laguna locals should make it a priority to visit this exhibition by an artist with a National Medal of Arts to his name while it's still so accessible. (949-494-8971; lagunaartmuseum.org)

SPRING INTO ART

**MARCH 15 - APRIL 27; SAWDUST FESTIVAL GROUNDS**

Learn the techniques used by Sawdust Festival artists from the masters themselves while trying your hand at creating one-of-a-kind pieces to take home. From the ever-popular glassblowing to ceramics, jewelry making and more, the Spring Into Art classes offered by festival veterans and local professional artists are a great opportunity to learn a new skill with a friend. Instructors walk students through the entire process from start to finish, leaving them with a new sense of appreciation for the arts, unique memories and a keepsake—their own handmade piece of art to display. (949-494-3030; sawdustartfestival.org)

## ENTERTAINMENT

"ALL THE GREAT BOOKS: ABRIDGED"

**MARCH 4-30; LAGUNA PLAYHOUSE**

Those who skimmed over the novels from high school English class no longer need to wait for a movie adaptation to find out what Henry David Thoreau meant when he wrote "Walden." The hilarious performers of the Reduced Shakespeare Co. have abridged 83 of the most classic works of literature, all to be covered in little more than an hour and a half. From Confucius to Tennyson, no page is left unturned in this lighthearted comedy. (949-497-2787; lagunaplayhouse.com)

ALVIN AILEY

**MARCH 27-30; SEGERSTROM CENTER FOR THE ARTS, COSTA MESA**

The acclaimed Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater brings its inspiring repertoire to the stage at Segerstrom Hall under the leadership of artistic director Robert Battle. Born from a 1958 street show in New York City, the iconic dance team has performed for more than 25 million people in 71 countries. Seamlessly weaving artistry and strength, the company presents a mesmerizing range of Ailey classics and contemporary pieces. (714-556-2787; scfta.org)

"SISTER'S EASTER CATECHISM: WILL MY BUNNY GO TO HEAVEN?"

**APRIL 7-9, 14; LAGUNA PLAYHOUSE**

The latest installment of the "Sister's Catechism" series to come to the Laguna Playhouse, this hilarious performance will answer the season's most pressing questions and explore the significance of the most popular Easter traditions. For instance, why isn't Easter on the same day every year like Christmas? And where did Easter bunnies come from? These questions and more will be answered in an interactive and crowd-pleasing show that'll have the whole family laughing. (949-497-2787; lagunaplayhouse.com)





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## UPCOMING CONCERTS

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The Fenians, 8 p.m. March 15; Gibson Bros., 8 p.m. March 20; Led Zepagain: A Tribute to Led Zeppelin and Hemispheres: A Tribute to Rush, 8 p.m. March 21; Funniest Housewives of Orange County, 8 p.m. March 22; The English Beat, 8 p.m. March 29; Big Head Todd and the Monsters featuring Ronnie Baker Brooks and Hazel Miller, 8 p.m. April 1; Joe Louis Walker, 8 p.m. April 3; Bruce Cockburn, 8 p.m. April 11 (949-496-8930; thecoachhouse.com)

## CHARITY AND EVENTS

### VALIANT WOMEN LUNCHEON

#### MARCH 21; THE ST. REGIS MONARCH BEACH, DANA POINT

The 18th annual Valiant Women Luncheon features a fashion show fundraiser with nurses and physicians, as well as a silent auction and opportunity drawing. Valiant Women is a Mission Hospital support group working to ensure that women in the community receive the health care they need. Proceeds from the event benefit hospital services. (949-365-3893; missionfoundationevents.com)

## MULTICULTURAL FAIR

### MARCH 22; SAGE HILL SCHOOL

With more than 20 international food booths, live entertainment and an artisans' village featuring artwork by Sage Hill School's students, faculty and parents, there's something for everyone at this cultural fair. Children's activities include bread making, butter churning, origami, henna painting, storytelling and more. Overflow parking will be offered at Mariners Church, with a free shuttle to the school. (949-219-0100; sagehillschool.org)

## BLUE WATER MUSIC FESTIVAL

### MARCH 29-30; SAWDUST FESTIVAL GROUNDS

Local and international musicians will come together to perform at the 10th annual Blue Water Music Festival. The tentative lineup includes Barefoot Kindred, Vinnie & the Hooligans, Common Sense, Aloha Radio, the Ken Garcia Band and many more. Ticket buyers may donate 50 percent of the general admission cost to a nonprofit or musical artist such as the Boys & Girls Club of Laguna Beach, Glennwood House or Wells of Life. (bluwatermusicfestival.org) LBM



"Jolly Cones" by Wayne Thiebaud

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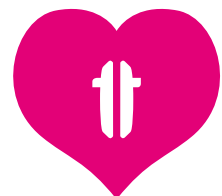
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JODY TONGCO



## DOWN DOG FOR A CAUSE

For more than six years, registered yoga instructor Carl Brown has been hosting Yoga in the Park, a free class at Treasure Island Park that remains open to anyone who wishes to join. While Carl has never expected or required payment for his teaching, he does accept donations from those willing to give. The profits always have gone to support two worthy causes: Thrangu Tara Abbey, a nunnery located on the outskirts of Kathmandu in Nepal, and the Himalayan Children's Fund. "The Himalayan Children's Fund is a way for people around the world, and the West in particular, to connect with the lives of people in the Himalayan region of Nepal, India and Tibet," Carl says. "It is through this fund that I have used Yoga in the Park to fund the specific education of girls in Nepal." Over the course of 2013, Yoga in the Park raised an impressive \$12,000, enough to fund the education of 12 girls in Nepal as well as cover some necessary improvements to their school. "With Yoga in the Park, I get to meet several personal goals of my own," Carl says. "The class helps me give back, and it helps me make a difference in people's lives both here and in Nepal." (yogainthepark.blogspot.com) —B.B.

## SEA LION SANCTUARY GETS AN UPDATE

Laguna's most adorable pinnipeds are receiving some upgrades to their rehabilitation center. A significant establishment in town, the Pacific Marine Mammal Center (PMMC) provides care to injured and malnourished sea lions and seals that come ashore. During the first half of 2013, more than 320 sea lions were reported stranded on Orange County beaches—a record-breaking number—and, at one point, the PMMC was filled to the brim with 167 of the mammals. With such heavy traffic coming through the facility, updates were undeniably necessary. These upgrades will aid not only the residents of the center but also its volunteers and visitors. Additions include a revamped intensive care unit, public restrooms, a multipurpose room, observation deck and gift shop. A new program, Citizens for Science, also will begin at the center this year. The program aims to educate those who frequently use the ocean (such as surfers and paddleboarders) on proper ways to observe wildlife. Additionally, the program will discuss ways to sponsor researchers who visit the area four times a year to observe California's seal and sea lion populations in the hopes of detecting and remedying issues causing harm to the marine ecosystem. (pacificmmc.org) —B.B.

## AN ARCHITECT AND ARTIST UNITE IN DREAM

Sculptor Louis Longi and architect Horst Noppenberger's proposed live-work project has been met with both praise and controversy—more controversy as of late, even after the Laguna Beach Planning Commission approved the project in a vote Jan. 8. Yet since then, the project has been appealed to the City Council and will be on the March 18 meeting's agenda. Project opponents argue that it could worsen the already congested traffic in the canyon, be visually unappealing and constitute too large of a development for the area. The plan's advocates, however, see it as an opportunity to strengthen Laguna's artistic presence and provide work space for valued members of the creative community. The planned 30-unit compound would offer apartments and studios to approved artists, and several units would be allocated to low-income artists who otherwise couldn't afford a home or studio in Laguna. While Louis and Horst have made adjustments to the project to earn its approval, residents anxiously await a final decision. —B.B.



COURTESY OF HORST ARCHITECTS





### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As a father of four as well as chef and owner of Sapphire Laguna, Azmin Ghahreman is passionate about kids and food. Putting these two passions together, Azmin has partnered with the MaxLove Project, a grassroots nonprofit organization dedicated to helping kids thrive despite cancer and other life-threatening conditions. Inspired by Max “SuperMax” Wilford, a Tustin resident who has battled brain cancer for the past 2.5 years and celebrated turning 7 on March 1, the project aims to make every cancer-fighting tool available, from nutritional and medicinal resources to alternative healing therapies. Through the sponsorship, Azmin donated healthy snacks to cater Max’s birthday party and fundraiser for the MaxLove Project. The donation supports MaxLove’s mission of empowering children and their families in the fight against childhood cancers and life-threatening illnesses through knowledge of whole-body nutrition and wellness. Azmin, a longtime proponent of healthy eating for kids, is also founder of the Sapphire at School program, an initiative developed in conjunction with nine Orange County schools that provides fresh and healthy alternatives to the standard institutional fare served in cafeterias. ([maxloveproject.org](http://maxloveproject.org)) ([sapphireatschool.com](http://sapphireatschool.com)) —A.T.

## CITY HELPS FUND MEMORIAL FOR FALLEN OFFICERS

The Laguna Beach City Council unanimously has agreed to match up to \$10,000 in donations to support a planned memorial in honor of two fallen Laguna police officers. Motor officer Jon Coutchie, who was killed in a traffic accident this past September, and officer Gordon French, who died after a shooting in 1953, will be honored by the memorial and are the only two Laguna officers to suffer fatalities in the line of duty. The Laguna Beach Police Employees’ Association, leading the fundraising campaign, has collected \$60,000—exceeding its initial \$40,000 goal—for a permanent memorial to be constructed outside of the police station, where it will be visible to officers as they come and go from work as well as civilians who visit the station. Other donors have followed suit in the wake of the city’s monetary contribution, including Hearts of Montage, employees of Montage Laguna Beach and Firebrand Media Chairman Allan Simon. —B.B.

MITCH RIDDER



### FINE ART WITH THE FAMILY

Families have a new monthly tradition to look forward to thanks to the Laguna Art Museum. Kids’ Art Studio, a program organized by the museum, allows children and parents to work together to create beautiful pieces of art from start to finish. Taking place the third Sunday of every month from 2-4 p.m., the brand-new classes allow families to collaborate and craft entire works of art inspired by various collections in the museum. Designed for all ages, the projects are engaging and produce pieces that kids will be proud to show off. Best of all, the fun-filled program is free to nonmembers of the museum with the purchase of admission and always free to museum members and children under 12. ([lagunaartmuseum.org](http://lagunaartmuseum.org)) —B.B.



# CONNECTING SCIENCE TO CONSERVATION



If anyone can make science not only fun but also interactive, it's Crystal Cove State Park and Crystal Cove Alliance. On Jan. 31, approximately 150 people attended the grand opening of the Michael and Tricia Berns Environmental Study Loop, an innovative new facility that invites visitors to discover the many facets of Moro Canyon through eight science field stations. Concluding a project more than a year in the making as well as commemorating California State Parks' 150th anniversary, the event began outside the newly built outdoor amphitheater with hors d'oeuvres and sparkling juice provided by The Beachcomber while guests took tours of the study loop. Later, guests gathered outside the auditorium for the ribbon cutting, where Crystal Cove Alliance President and CEO Harry Helling and Director of Public Affairs Laura Davick, among other board members, joined Michael and Tricia Berns. Afterward, attendees were led inside the amphitheater for speeches by Crystal Cove's greatest advocates, including Maj. Gen. Anthony Jackson, director of California State Parks; Travis Huxman, director of the Center for Environmental Biology at the University of California, Irvine; and Michael and Tricia Berns. As a finale to the event, which truly showcased Crystal Cove's majestic beauty, guests were treated to a performance by the Laguna Concert Band and fresh s'mores amid the stunning backdrop of Moro Canyon and the Pacific Ocean. (crystalcovebeachcottages.org) —A. T.

## THAT'S THE SPIRIT

Hosted by the Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce, the annual Spirit Awards were held at seven-degrees on Jan. 31 to honor locals and Laguna-based organizations. In true Laguna fashion, the quirky and comical evening wasn't a time to be solemn or serious. Waste Management's Michelle Clark, who served as mistress of ceremonies and host along with Larry Campbell, kicked off the awards presentation—and set the jovial mood—with a lip sync and dance up to the stage to Katy Perry's "Roar." While Michelle's stand-up comedy certainly entertained the approximately 280 attendees at the event that night, the hard work and dedication of the award winners and nominees were hardly forgotten. In addition to the awards presentation, guests witnessed Mayor Elizabeth Pearson swear in the chamber's 2014 board members. Below, see the list of who took home a coveted Spirit Award. (lagunabeachchamber.org) —A. T. LBM



- Chamber board member:** Julie Cimpko
- Business:** Whole Foods Market
- Building industry:** DeeMark Partners
- Citizen:** Michael Kinsman
- Nonprofit:** KX 93.5 FM
- Restaurant:** The Cliff
- Green enterprise:** Laguna Nursery
- Government official:** Assemblyman Allan Mansoor
- City professional:** Larry Bammer
- Retail store:** Buy Hand
- Gallery:** coastal eddy, a gallery
- Professional service:** Nokes & Quinn
- Volunteer:** Wendy Potter

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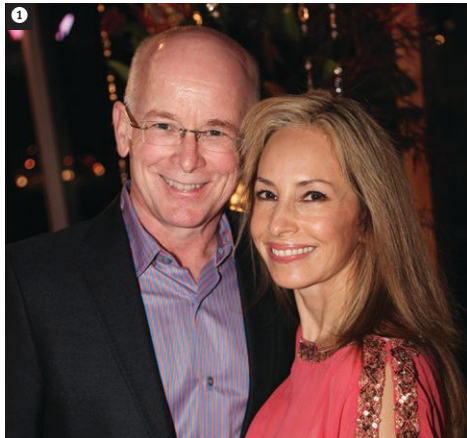




# COMMUNITY

## LAGUNA ART MUSEUM'S ART AUCTION 2014: THE ART OF THE HEIST

1 Larry and Carol Blaire 2 Charlie Adamski, Jeanie Denholm, Karen Morally, Sara Heesch, Michele Monda, Jennifer Karam, Vanessa Helim, Sarah Strozza 3 Tyler Russell, Celia Hulling 4 Sara and Malcolm Warner, Vanessa Rothe, Arabella Cant 5 Live auction 6 Polina Chebotareva, John Moske, Filipp Chebotareva 7 Artist Jeff Peters painted live during the event.



ERIC STONER



Taking inspiration from the popular 1968 caper film “The Thomas Crown Affair,” in which self-made billionaire Thomas Crown maintains an unusual hobby of stealing priceless masterpieces, the Laguna Art Museum’s annual art auction, The Art of the Heist, took place Feb. 8 at the museum. While no artwork was embezzled in a briefcase or under a trench coat that evening, approximately 400 guests did have a chance to “heist” original works of art by more than 100 of California’s most sought-after artists including Elizabeth Turk, Adam Silverman, Victor Hugo Zayas, Timothy Clark, Jimi Gleason, Jeff Peters and James Verbicky. In fact, the auction fundraiser grossed approximately \$200,000 for the museum’s education and exhibition programs, and it’s expected to net \$120,000. The top four sales at the event occurred during the fast-paced live auction and included “Light Trap” by Laddie John Dill, which sold for \$15,000; “Bridges in Winter Morning” by Theodore Svenningsen, which sold for \$8,000; “Italian Shuffle” by Tony DeLap, which sold for \$7,500; and “Station to Station 4” by Shepard Fairey, which sold for \$7,000. In addition to both silent and live auctions, guests enjoyed cuisine from local restaurants including The Wine Gallery and Sapphire Laguna, sipped on vintage-inspired cocktails by Tito’s Handmade Vodka and beer from Noble Ale Works, and watched a live painting by Jeff Peters. (lagunaartmuseum.org) —A. T.



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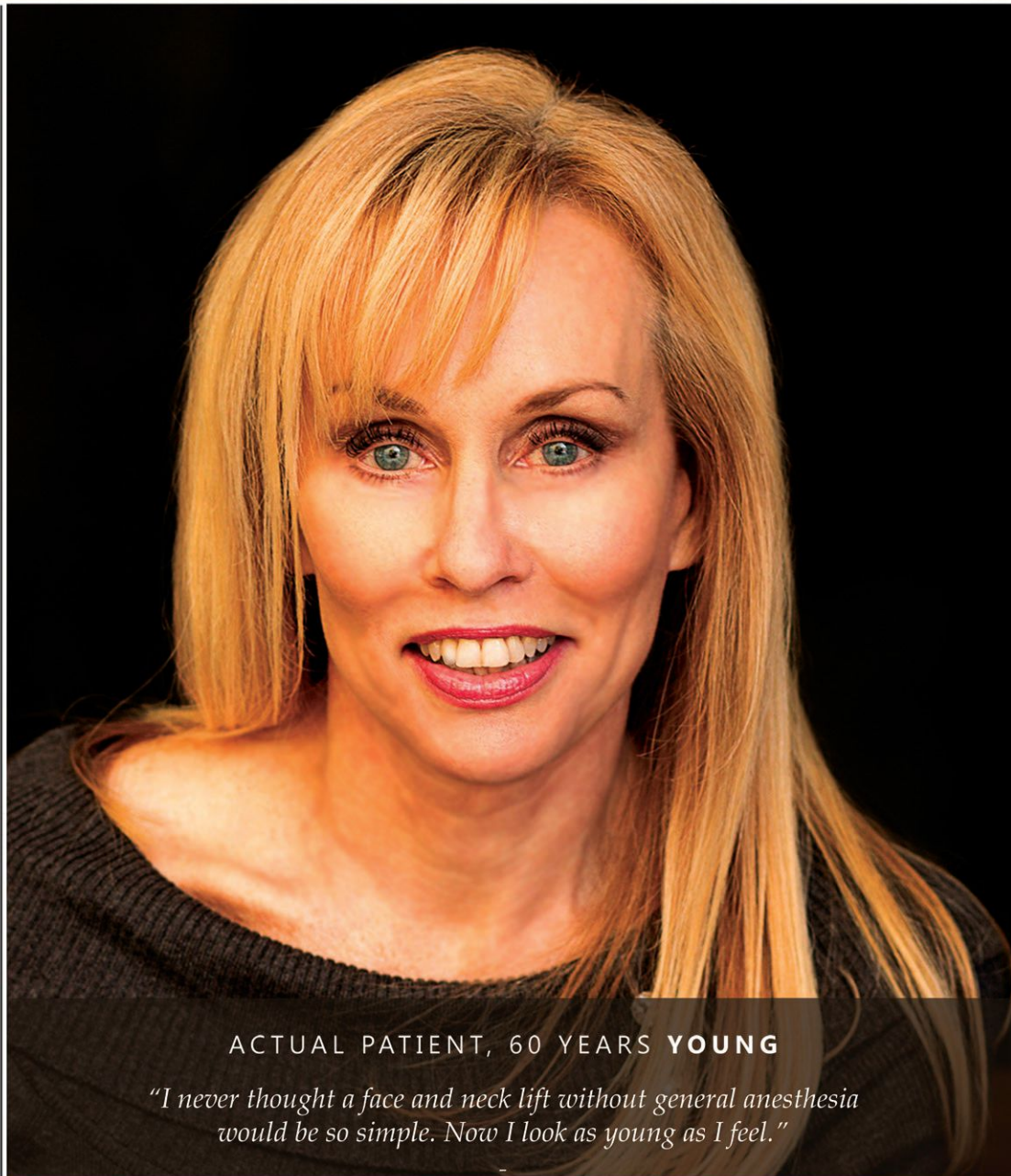
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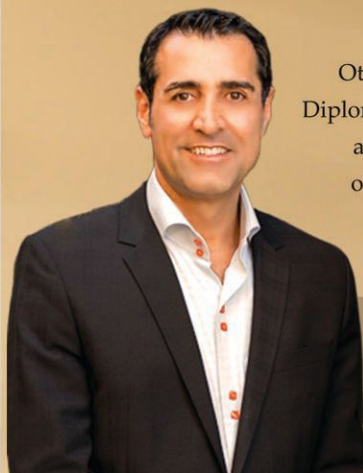
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## GOOD GRINDS

There's nothing like the perfect cup of joe to kick-start your morning, and Laguna has several cafes and coffee houses that provide exceptional brews for that much-needed jolt.

*By Beth Fhaner | Photos by Jody Tiongco*



Laguna Coffee Co. roasts premium beans, including French, Italian and Sumatra.

MARCH IS NATIONAL CAFFEINE AWARENESS Month, so we thought it was an appropriate time to tour some of the best places in town for great coffee and other delectable goodies. From cozy hole-in-the-wall cafes to local institutions that consider coffee preparation a high art, Laguna's many brewers make it easy for java lovers to get their daily doses of liquid energy. So, to get your day buzzing with a delicious sip, be sure to check out these coffee hot spots and others around town.

### SIGNATURE BREWS

For coffee in a setting with a definite bohemian vibe, look no further than the Koffee Klatch, a laid-back, eclectic, dog-friendly place with French prints lining the walls, comfy couches, several small tables in the back and an outdoor patio area—a perfect place to sip your brew while reading a book or working on your laptop. Friendly baristas serve a wide range of coffees and ice-blended drinks here, but by far the most popular selection on the menu is the Mayan Mocha, an absolutely delicious beverage that's not too sweet with just the right amount of espresso flavor and a generous dollop of cinnamon. Order it with whipped cream—it's pure bliss. The chai tea latte is also highly recommended. Coffee by the pound is available for purchase too, including the house blend, the robust black velvet, vanilla nut or decaf. In addition to coffee alternatives such as fruit smoothies, teas, sodas and lemonade, the Koffee Klatch offers savory sustenance with breakfast and lunch items. Breakfast is served all day, and salads, sandwiches and soups are also available. Pair your beverage with a bagel (try the signature Love Bagel, a bagel of choice with cream cheese, tomato and lemon pepper), muffin top or any of the slices of yummy cake on offer in the display case. Another nice perk about this place on South Coast Highway is that it's open late—until midnight Fridays and Saturdays, and until 11 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays. (949-376-6867)





Left: Koffee Klatch offers a wide range of coffee drinks in a laid-back cafe with a bohemian vibe. Right: Laguna Coffee Co. baristas free pour the lattes, creating decorative designs atop the drink.

Tucked away amid shops in the Lumberyard complex on Forest Avenue, the Coffee Pub is something of a hidden gem, yet the friendly service and casual ambience attract many regular patrons. Place your order at the counter, and then opt for either indoor seating or a table on the adjacent patio. The Coffee Pub serves organic Gaviña Gourmet Coffee (which is produced by coffee makers who've been in business for more than 100 years, so they must be doing something right), and regular, medium and dark roasts are available, as well as decaf coffee and espresso drinks. Try the chai latte or the barista special, which, depending on the barista's whim, could be a creme brulee latte or white mocha pumpkin latte, among other special concoctions. Coffee alternatives include teas, smoothies, hot chocolate and lemonade; bagels, pastries, sandwiches, salads and soups provide satisfying nosh.

"The experience you get when you come here for a cup of coffee is like seeing an old friend—it makes you feel at home," says barista/sandwich artist Sergio Gomez, who truly seems to know almost every customer who walks through the door at the cozy Coffee Pub. (949-494-5334)

#### GLOBAL FLAVORS

If you're a serious coffee connoisseur, a visit to Laguna Coffee Co., which has been serving gourmet, organic specialty coffees since 1991, is a must.

The South Coast Highway shop shines a spotlight on a variety of international vendors, incorporating beans sourced from Africa, Brazil, Indonesia, Hawaii and Costa Rica. Owners Paul and Cathy Ackley and Peggy Warner buy, roast and serve premium blends, including distinctive dark roasts, espressos, cappuccinos and decaf beverages (French, Italian, espresso and Sumatra).

Customers can buy pounds of whole coffee

beans here, and get them grinded too—popular choices include Ethiopian Yirgacheffe beans and Costa Rican beans. Choose from several milk options as well, including soy, hemp, rice, coconut milk and almond organic milk. Blended coffee drinks, iced coffee, smoothies and teas are also on the menu, plus tasty eats such as sandwiches, pastries and empanadas (a Tuesday special).

Additionally, don't miss the incredible carrot



Barista Sergio Gomez serves a customer at the Coffee Pub's outdoor patio in the Lumberyard complex.

#### OTHER JAVA HOT SPOTS

##### ANASTASIA CAFE

(949-497-8903; anastasiaboutique.com)

##### ANDREE'S PATISserie

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##### COFFEE CAFE AT WYLAND

(949-376-8000; wylandgalleries.com)

##### LAGUNA WINE, COFFEE & SPECIALTY FOODS

(949-494-4697; lagunawinecafe.com)

##### ORANGE INN

(949-494-6085; orangeinncafe.com)

##### SAPPHIRE PANTRY

(949-715-9889; sapphiredllc.com)


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Heidelberg Cafe & Bistro whips up lattes and more.

cake or the French strudels served every Sunday. Open seven days a week, Laguna Coffee Co. also boasts a pleasant patio and live jazz every Saturday morning. “We have excellent coffee from around the world, and we micro roast here on a weekly basis,” says barista Annie Fedotov. “We also have great baristas who free pour lattes, which results in the decorative hearts.” (949-494-6901; [lagunacoffeeco.com](http://lagunacoffeeco.com))

The outdoor patio at Heidelberg Cafe & Bistro’s on South Coast Highway is another perfect spot to grab a cup of joe while soaking in the beauty of Laguna Beach. Order anything from lattes to cappuccinos and drip coffees. A local favorite is the Cafe Mocha Royal, which is made of chocolate milk, espresso, whipped cream and chocolate chips. Also highly regarded is the cafe’s German-style breakfast, such as the German sausage and eggs. (949-497-4594; [heidelbergcafe.com](http://heidelbergcafe.com))

At Jean Paul’s Goodies, regular customers know the drill: Order quickly and make sure to bring cash to pay for the exceptional French coffee and mouthwatering, freshly baked pastries, including the light-as-air, buttery croissants. Located in a strip mall in the north end of Laguna, Jean Paul’s Goodies is touted by some locals as having some of the best coffee on the planet. Owner Jean Paul has a reputation for sometimes exhibiting a gruff demeanor, but perhaps it’s just his French attitude and passion for ultra-fine coffee. Be forewarned, though—whatever you do, don’t bring in a Starbucks cup (or risk being told to leave) and don’t ask for a latte, as the proper beverage to order here is a “cafe au lait,” which is available in one size only. (949-494-7832) **LBM**





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# HIT THE COURT

Laguna's Julie Heussenstamm shares her love for the game of tennis.

*Section by Somer Tejwani*

JODY TIONGCO



**JULIE HEUSSENSTAMM** WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO GROW UP WITH A CLAY COURT TENNIS FACILITY AT the end of her street in Melbourne, Australia. “For some reason, my mum wouldn’t sign me up for dance lessons, my first love, but did sign me up for tennis at 7 years old,” Julie says. “Turns out, she made the right choice for me. I was a natural, forgot all about dancing, and never looked back.”

Throughout the span of her junior playing years, Julie had three coaches who all instilled in her what she calls a classic Australian game focused on serve and volley, sound ground strokes, a one-handed backhand and an unending love of the game.

Now the director of player development at All Court Tennis in Laguna Beach, Julie conducts junior and adult classes, one-on-one training, cardio tennis and junior team tennis. Here, she shares her top tips for beginner to advanced players of all ages.

**Laguna Beach Magazine:** How long have you been coaching?

**Julie Heussenstamm:** I have been coaching for 20-something years here in California, and I have been a member of the United States Professional Tennis Association from the beginning.

**LBM:** Why is tennis such a unique sport?

**JH:** Players are competing on their own terms and making their own decisions during match play. The physical fitness, focus on fairness, need for mental toughness and the ability to bounce back after defeat are all great benefits.

**LBM:** What tips do you have for new players to the game?

**JH:** Start with tennis-specific shoes to prevent injury and keep you light on your feet, because tennis is a running game. Always keep the ball forward of your body when hitting. Take a few lessons. The fundamentals will be the building blocks of your future game.

**LBM:** What tips do you have for avid players to improve?

**JH:** Find a teaching professional who can give you unbiased feedback and minimize your weaknesses, and build on your strengths. Also, watch professional tennis—live if possible—although the commentary on TV is free advice.

**LBM:** Any advice on cross-training?

**JH:** Cross-train with soccer or cardio tennis; learn yoga, Pilates and plyometric exercises.

**LBM:** How often do you recommend playing to improve your game?

**JH:** Getting on the court to practice with purpose and focus as often as possible is ideal. Players should practice strokes and practice playing strokes within a live point situation, and then also in an actual match. Obviously this requires more practice than one hour a week, so finding a compatible practice partner is key.

**LBM:** Do you prefer singles or doubles?

**JH:** Ultimately tennis is a game, so have fun—play singles, play doubles, hit with your children.

**LBM:** Speaking of children, what advice do you have on playing with them?

**JH:** If you are hitting with a child, bring the equipment down to his or her level: softer balls, smaller racquets, handicapped point system. Make the sport achievable by starting off with low, gentle feeds that bounce to the player, gradually moving the ball away so the child moves to the ball. Invent silly or fun games.





**LULULEMON SWIFTLY TECH RACERBACK**, \$48, at Spa Montage, Laguna Beach (949-715-6010; spamontage.com)



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## A LOVE MATCH

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**ADIDAS BARRICADE TENNIS SHOES**, \$140, at Dick's Sporting Goods, Fashion Island, Newport Beach (949-640-1107; dickssportinggoods.com)



**BKR BAMBI BPA-FREE WATER BOTTLE**, \$28, at Gap, Crystal Cove Shopping Center, Newport Coast (949-494-0792; gap.com)



**PRINCE EXO3 WARRIOR 100 RACQUET**, \$200, at Laguna Niguel Racquet Club, Laguna Niguel (949-496-4665; spearmanclubs.com)



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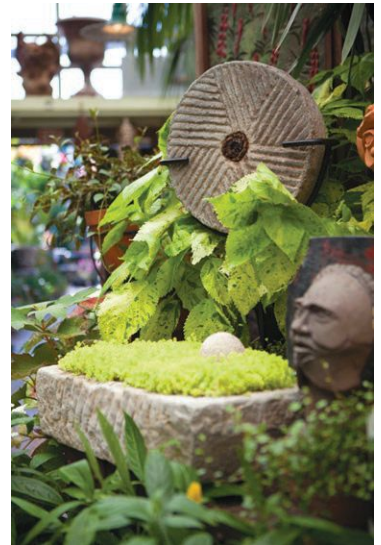


# BOTANICAL BOUNTY

Local experts weigh in on designing an outdoor space that incorporates all of the comforts of home—green thumb optional.

*Section by Somer Teiwani*

PHOTOS BY SCOTT SPORLEDER



Ruben Flores, of Laguna Nursery, recommends personalizing outdoor space with furniture or artwork.

RUBEN FLORES, CRAIG DE PFYFFER AND GENE Sottosanto cultivate and make possible some of the most unique and beautiful residential outdoor spaces in Laguna. With experience accenting anything from a cottage retreat to a complicated cliff-side estate, each of these experts takes pride in designing landscapes that complement that natural environment while remaining eco-friendly. Here, the three share their best-kept secrets for creating the garden of your dreams.

## PERSONALIZE THE SPACE

With the right plants and a little furniture, the outdoors can feel as intimate as the inside of your home. Ruben, a Laguna Nursery landscape designer and horticulturist, suggests trying to personalize your garden with the use of furniture such as a simple wood platform deck, or even art that you'd normally hang indoors. This will help make the space feel more like an extension of you. Water features also create habitats for birds, dragonflies and other wildlife, says Craig, a landscape architect and Environmental Designs Landscape founder. "Install a water

reservoir with a recirculating pump and add a low-voltage underwater light for interest at night," he says.

Another way to customize the space is to think of how you'll be using it. Is your goal to create privacy? A space to have cocktail hour or dinner with friends? Once goals are set, remember to "have fun—the garden should be a place of inspiration and joy. Don't create a maintenance monster that you dread," Ruben adds.

Gene, known as Green Gene, has been a landscaper and gardener in Laguna Beach since the mid-1970s and agrees that low maintenance is the way to go. "I don't like to do high-maintenance, low-production gardens—you know, everything mowed and sheared in a straight line. It should be a little more relaxed and not as logical," he says.

## GO GREEN

Being eco-conscious doesn't have to mean giving up style. Choose plants that tolerate less water, attract wildlife and, if possible, are California natives. Craig also suggests installing a smart

controller for the automatic sprinkler system. "Smart controllers adjust the amount of water applied to the landscape based on weather conditions to conserve water," he explains.

Craig adds that native plants or a meadow of drought-tolerant grasses reduce the water, fertilizer, pesticides and maintenance requirements for a healthier environment. Ruben suggests Southern California native *Ceanothus* (the California blue lilac) and citrus trees. "Citrus is fragrant, gives fruit and is a beautiful tree," he says. Craig says a great flowering perennial is the *Penstemon heterophyllus* (the Margarita BOP), which attracts hummingbirds to the garden.

In addition to the aesthetic benefits, going green is also economical. "You don't have to pay an exorbitant water bill if you plant drought-tolerant plants," Gene says. "For example, the California walnut is edible, drought tolerant and attracts birds."

Whether you opt for an eco-friendly environment or a sacred sanctuary where you can fall into your own thoughts, gardens are personal spaces meant to be reflective of your personality.





**PAPASAN SUNBED**, \$699.95, with Maui Calliope papasan cushion, \$129, all available at Pier 1 Imports, Crystal Cove Shopping Center, Newport Coast (949-497-7428; pier1.com)



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## START DIGGING

Develop the green space of your dreams with these must-have tools and decor.

Laguna Nursery's Ruben Flores says landscapes grow and increase in value as they mature, so don't wait to start planting. Define your theme and start creating your dream outdoor space now with the help of these accents. *LBM*



**DIGZ OUTDOOR GARDENING GLOVES**, \$4.99, at Crown Ace Hardware, Laguna Niguel (949-363-9000; crownhardware.com)

**DUOMO LANTERNS**, \$59 to \$295, at Restoration Hardware, Fashion Island, Newport Beach (949-760-9232; restorationhardware.com)



**DROOG TREE TRUNK BENCH**, \$23,460, at Vertigo Home, Laguna Beach (949-494-7547; vertigohome.us)



# POPPING OFF

Modern Pop founder Julie Podolec has transformed the classic ice pop into a guilt-free treat.

*By Tess Eyrich*



Laguna-based Modern Pop, created by Julie Podolec and her husband, uses only fresh fruit and all-natural sweeteners including honey and agave nectar, if needed.

EVEN IN A PLACE THAT PRIZES ORGANIC AND sustainable foods as much as Laguna does, finding an all-natural snack that truly lives up to its name can still pose something of a challenge. That's where Julie Podolec comes into the picture. Just over a year ago, the new mother created Modern Pop, a homegrown company that sells frozen fruit bars made with only fresh fruit and, if necessary, all-natural sweeteners like honey and agave nectar.

After spending the past summer selling the

gluten- and dairy-free pops from a cart outside Sapphire Laguna, Julie reports that Modern Pop products are now carried by Bristol Farms' Newport Beach and Santa Monica locations, and she and her husband are gearing up to distribute the fruit bars to all 14 of the market's Southern California outposts as well as Whole Foods Market in Laguna. In the meantime, she's teamed up with Newport Beach-based event planning firm Tamera Event Design to make the pops the

stars of a host of local celebrations.

Here, Julie shares her story of causing a modern sensation with Laguna Beach Magazine.

**Laguna Beach Magazine:** What inspired you to start Modern Pop?

**Julie Podolec:** The main inspiration was my son. At the time he was only around 8 months old, and he was going through a really bad teething process. I went to Whole Foods—that's

usually where we shop if we want to find something more natural for him. Although we thought it would be an easy thing to pick up at the grocery store, we left empty-handed. Everything had sugar and fillers and juices. My husband and I decided to start experimenting in our kitchen, and so that was the main inspiration, just trying to give my son something healthy and alternative to anything else that was on the market.

**LBM:** What flavors does Modern Pop offer?

**JP:** The flavors are raspberry ginger, watermelon cilantro and mango mint, and we just came out with one that's simpler for everyone, including kids, and it's strawberry lemonade.

**LBM:** Which flavor is your favorite?

**JP:** My favorite is mango mint. It's not as

sweet—it's one where we don't use any sweetener, so it's just mangoes, mint and lime juice. And it's minty, so it's kind of like a mojito.

**LBM:** What was the process of refining the flavors like? Any mishaps along the way?

**JP:** Some of the flavors I tried just didn't have that excitement about them; they were just really bland. Banana was one of those flavors that I thought would be good, but it was a little bit plain because we're not adding in anything else to enhance the flavor of the fruit. Raspberry ginger is amazing; we don't have to add much agave ... because raspberries are just naturally sweet.

**LBM:** Have you always been interested in cooking, or was it a more recent development?

**JP:** It was a totally new thing. I've always been

in sales, and my husband works in finance, so it's a good balance. ... But as far as cooking, I kind of got into it after I had my baby. I wanted to be giving him good food, not junk food.

**LBM:** Did anything in particular motivate you to adopt a healthier lifestyle overall?

**JP:** My husband and I moved here from New York City five years ago. Moving to Laguna Beach, I've never seen a culture that's so health-conscious. You have all of these healthy options in Laguna, from gluten-free foods to healthy bowls to smoothies—if I were in New York City I'd still be eating McDonald's. It's just a different culture. I saw that there's definitely a niche in the market for a healthy alternative to an old standard. ... I think having moved to Laguna Beach really opened my eyes to a healthier lifestyle. **LBM**



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# Welcome to One Laguna

*A new interactive media center showcases Laguna Beach, helping both visitors and locals explore all that the city has to offer.*

*By Peter A. Balaskas | Photos by Jessica Casperson*

SINCE ITS FOUNDING IN 2006, FIREBRAND MEDIA has proven itself as a formidable pioneer when it comes to building and nurturing professional relationships between businesses and consumers through its publications, digital platforms and marketing solutions. Firebrand produces Laguna Beach Magazine and the Laguna Beach Independent newspaper among its many periodicals. With the creation of One Laguna, a special center that utilizes the finest in interactive multimedia technology, Firebrand has harnessed its visionary skills once again by providing the perfect place for locals and tourists to visit, plan trips in the area, discover and learn about Laguna, or simply hang out and have fun.

## THE VISION

For Firebrand Media Chairman Allan Simon, the idea to create an interactive community center came about with the vacancy of the building he owns at 225 Forest Ave., which sits just a half block away from Pacific Coast Highway. The area's popularity is due to the considerable amount of foot traffic from both tourists and locals, especially during the summer. Allan recognized the potential this location might have when it comes to helping his fellow Laguna Beach business owners.

"I realized there are many merchants in town that ... [are far] from the downtown business district and wish they could pay the rent on Forest Avenue, but they can't," Allan says. "So ... it becomes simple: How do we represent them, ... electronically, so some of that foot traffic that comes [into the center] can find [the other businesses] right then and there without searching all over Laguna and probably missing them?"

JODY TIONGCO





Interactive screens help visitors learn about Laguna.



Up to 32 fingers can simultaneously tap on the Big Board, composed of two 84-inch, ultra high-definition screens.

The answer soon came for Allan: to create a special resource center for the community that places not only technological resources at their disposal but also serves as an attractive and fun place where they can socialize, learn about the local businesses and historical areas in Laguna, and use the technology to plan their entire day.

“The shop owners can get representation here, and we can direct the customers there,” Allan explains. “I tried to conceive this project as a place where it has a fun, interesting and learning component.”

After gaining unanimous approval from the Laguna Beach Planning Commission in August 2013, the next step in designing One Laguna was to combine the best in Laguna Beach content—historical and consumer-based—with the most advanced interactive technology that is both easy and enjoyable to explore. Within only six months, the center moved from concept to reality, opening its doors to the public in February and celebrating its launch in March.

## TECHNOLOGICAL TOUCH

The first priority when it came to selecting the appropriate technology and designing it for One Laguna was to make all functions as user-friendly as possible, creating an “interactive

playground.” Firebrand Media contracted Jonathan Tavss of Scarlet Terrier Productions to supervise the center’s design and initial operations. Jonathan, who has had experience introducing the next generation of connected displays and interactive environments to multiple companies, divided the One Laguna experience into four categories: “Perfect Laguna” touch screens, centerpiece map tables, “Social Lounge” experiences and the “Big Board.”

“Each of the displays is a fully self-contained, interactive product with a built-in computer, speakers, and all having Bluetooth and [short-range wireless] connectivity,” Jonathan says. “These are not just a bunch of televisions.”

As visitors enter the spacious building and walk upstairs to the mezzanine level, they will discover one of the four 55-inch touch screens, which display different areas of interest. The technology, branded “Perfect Laguna,” helps guests explore a variety of stores, galleries, restaurants and lodgings, if they are staying overnight, as well as beaches, hiking or biking trails, and other outdoor activities. Each listed business entry has colorful images, detailed descriptions of its history and services, and maps to help guide users to their destinations.

The crowning touch of Perfect Laguna is that

guests can create an account, select their favorite places they want to go, add that information into their account and the Perfect Laguna technology will create a PDF of their itineraries, which will either be sent to the user’s smartphone, or the schedule can be printed out at One Laguna.

As guests continue making their way upstairs, they will pass the sound studio for a new, online-only radio station KX@OneLaguna before reaching the second floor, where they will not only see the remaining three Perfect Laguna screens—as well as the six small tablets mounted on metal pedestals that serve the same purpose as Perfect Laguna—but also the 13- by 4-foot Big Board dominating the main wall. Composed of two 84-inch, 4K (ultra high-definition) screens that are connected and covered with a 32-point touch screen (meaning that a maximum of 32 fingers can tap on the screen at one time), this centerpiece offers guests hours of fun viewing various nature and scenic photos of Laguna, as well as archived photos of historical landmarks, each with background information and photo credits. Guests can also watch high-definition videos of key locations and activities around Laguna Beach; some of the footage includes underwater video taken by the Laguna-based MacGillivray Freeman Films, known for its large-format





Tyler Russell (center) broadcasts a show for the online radio station, KX@OneLaguna, from the One Laguna studio.

### LIVE AT ONE LAGUNA

In addition to resources for shopping, dining, playing and staying in Laguna Beach, the interactive One Laguna center provides a home for KX@OneLaguna, a new online-only radio station, which is a collaboration between Firebrand Media and Laguna-based radio station KX 93.5 FM.

Known for playing generational alternative rock—1980s, reggae, folk and current indie music—KX 93.5 will create a special format for the station: Orange County-related talk radio.

Some of the confirmed programs will include a psychology show hosted by Dr. Ari Grayson, a book review show hosted by Randy Kraft, a yoga show hosted by Sara Vogel, a spoken word/poetry show hosted by John Gardiner and a talk show with locals by Laguna Beach Magazine editor Alli Tong.

Tyler Russell, program director of KX 93.5 FM, believes these programs will have a wide appeal to community members. "We're targeting a more intellectual, global audience on the new station and playing with the term 'smart talk,'" he says.

KX@OneLaguna is available for streaming at onelaguna.com and KX935.com. The overall programming will be fully operational 24 hours a day, seven days a week. During the times that the talk shows are not on the air, diverse music such as jazz, blues and classic oldies will be played.

Tyler adds, "Between KX 93.5 FM and KX@OneLaguna, there should be something for every type of radio listener in Laguna Beach."

movies including "Everest," the highest grossing Imax documentary to date.

Also in the main room and the Social Lounge are two 46-inch centerpiece tables, which, in addition to showcasing content from Perfect Laguna, feature interactive maps that highlight historical information and landmarks in the city. These "map" tables can have their heights and angles adjusted according to the user.

Two 32-inch, high-tech coffee tables—with built-in hidden Bose speakers—also provide an entertaining interactive experience for the user. As they sit down on the comfortable sofas and drink their coffee, visitors can use the touch

screens to browse local art as well as Laguna-themed photos and videos from local photographers and filmmakers.

Once guests stroll into the Social Lounge, they can occupy themselves at the two 55-inch mounted touch-screen monitors, which offer the opportunity to share their One Laguna experience with others. The first screen, called "Wish Were You Here," gives users the opportunity to pose for pictures, or "selfies," in front of the screen, and then create a virtual postcard that guests can email to their friends and family. The second screen is the Social Wall, which collects and displays live feeds related to Laguna Beach from social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

For both locals and tourists, visiting One Laguna is like exploring a microcosm of the city. As Marc Ostrick, an independent consultant hired to oversee the technology in the space, points out, One Laguna is a high-tech center that celebrates Laguna Beach in many ways. "... Laguna has been known as a place of looking at the historical images in the past, but let's celebrate the future as well," he says. "This can be a place where you can celebrate the past, the present and the future."

Guests instantly get a taste of all three as they walk through the glass doors of One Laguna and first encounter the art gallery whose ground level space was donated to the Laguna College of Art & Design (LCAD). College President Jonathan Burke praises One Laguna and the opportunities



Crews install items for the Troy Lee exhibit—one of several highlighting businesses and interests in town.



it gives to his students and the community.

"LCAD on Forest [Avenue] fosters creative dialogue and educates through contact with original art," Jonathan says. "I consider LCAD's gallery and One Laguna a successful collaboration that together creates opportunities for students and the community."

Guests will continue to be engaged as they walk upstairs and take in the hip, city-loft interior design of the One Laguna level, which features exposed brick walls, iron beams, polished hardwood floors, skylights and a subtle mix of jazz, blues and other contemporary music enhancing the center's welcoming atmosphere.

As visitors play with the Big Board, the Social Lounge screens or congregate around the coffee tables looking at historical photos or dynamic, point-of-view mountain biking videos, more and more local businesses around Laguna Beach are getting increased exposure through the technology One Laguna offers. As Firebrand Media CEO and Editorial Director Steve Zepezauer points out, One Laguna not only helps businesses, but also serves as an excellent community companion to the Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce and Laguna Beach Visitors Bureau.

"The Visitors Bureau gets people here; we want to entertain the people that are already here. So ... in that way, we very much complement the Visitors Bureau," Steve says. "And [the Chamber of Commerce] is extremely excited about [One Laguna]. I foresee both the Visitors Bureau and Chamber of Commerce having a presence in the building; we've offered it to the both of them."



Visitors can take photos for virtual postcards at One Laguna to send to friends and family.

### FUTURE OF ONE LAGUNA

All the creators of One Laguna agree that the center is an ever-evolving project that will continue to grow beyond expectations. Many future plans include developing a heightened real estate showcase, where local agents and their listings can be featured with colorful images and videos. Another is to create the option to purchase tickets to key Orange County events and venues, like The Laguna Playhouse, Pageant of the Masters, Segerstrom Center for the Arts and even Disneyland. Ideas regarding video production and broadcasting are also in the works.

There is also OneProgram, which is, according

to Firebrand Media Chief Technology Officer Scott Sanchez, a key plan that would benefit both consumers and local business owners. "[It's] a virtual punch card ... [where] you'll generate points and those points can be redeemed at participating merchants," Scott shares.

Allan and his fellow "multimedia pioneers" are optimistic One Laguna can be used as a model for other metropolitan cities to follow. "Laguna is a magical place," Allan says. "Nobody can change the beauty of the place, the beauty of the people, the cosmopolitan nature of the people. ... I just hope to contribute to continue to make it great." LBM



Laguna College of Art & Design runs an art gallery on the ground floor while the technology space is upstairs.

### CELEBRATING THE FUTURE

More than 200 VIP guests attended the invitation-only launch party for One Laguna on March 6 at the building located at 225 Forest Ave. During the course of the evening, guests played on the touch screens, sipped on beer and wine, and savored small bites from local restaurants, such as Sapphire Laguna, Mozambique and K'ya Bistro.

To see exclusive photos of the event, check out LB Mag Plus!

DOWNLOAD THE TAGGAR APP



For steps on how to access LB Mag Plus, see page 8.





# DIVE INTO DENIM

*This spring, denim styles are reviving the trends of the past with a contemporary edge.*

*By Kirsti Correa | Photos by Jody Tiongco*

COMEBACK STORIES ARE HEADLINERS. In traditional tales, legendary sports games and polarizing political races, the underdog frequently upsets the competition, bringing onlookers to the edges of their seats until a victor is determined. Perhaps one of the most interesting comebacks of our generation presents itself in the form of a fabric: denim. Season after season, denim does just that—it comes back.

Instead of taking a seasonal hiatus, denim boosts its reputation by reinventing itself, leaving us in awe of its everlasting spirit. In reality, the denim “trend” actually defies the definition of a trend, which refers to something that’s ephemeral—something that will soon be collecting dust in the back of a closet. Denim entered the U.S. as a utilitarian uniform in the 18th century, and it’s since become a global staple that defies both geographic and social divides.

“Denim is cyclical,” says Dana Marron, co-owner of local boutique Laguna Supply. “The trends from 20 years ago are back. ... If you hang onto a denim piece long enough, then it will eventually come back.”

From colored and white jeans to denim tops, jackets and flattering boyfriend silhouettes—reminiscent of the decade most remembered for popularizing grunge—the denim styles of yesteryear have met their matches in today’s trends.

## OCEAN BLUES

It’s safe to say that denim suits the city of Laguna well. A surfery-sophisticated setting combined with the fabric’s too-cool attitude makes for a fashion statement unique to the coastal city. “There is a relaxed ease when wearing denim in a beach town,” says Robin Chretien, founder and designer of luxury denim brand Robin’s Jean. “I



think the Lagunans have invented a cool, laid-back style, which can be casual yet stylish at the same time."

Both an artist's community and a walking town, Laguna calls for comfortable and creative wardrobes. A pair of solid, cropped skinny jeans is functional enough for sandy toes at Main Beach and stylish enough to pop in and out of the boutiques of downtown Laguna. "I'm impressed with the women who walk into my shop," Dana says. "I think the Laguna Beach woman has really got it down."

Comfortable temperatures and breezy days give the quintessential Lagunan the freedom to wear denim in a variety of creative ways. Whether the staple shows up in an airier fabric, a lighter color or a shorter silhouette, denim is a mainstay of coastal fashion. "I think Laguna has a unique perspective on denim," says Kendra Pearce, owner of Taim Boutique on Pacific Coast Highway. "We're close enough to LA to pull off really trendy denim [and] we're artsy so we can pull off fun, unique denim, but we still love our classics. ... You'll find a little bit of everything here, and nothing looks out of place."

"We wear denim all the time, so we know how to make it dressy and casual," she continues. "Locals wear denim in every way you could imagine. We see [them] wearing skinny jeans cuffed for a casual look, tucked into boots when it gets a little chilly and with heels for drinks at [The Rooftop Lounge]."

## BOYFRIEND MATERIAL

Given Laguna's casual spirit, it's no wonder that a pant synonymous with comfort in the 1990s has native ties, according to one local trendsetter. Laguna-based personal stylist Leslie Christen says when she was a student at Laguna Beach High School in the late 1990s, jeans from a vintage clothing store called Locals Only, owned by Southern California artist and retail legend Jim Olarte, were must-have pieces.

"He stocked men's Levi's, the original boyfriend jeans," Leslie says. "They had the perfect low-rise, beachy feel [that you could] wear long or shortened for cutoffs. They were perfect. ... He was a pioneer for the trend."

Today boyfriend jeans are back again, and while Locals Only has since closed, other Laguna shops are reintroducing the trend to shoppers. "Laguna Supply always does a great job of stocking the new 'it' brands and styles for denim," Leslie says. "Their customers can always rely on walking out with great pieces."



Simple Boutique offers denim styles for everyone, from skinny jeans to relaxed fits.



Pot-Patch jeans by Robin's Jean



Jeans are styled dressy yet casual at Taim Boutique.

## TAKE CARE

When you find your favorite pair of jeans, you want it to last forever. While the denim trend is considered timeless, in order to make the same thing true for an individual pair of jeans, proper maintenance is required. Here, denim devotee Rachael Dickens of OC Style Report shares some tips to ensure longevity for your beloved blues.

- Always turn jeans inside out before washing.
- Wash jeans in cold water in a washing machine to avoid shrinking them.
- Use a gentle soap, such as Woolite.
- Let jeans air-dry to retain their color.





Melrose Place boutique's managers advocate that men have at least seven varieties of jeans in their arsenals.

Laguna Supply carries a wide range of denim brands including Mother, J Brand, Rag & Bone, Genetic and Current/Elliott. "Mother is the softest denim out there," Dana says. "[Their jeans] are languid and comfy. People like them because they feel like you're wearing sweatpants."

Taking denim's traditionally relaxed vibe to a whole new level, boyfriend jeans are best worn distressed in a medium blue wash for an effortless look that harkens back to the days of Kurt Cobain. Deemed a Laguna staple by Taim's team of stylists, Mavi's boyfriend jeans are one of the more popular versions of the trend for their fit and understated look. "Skinny jeans are still reigning supreme, but you can't beat a great pair of ... boyfriend jeans," Kendra says, adding that Taim plans to carry different varieties of the style through spring.

Located on the corner of PCH and Legion Street, 11th Moon offers a fusion of skinny and boyfriend jeans made by New York-based women's brand 6397. The label's Loose Skinny jeans feature a fit that's a tad snugger than your typical pair of boyfriend jeans, but the comfort level is just as impressive.

#### FROM THE TOP DOWN

Denim has not only taken over the scene from the waist down, but it's also inching its way upward.

From a chambray (a plain weave fabric that looks like denim) shirt to a timeless jean jacket, the ways to embrace denim up top are endless.

"Laguna is so denim-obsessed that it's not just about one piece—you have to have the perfect denim item for each category from jeans, jackets and shirts," Dana says. "... It's funny because everyone has denim in their closet, but they're still searching for the perfect pair."

A versatile garment, a chambray button-down shirt works as a blouse or a light jacket when worn open over a T-shirt or tank top. After a day spent splashing in the water, it also transitions well as a bathing suit cover-up. While the piece has been spotted in stores for months, its multifaceted appeal makes it a wardrobe game-changer. It's capable of crossing seasons, and it has paved the way for old trends to make a comeback in sleeker incarnations.

Denim on denim, in particular, has been considered something of a faux pas ever since Britney Spears and Justin Timberlake donned matching head-to-toe denim ensembles for the 2001 American Music Awards. Still, time heals most wounds, and the late-1990s trend is slowly reappearing in a fashionable way, thanks in large part to chambray.

To ease your way into doubling up on denim, pair a chambray top with crisp white jeans.



Loose Skinny jeans by 6397 at 11th Moon

For a bolder look, wear a blue jean that's a few shades darker or lighter than the chambray top. "If you're wearing denim on denim, make sure the materials aren't the same heaviness," says Rachael Dickens, founder of OC Style Report, a Laguna-based online fashion portal designed for Orange County locals.

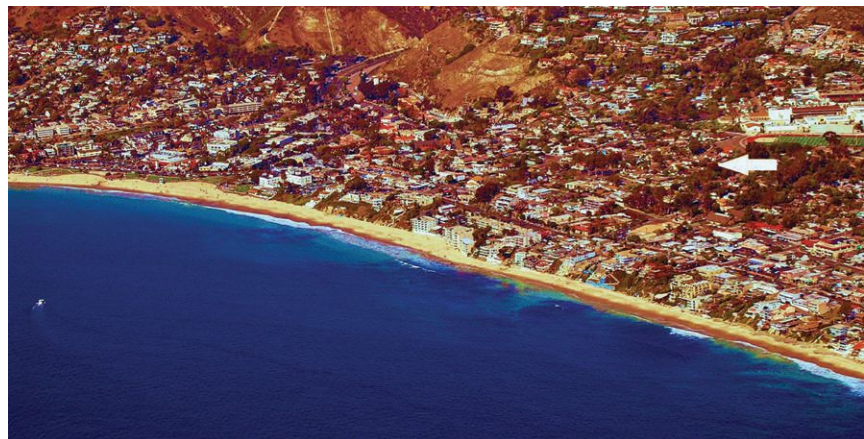
Chambray is a lightweight fabric that's ideal for springtime, but when the wind blows a little stronger in Laguna, consider opting for a heavier denim jacket. A perfect evening accessory, a jean jacket looks best when worn over a sundress with wedges.

While the 1990s version of a denim jacket is a classic to work back into your wardrobe, updated garments incorporate more current trends like leather piping or elements of retro-inspired motorcycle jackets. "[Lagunans] are more sophisticated and they already know what's out there, so they want to see novelty items," says Marsha Gannon, manager of Simple boutique in Laguna. "We [have] a great denim jacket from Citizens [of Humanity] ... and a shirt from Joe's Jeans that's chambray but with stripes."

#### ALL IN THE DETAILS

Denim is breaking the boundaries of conventional patterns this season with jeans that merge contrasting pieces of fabric into one silhouette.





## 476 EL BOSQUE

Laguna Beach

\$1,995,000

Located in the heart of Laguna Beach, this spacious home blends mid-century architecture with classic cottage details. The comfortable single-level floor plan provides ideal family, work and entertainment areas. Beamed ceilings, skylights, French doors and two fireplaces accent the sunlit interiors. Best of all, this elegant property is just a 5-10 minute stroll to beaches, restaurants, Main Beach and the Forest Avenue shops. Great "close-in" site.

### FEATURES:

Approximately 2,700 square feet, 9,000+ square foot parcel, three bedrooms, three baths, large country kitchen, garden-side breakfast room, dining room or office, living & family rooms, bonus room with bath, patios, outdoor dining & decking, two-car garage with storage room.



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Boyfriend jeans by Mother, at Laguna Supply

“People really want to see something new and a little bit more trendy around here,” Marsha says. “We always have basics like skinny, [cropped] and boyfriend jeans, but we always bring in novelty pieces. ... It can’t be too crazy, though; people still prefer items that are easy to wear.”

Patchwork jeans offer a unique way to mix up—literally—your standard pair of blues. Robin’s Jean, for instance, carries its own version of patchwork jeans for men and women. “Everyone [has] a way of customizing their own jeans, and I brought that feeling back with the Pot-Patch jeans,” Robin says.

In addition to patchwork, Robin’s Jean has introduced another interesting element into its spring line. The men’s Motard, or motorcycle-style jean, features knee pleats that allow maximum movement and comfort, Robin says.

In order to achieve a perfect fit, Pete Surprenant, owner of North Menswear on Glenneire Street, suggests purchasing a pair of raw, selvedge denim jeans. “It’s a commitment because you can’t wash it for three months, but anything that takes time and effort usually ends up being more rewarding,” Pete says. “When you buy raw denim and break it in, it tailors to your body better. ... The quality of the raw denim is unmatched—and it will last a much longer time.

“For a long time, denim came with treatments



North Menswear specializes in raw, selvedge denim that forms to the wearer’s body over time.

and washes to make it look like it’s faded, but if you do it yourself, it gives you more of an authentic look,” he adds. North Menswear carries several versions of raw denim, the shop’s most popular brands being the Nashville, Tenn.-based Imogene + Willie as well as Left Field and Williamsburg Garment Co. “The Barton jean by Imogene + Willie is great,” Pete says. “It fits well and the legs are super straight; there’s no nonsense. It’s a classic, timeless piece.”

Melrose Place boutique, owned by Johnny Alper and Gila Leibovitch, stocks a large assortment of jeans for men, and manager Eddy Rubin says that every man should have at least seven pairs of jeans

in his rotation in a medley of different washes and styles: medium blue, dark blue, black, distressed, “rock ’n’ roll,” an earth tone and rustic gray.

“The three pairs every girl needs are skinny black jeans, a clean-cut trouser and a medium blue boyfriend jean that’s a little distressed,” Rachael says. “They’re the three jeans that allow you to have diversity in your denim.”

There’s no secret to finding the right pair—it’s just a matter of trial and error. “Try everything, and be open to everything,” Rachael continues. “If you find a brand or style that works for you, then stick with it and buy it in different colors, prints and trends.” **LBM**



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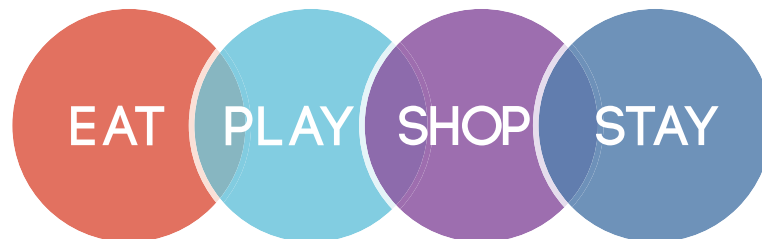


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# TAG TEAM

*Go behind the kitchen door to meet some of the area's top chefs and their dedicated sidekicks.*

*By Ryan Ritchie | Photos by Dhrumil Desai*

IN 1967, THE BEATLES RELEASED "WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM My Friends," a tune about the importance of relying on strong relationships to get us through the good times and the bad. While the track relays a valuable lesson about positive personal affairs, the message of the song also applies to work associates, and nowhere is this concept of maintaining healthy business relations more significant than the inside of a kitchen.

Head chefs get the acclaim. Their names may be written on the menus and in headlines, but no successful restaurant is a one-person operation. Diners often don't think of the staff when they're enjoying an exquisite meal, but they should because the overall quality of a restaurant isn't simply dependent on the head chef's talent.

Powerful connections between head chefs and their staffs are especially apparent at five local eateries. Though these bonds may differ in terms of specifics, they're all based on the same cornerstones of mutual respect and understanding. Here are just a handful of Laguna's most powerful pairs that make some serious culinary magic together.







Executive Chef Craig Connole (right) and sous chef Zefferino Hernandez liken their relationship to that between a coach and a player.

CRAIG CONNOLE, EXECUTIVE CHEF  
ZEFFERINO HERNANDEZ, SOUS CHEF  
**K'YA BISTRO BAR**

As head chef at three restaurants, including K'ya Bistro Bar, Craig Connole has many responsibilities that extend beyond cooking. The 49-year-old says the public often doesn't consider that there are "so many things that need to be done" when operating a restaurant. These duties include preparation work, taking inventories, placing orders for the next day and sorting ingredients. Such a hectic schedule sees many chefs putting in 18-hour workdays; consider that Craig has three restaurants to run, and it's easy to understand why he does "very little cooking" at K'ya. Thankfully, he has sous chef Zefferino Hernandez for assistance.

"He runs the restaurant," Craig says. "I make the menus and the recipes. I create all the dishes and then I show him how to do it. ... He's basically the chef."

Craig is in charge of all creative decisions, which include developing recipes and menus. In addition, part of his job, he says, is to show Zefferino how to execute the dishes and inspect the finished products for consistency. The head chef likens this managerial role and Zefferino's job to the relationship between a coach and a player.

"I show him how to make it and how I want it to look on the plate," Craig says of the pair's system. "They run with that, and I watch what everybody's doing."

K'ya shares a kitchen with The Rooftop Lounge, where all meals—including spreads for on-site banquets—originate. The kitchen was built to accommodate approximately 80 seats at any given time, but with food for The Rooftop Lounge and banquets being prepared concurrently, Craig's staff typically prepares meals for nearly 220 guests. Because of this frenzied pace, Craig often asks Zefferino for advice with everything from service setup to making things move more quickly in the kitchen, a place the head chef describes as "a crazy spot."

Lest anyone think Craig is unappreciative of Zefferino, the head chef emphasizes that he's thankful to have a sous chef who can execute his menus to his liking. The result, he admits, isn't always fair to Zefferino.

"He makes it easy for me to look at the big picture," Craig says. "I get the glory and he does all the work."



DAVID FUÑE, EXECUTIVE CHEF  
JULIO AGUILAR, CHEF DE CUISINE  
**SPLASHES AT  
SURF & SAND RESORT**

Starting a new job is rarely easy, especially when that job puts you in a position of authority over people who have worked for the company for years. David Fuñe realized this when in April he became executive chef at Splashes at Surf & Sand Resort; to help ease the transition, the 42-year-old relied on Chef de Cuisine Julio Aguilar. The result, David says, has been “a dream come true.”

David adds that he knew that he was in a positive working atmosphere from the very beginning when Julio went out of his way to help the executive chef however he could. Julio was working seven days a week at the time, but made sure not to saddle David with additional responsibilities.

“He didn’t shovel a bunch of stuff on my plate because he was overworked,” David says. “He was really solid.”

Before David’s arrival, Splashes served Mediterranean and California cuisine, but the new head chef chose to refocus the menu primarily on California-style dishes. The change meant a shift to cooking with more fresh, local ingredients and seafood. Julio, who had previously worked at Splashes for six years, easily could’ve put up a fight against the transition, but instead he adjusted to David’s direction—a reaction that has benefitted both men.

“He’s literally my right-hand man, if not the point man in Splashes,” David says. “He’s taken off and done stuff on his own that I [didn’t] have to ask him to do. He focuses on keeping natural flavors predominant.”

David adds that he took off three days during the winter—an extended leave for a chef—leaving Julio alone with a “sizable prep list” that could’ve been cause for concern. Throw in the fact that the dishes were holiday meals not found on Splashes’ regular menu, and the restaurant easily might have descended into chaos. David didn’t have the time to explain everything to Julio before leaving, but when the head chef returned he discovered that Julio had handled the kitchen without a hitch.

“It was phenomenal,” he adds. “There’s no way I could have done that three to five months ago. Right now we’re seeing eye to eye on everything. It’s been really good.”

Executive Chef David Fuñe (right) calls Chef de Cuisine Julio Aguilar his “right-hand man.”



LINDSAY SMITH-ROSALES,  
EXECUTIVE CHEF/CO-OWNER  
JIMMY CORONA, SOUS CHEF  
**NIRVANA GRILLE**

As Nirvana Grille enters into its sixth year of operation in Laguna, Executive Chef Lindsay Smith-Rosales feels a sense of contentment with the business she shares with her husband, Luis. That satisfaction is due in large part to her sous chef, Jimmy Corona. As friends for more than 10 years (Jimmy once worked as a chef with Luis at The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel), it seemed like a natural move for him to join the husband-wife team a few years after they opened Nirvana Grille in 2008. Now a cornerstone of the restaurant for nearly a year, Jimmy says he's finally in "his happy place."


The trio's strong foundation of friendship ultimately gave Lindsay the confidence she needed to let someone come in and take the reins in the kitchen. "I naturally have an instilled trust in him," she says. "I know whatever happens in our day is not going to stop us from tomorrow coming together again. ... And now my day is really spent running the day-to-day operations, ... and I never had the time or the trust to really let go that much before in the kitchen."

For Lindsay, Luis brought a sense of accountability and commitment to the team at Nirvana Grille, in addition to helping things run more smoothly in the back of the house so that she can focus on the larger picture. "... He's basically my work husband," Lindsay jokes. "I can get mad at him and the next day we've made up."

Jimmy adds, "We have our moments ... but I want them to succeed."

It's this same sense of mutual respect that has brought Nirvana Grille the success it enjoys today. But like partners in any other relationship, Lindsay and Jimmy admit that they don't always agree with each other. When it comes to experimenting with new menu items, Jimmy isn't afraid to tell Lindsay what he thinks or if he doesn't like something. But the couple always come up with a compromise, as good friends do. An example of this is with their new menu, which debuts this March.

Most importantly, at the end of the day, the two know that they can count on each other. "We are family," Lindsay says. "... He's like a brother to me, so it's an important relationship in my life." —A.T.



Executive Chef Lindsay Smith-Rosales' strong friendship with sous chef Jimmy Corona gave her confidence in Jimmy's ability to helm the kitchen.



MARC COHEN,  
EXECUTIVE CHEF/CO-OWNER  
TIM GARNER, GENERAL MANAGER  
JOE GUILLENA,  
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS  
**230 FOREST AVENUE**

Executive Chef Marc Cohen doesn't have a person to help him run 230 Forest Avenue; he has people.

The chef holds weekly meetings with Tim Garner, the restaurant's general manager, and Joe Guillena, its director of operations, to discuss topics like potential wine specials, wine pairings and culinary events happening across Laguna. Marc has the final say in all aspects of operating his business, but no decision is made without the agreement of all three men.

"All decisions are the decisions we feel are the right way going forward," he says. "Once we make a decision and we are in agreement, we follow it through. Once we agree that's the path we're going to take, we back it until it's over."

Marc jokingly describes his relationship with Tim and Joe as a three-headed monster, but the 43-year-old is quick to point out the different functions the men serve at 230 Forest Avenue. Joe's role involves working with Marc to determine how to get the best deals for customers, what the servers are capable of selling and which dishes the customers will enjoy most. With Tim, Marc collaborates on developing the dishes and selecting wines that are best for both the customers and servers.

"Tim knows my food, and he understands what I'm trying to accomplish," Marc says. "He also knows the customers and understands what he thinks they want. Then it's my job and Joe's job to secure prices that are affordable to the customer."

Marc notes that he's "absolutely open" to suggestions from Tim and Joe, which often become topics of discussion during their weekly meetings. The head chef trusts his employees' opinions because he believes they are just as invested in the business as he is. That level of trust directly contributes to the success of 230 Forest Avenue, Marc says.

"You're only as good as the people you work with and for," he muses. "They have respect for me and what I do, and I have respect for them and what they do. It's a very healthy relationship."

Executive Chef Marc Cohen (left) says that he collaborates with General Manager Tim Garner (middle) and Director of Operations Joe Guillena to develop dishes and select wines.



Executive Chef Azmin Ghahreman (right) praises his chef de cuisine, Devin Wells, for his work ethic and passion.

TREVER HOEHNE

**AZMIN GHAHREMAN, EXECUTIVE CHEF  
DEVIN WELLS, CHEF DE CUISINE  
SAPPHIRE LAGUNA**

Devin Wells is chef de cuisine at Sapphire Laguna, but he didn't start that way.

The 33-year-old was a student at the Culinary Institute of America when in 2005 he met Azmin Ghahreman, who at the time was the executive chef at The St. Regis Monarch Beach. When Azmin left that position to open Sapphire Laguna, Devin joined him as a junior sous chef. From there he was promoted to sous chef, eventually landing his current position as chef de cuisine. According to Azmin, Devin's climb up the culinary ladder is a result of one thing: his work ethic.

"He's always hungry for more," Azmin says. "He can go anywhere and open his own restaurant, and I have no doubt he'll be successful. But he wants to learn more."

Azmin and Devin share similar philosophies in the kitchen, which makes the head chef's job easier. Rather than having to explain which spice to add to a certain dish, Azmin knows his chef de cuisine has the instincts and knowledge to create delicious meals without having to be told how to do so. Their like-minded attitudes toward cooking are products of years spent together in kitchens, Azmin says.

"We're like two police officer partners—'You cover the left side and I'll cover the right side,' " he jokes of the pair's relationship. "Same with us. He understands what this business is all about."

One might assume that the two men have had disagreements that led to tense moments in the kitchen; after all, they've worked together for nearly a decade. Azmin, however, is quick to ensure that he and Devin have "never had a bad day together" because the two men understand how to deal with potential issues before they escalate.

"If I know he's mad about something, I either talk with him or stay away until he comes down," Azmin continues. "He's always respectful and once you respect someone or someone gains your respect, then no matter what you say or do, business is business."



Chef de Cuisine Casey Overton (right) describes his partnership with sous chef Benjamin Martinek as a "balance of creativity and hard work."

CASEY OVERTON, CHEF DE CUISINE  
BENJAMIN MARTINEK, SOUS CHEF  
**THE LOFT AT  
MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH**

The Loft at Montage Laguna Beach, one of the area's most critically acclaimed restaurants, offers not only breakfast, lunch and dinner but also bistro menus, making the planning process "nearly impossible to run by yourself," according to Chef de Cuisine Casey Overton.

That's where 30-year-old sous chef Benjamin Martinek comes in.

"Having Ben as my right-hand man is such a relief," Casey says. "I rely on his added creativity along with my direction to help drive the restaurant. He is the 'boots on the ground' representation of me."

The two men have worked together for roughly three years, beginning when Benjamin was cooking for another Montage restaurant, Studio.

The Loft is known for simple dishes that typically highlight three to four seasonal ingredients—an uncomplicated approach that mirrors the nature of Casey's relationship with Benjamin. The 31-year-old chef de cuisine describes his partnership with his sous chef as a "great balance of creativity and hard work" that sets the foundation for the restaurant's future.

"There is a shared spirit of where we see The Loft going," Casey says. "We have a great time working together. He is a great trainer and really understands cuisine."

Having two creative people in a kitchen can cause differences in opinions, but Casey explains that he and Benjamin share a mutual respect for each other that often settles any disputes. And when respect isn't the answer, there's always food.

"We are able to resolve [conflicts] with a shared mutual respect and open communication," Casey muses of the partnership. "Or, just a dish made with thoughtfulness is always a great equalizer." **LBM**



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# Weddings

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# KEEP ON TRUCKIN'

*A fairly new phenomenon for foodies—food trucks—makes it possible to savor gourmet cuisine from the sidewalk.*

*By Debbie Miller | Photos by Jody Tiongco*

THE FOOD TRUCK SCENE IN ORANGE COUNTY has evolved rapidly over the past five years, and it's proven that this is more than just a passing fad. In addition to regular food truck stops, the region has held several truck-driven events over the past few years, including the OC Foodie Fest in 2010 and 2011, the Munchathon 5K and food truck festival in 2011, and the Laguna Beach Food Truck Festival in 2012 and 2013. Plus, this past season of Breakers football at Laguna Beach High School featured Food Truck Fridays, where the top food trucks in OC (including ones featured here) set up shop outside the Friday night games.

As food trucks have now become more

commonplace, with designated weekly stops as well as rolling (no pun intended) events, the OC region has certainly embraced the eclectic trend of dining on wheels. Best of all, whether it serves gourmet waffles or comfort food classics, there's a truck to please every taste bud.

## WAFF-N-ROLL

Longtime Laguna resident Brian Fast debuted his popular truck, Waff-N-Roll, early last year. The concept is built around waffle sandwiches and features selections like pulled pork, tandoori chicken, smoked turkey and, for the vegetarians, rosemary balsamic mushroom.

"Waff-N-Roll bakes our oil-free—yet decadent—thin and crispy waffles and fills them with foodie-inspired goodness," Brian says. While we don't usually think of waffles as being healthy, most of the savory options aren't as bad as you'd think. Granted, there are also sweet sandwiches with fillings like dulce de leche, tangy lemon curd and berries, and Nutella.

"I got involved in the food truck business for two reasons," Brian says. "First, I needed a challenge. I developed an amazing waffle baking and sandwich process and needed a launch pad. Second, as a restaurant owner of 30 years, I was somewhat terrified by the thought of a kitchen with tires and a





Handcrafted ice cream sandwiches from Chunk-n-Chip incorporate only simple, natural ingredients.

transmission. ... Maybe I was just looking for an environment where more stuff breaks.”

The OC waffle truck has seen great success over the past year and is still enjoying a busy schedule. In addition to participating in a variety of festivals, the Waff-N-Roll truck can regularly be found at various schools around south Orange County.

These days, it's more than evident that Brian loves what he does: “Every day, we introduce the curious masses to the growing worldwide trend of waffle sandwiches and convert them into happy, waffle-sandwich-craving fanatics.” (waffnroll.com; Twitter: @waffnroll)

## BACON MANIA

Husband-and-wife team Jay and Karen DiEugenio launched BACON MANia in 2010, making it one of the oldest trucks in OC. They figured that with

their experience as “professional tailgaters,” they’d be the perfect people to jump into an industry that was just beginning to boom. Soon enough, their menu was garnering enough attention that the business was able to expand to the LA area.

The truck, which takes American comfort food classics and makes them better with bacon, has seen a variety of successes, including being featured on the Cooking Channel’s “Eat Street” in an episode titled “Bacon Mania Baby” and on the Discovery Channel’s “United States of Bacon” in an episode named for its signature dish, the Jack Back Sammie. The duo has also appeared on Carson Daly’s AMP 97.1 radio show and the KTLA 5 Morning News, among other outlets.

When it's not busy being in the spotlight, BACON MANia's team is active in the local area, and every week embraces the opportunity to work

with members of the community to raise funds for schools, churches and other causes. In fact, you can find Jay and Karen's two sons, Nick and Luc, working hard aboard the truck as well.

“Many people don't realize it, but most of the time when you see food trucks at community events, they are donating a percentage of their sales back to a charitable organization,” Karen says. “It is an unexpected perk to this business—the feeling that you are helping to make your community a better place.”

Karen describes BACON MANia's menu as “unabashedly American,” “unapologetic man food” and “food like you wish your mom used to make.” The menu includes grilled cheeses, pulled pork, chili, sliders and sandwiches.

And then there are unconventional dishes that really push the envelope. “Mostly these dishes involve wrapping something unexpected in bacon—a little trick we picked up during our tailgating days. Brownies, PB and J, mac and cheese, chicken wings ... we'll wrap it and fry it, and our fans love it.” (baconmaniatruck.com; Twitter: @baconmania)

## CHUNK-N-CHIP

If you have a sweet tooth, you have to try Chunk-n-Chip. One of the original OC dessert trucks, Chunk-n-Chip offers artisanal ice cream sandwiches that combine warm and soft Chunk-n-Chip cookies with one of the truck's many flavors of ice cream.

Chunk-n-Chip takes pride in being “experts” in crafting the most delectable ice cream sandwich in town. In addition to cruising around in their popular truck, the dessert brand's staffers are also



Jay and Karen DiEugenio debuted their BACON MANia truck in 2010.



BACON MANia's Jack Back Sammie features sharp cheddar and smoked bacon.





Waff-N-Roll's popular pulled pork sandwich is topped with house-made mango-chipotle barbecue sauce.



Inside the Waff-N-Roll kitchen

BOTH PHOTOS COURTESY OF WAFF-N-ROLL

## REGULAR FOOD TRUCK STOPS

Laguna Beach High School (seasonal)  
625 Park Ave., Laguna Beach  
September through November,  
Fridays, 5:30-9 p.m.

Laguna Hills High School  
25401 Paseo de Valencia, Laguna Hills  
Thursdays, 5-8 p.m.

Brandman University  
16355 Laguna Canyon Rd., Irvine  
Thursdays, 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Orange County Great Park  
6990 Marine Way, Irvine  
Sundays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Irvine Lanes  
3415 Michelson Dr., Irvine  
Tuesdays, 5-9:30 p.m.

Parking lot at 1401 Dove St.,  
Newport Beach  
Wednesdays, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

OC Fair & Event Center  
88 Fair Dr., Costa Mesa  
Wednesdays, 5:30-9 p.m.;  
Thursdays, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

available for catering (they do a lot of weddings), either with the food truck or just an ice cream "sammich" station.

CEO and owner Claudia Gonzalez had been selling craft ice cream "sammiches" seasonally at festivals since 2007, and saw the food truck scene as a great opportunity to expand. The Chunk-n-Chip truck debuted in August 2010 at the OC Foodie Fest at the Honda Center in Anaheim, where it was named the second most popular truck at the festival by Yelp. Since then, it's been a full-time operation for Claudia.

"We hand-make our treats with oven-warm, ooey-goey cookies and honest-to-goodness ice cream. We are a family-run, small batch business, so we make both cookies and ice cream from scratch with premium yet simple, nural ingredients," Claudia explains. "No artificial what-chamacallits or mass production—just old school craftsmanship and a ton of love."

While they do carry the classics (like chocolate chip cookie with vanilla bean ice cream), they're all about taking food to the next level with adventurous flavors like lemon zest cookies with



Chef Jose Ignacio Piaggio (right) shuttered his brick-and-mortar storefront in favor of a truck in 2009.



## TRACK YOUR TRUCK

Use these websites to track down your favorite meal on wheels.

[roaminghunger.com/oc](http://roaminghunger.com/oc)  
[foodtrucksmat.com](http://foodtrucksmat.com)  
[thefoodtrucker.com](http://thefoodtrucker.com)  
[lookingforfoodtrucks.com](http://lookingforfoodtrucks.com)

lavender-blueberry ice cream or their Champagne cookie with strawberry-balsamic vinegar and cracked pepper ice cream.

It's clear that Claudia couldn't be happier to be in this business. "What I love the most are the smiles and excitement we create from delivering the ultimate, hands-down ice cream sandwich experience. In particular, seeing a newbie's reaction to their first bite ... the smile of a kid having a new toy, with chocolate and ice cream smeared on their face. Now that's priceless for us." (chunknchip.com; Twitter: @chunknchip)

## PIAGGIO ON WHEELS

Piaggio on Wheels is Orange County's original Argentine food truck. After owning a restaurant in downtown Brea for seven years, the truck's founder, Jose Ignacio Piaggio, decided to start a food truck. The truck launched in 2009 amid the economic downturn.

"With a truck, there's less overhead than there is at an actual restaurant," Jose says. "Because we can move around, there are a lot more opportunities for where food service is needed."

The Piaggio truck serves skirt steak tacos, chimichurri, sausage and milanesa sandwiches, skirt steak and chimi fries, and dulce de leche. Piaggio on Wheels is most known, however, for its signature Argentine empanadas, which Jose has been making for almost 30 years. His savory recipe has traveled from his native Argentina to his restaurants in Brazil and California, and it's now the trademark item of his food truck.

The entire menu has an Argentine twist. Popular options include taco, burrito and quesadilla creations, as well as a famous lomito sandwich made with slow-braised pork, a choripan made with traditional Argentine sausage, the chicken milanesa sandwich and Piaggio's popular version of pulled pork paired with its addictive chimichurri sauce.

For Jose, mobility is one of the most enticing aspects of the food truck business. "It gives me the freedom to move around and go to different events, meet different people, be in different situations versus just being in one location."

The truck has a few regular stops, participating in the OC DinDin-a-GoGo event every Tuesday



Tamarindo Truck's ceviche combines the flavors of fresh fish, lime, tomato, red onion, cilantro and avocado.

at Irvine Lanes bowling center as well as the Food Truck Fare on Wednesdays and Thursdays at the OC Fair & Event Center. (piaggioonwheels.com; Twitter: @piaggioonwheels)

## TAMARINDO TRUCK

Who doesn't want fresh Mexican food on the go? That's where Tamarindo Truck, which serves up authentic Mexican cuisine across Orange County, comes in. Its concept is simple: Bring the best that traditional Mexican street food has to offer to the curbs of Southern California.

The truck is a family business, with husband Pedro Resendiz helming the kitchen and wife Sarah overseeing the logistical aspects of the operation. The couple had always wanted to open a restaurant, and after living out of the country and returning home, they decided it was as good a time as ever to pursue their dream.

"Pedro had always cooked in other chefs' kitchens, and I was a behavior therapist working with children with autism. We thought a food truck would be a nice start to get our feet wet," Sarah says.

Tamarindo Truck offers truly original Mexican cuisine. No crazy foams, no unrecognizable ingredients or cinchy menu items. The No. 1 thing that makes Tamarindo unique, though, is that

everything served is made from scratch.

"We use only the best high-quality ingredients and source local and organic whenever possible," Sarah says. "We don't serve anything from a can, and buy fresh ingredients to roast off all of our salsas, marinades, sauces and spreads each morning. We are serious supporters of the local slow food scene and eating real food—real food for real people."

One thing Sarah loves the most about the business is when people eat the food and just "get it"—they can taste the love that goes into it, or it transports them back to something their mother or grandmother used to make.

"There is such a hype around food these days: calories, carbs, eating on the run, et cetera. Food is meant to be shared and enjoyed with those who are near and dear to you. Food is meant to bring people together. We love when our food does that; it's such a great feeling." (tamarindotruck.com; Twitter: @tamarindotruck)

These well-known food trucks have been spotted around Orange County as well as around Laguna, especially during the high school football season. So keep your eyes open and your stomachs empty, because you never know when you might run into your next favorite food truck. **LBM**





Executive Chef Lindsay Smith-Rosales of Nirvana Grille plans to experiment with rosemary and lavender accents in this spring's cocktails.





# GETTING CRAFTY

*Tantalize your palate this spring with craft cocktails from some of Laguna's hottest eateries.*

*By Kelly Shannon | Photos by Jody Tiongco*

IN A PLACE LIKE LAGUNA BEACH, THERE'S AN ARTIST TO BE FOUND ON EVERY corner. From jewelers and glassworkers to painters and photographers, the local community is far from experiencing a shortage of creative talent. But what about the artists who specialize in another medium?

For Laguna's star mixologists, the bar is a blank canvas and craft cocktails are this season's masterpieces. The city's bartending greats combine knowledge of the past with a keen understanding of contemporary style. Fusing flavors, they create boundary-pushing beverages that leave us constantly thirsting for more, and their ingenuity shines as brightly as their ability to carry a conversation.

With many Laguna eateries now mirroring the seasons by highlighting only the freshest ingredients, it's no surprise handcrafted cocktails have become a staple on local menus. Laguna's craft cocktails are offering our palates more flavor, dimension and originality than we've ever experienced before, as bartenders deliver new and interesting drinks that incorporate things like house-infused vodkas, flavored bitters, vibrant garnishes and other additives.

Unlike the act of pulling back the tab of a chilled can, the complexity of concocting handcrafted specialty cocktails is an art best left to the experts—so, as the sweet smells of spring punctuate the coastal air, let's sip our way across the city.

## SIGNATURE HITS

Walking into Broadway by Amar Santana is like stepping through a portal into vintage New York City. The restaurant is consistently busy; the bar, pleasantly packed. And while it's the food at Broadway that usually steals the show, the restaurant's craft cocktail creators are also some of the best in Laguna.

Broadway bartender AnnAlise Ventre, whose youth belies the 10 years she's spent in the restaurant industry, says the freedom involved in mixing drinks is what keeps her behind the bar. "I love bartending because we get to be so creative," she remarks. "I love being able to mix different flavors and ingredients and try new things."

Still, despite her passion for innovation AnnAlise maintains a deep respect for the classics. Her historical knowledge and interest in spirits is akin to that of a dedicated professor. "I love the history behind all of it, learning about the history of spirits and how they've come into play today," she says, comparing the skill of mixing cocktails to cooking. "You have to be able to put something together that not only tastes good, but surprises you and pleases you."

At Broadway, the attention paid to all of the components of a craft cocktail extends to even the slightest details. "Any juice, any syrup is made here by hand by the bartenders," AnnAlise says. The restaurant's Moscow mule, served in the traditional copper cup, is a crowd favorite, and Broadway prides itself on making





TREVER HOEHNE

The Selanne at Selanne Steak Tavern



Sapphire Laguna's seasonal cocktails incorporate house-infused mint, espresso and basil vodkas.

its ginger beer in house (it's also served on tap).

The harmony between the bar and the kitchen creates a cohesive dining experience. "Every night the kitchen will ask the bartenders what produce we need to order for tomorrow. Because we shop with local produce companies, nothing is shipped," AnnAlise says. "We make sure to use the most seasonal, local and sustainable produce."

In addition to staple cocktails like the Moscow mule, the restaurant embraces seasonality with a list of specialty cocktails that highlights the freshest ingredients possible and changes every few months as new produce becomes available. "Since winter happened so late this year, a few of the winter favorites will stay on our cocktail menu for spring," AnnAlise says.

A few blocks south of Broadway by Amar Santana sits Mare Culinary Lounge on Pacific Coast Highway, a restaurant that's become famous for a special craft blend of its own.

Tucked beneath the Holiday Inn, the eatery is home to one of the most colorful and entertaining bartenders in town. Luigi Avalos, whose titles include manager, head server and bartender, dotes on his most prized creation, the Marerita. Dreamed up by Luigi, the Marerita is Mare's trademark margarita, blended with locally sourced fresh fruits and herbs grown on the property. Mare's bartenders even make their own agave nectar, which is unbelievably clear, pure and delicious, eliminating the need for a sweetener like triple sec.

"We use Tres Sietes Silver Tequila, organic agave nectar, freshly squeezed Perricone orange juice,

## DIY GIN BUCK COCKTAIL FROM SELANNE STEAK TAVERN

Make like a true bartender and craft this simple cocktail at home. "This drink is a cross between a mojito and a Moscow mule, with the addition of gin," says Mike Blash, bar manager at Selanne Steak Tavern. " ... The flavors melt together

nicely and the fizzy 'pop' of the ginger beer cleans the palate for the next drink."

2 ounces Death's Door Gin  
8-10 mint leaves  
¾ ounce fresh lime juice  
½ ounce simple syrup  
Ginger beer

Muddle the mint leaves in the bottom of a bucket glass. Then, fill the glass with ice, add the simple syrup, lime juice and gin. Stir the drink to mix it, and finish by filling the glass with ginger beer. Garnish with a lime.



Luigi Avalos of Mare Culinary Lounge adds heat to his signature Marerita with Calabrian peppers.



fresh basil, lime, lemon, [a] splash of soda water and the Calabrian pepper,” Luigi says, eager to discuss the logistics of the restaurant’s food and beverages. “The orange juice cuts the acid from the pepper. Basil gives you the sweetness. You feel the warmth of the pepper, which wakes you up. ... But the secret to the Marerita is: Don’t stop drinking it, otherwise it might get spicy.”

Just a mile down PCH from Mare you’ll find one of Laguna’s newest additions, Selanne Steak Tavern, located adjacent to the Surf & Sand Resort. Though it only debuted in fall of 2013, the restaurant’s bar is something of a throwback to an era of classic cocktailing, and it features a staff that’s fully versed in Laguna’s dining culture.

The bar’s manager, Mike Blash, previously logged time at Three Seventy Common Kitchen + Drink and the now-defunct Sorrento Grille. “I’ve grown up in a bar,” says Mike, an industry professional who has spent the past 20 years accruing experience as a bar back, bartender and bar manager.

A scout of local produce, Mike shops primarily at the Laguna Beach, Huntington Beach and Irvine farmers markets. His cocktail menu always has a seasonal focus, yet also plays to his clientele’s requests. “Simple ingredients are key,” he says. “The more pure the drinks are, the better they taste. All our syrups and juices are made fresh.”

For a taste of one of Laguna’s newest cocktail menus, Mike suggests trying the restaurant’s signature beverage, The Selanne, which is made with Woodford Reserve bourbon, fresh lemon and a secret ingredient made in house.

## SEASONALLY INSPIRED

While some of Laguna’s top eateries embrace tradition, others are entirely focused on evolution. Sapphire Laguna is decidedly one of the latter.

“Seasonality and global inspiration influence everything we do, and our menu changes frequently to take advantage of peak seasonal ingredients and international flavors,” says Azmin Ghahreman, owner and head chef at Sapphire. “The spring season brings so many fresh and flavorful ingredients to work with. ... We are all about making everything from scratch, from our purees to our simple syrups; we even infuse our flavored liquors in house, like our spiced rum along with our mint, espresso and basil vodkas.”

Azmin debuted the restaurant in 2007 to much fanfare, and since then he’s made it a point to serve Lagunans only the freshest flavors from their own community. “I love our charming beach town, and I’ve always been committed to supporting our local businesses,” he says. “I make it a point to purchase locally as much as possible. ... You can often find me at our local farmers market on Saturday



The Market Cooler at 230 Forest Avenue is a refreshing combination of gin, cucumber, lime and basil.



Moscow mule at Broadway by Amar Santana

mornings, where I purchase produce and soak up culinary inspiration from our local artisans.”

Much like his globally inspired menu, Azmin’s craft cocktails have an international flair and they’re known to incorporate fresh seasonal ingredients and unique flavor combinations that excite even the most adventurous palates. He encourages his bar staff to share their cocktail knowledge with guests and help them discover new drinks. “I enjoy experimenting behind the bar with different ingredients to create new flavor combinations,” he adds. “I also encourage my talented bartenders to do the same—some have created signature craft cocktails that are on our menu today.”

Leaving Sapphire, travel a few blocks up PCH and you’ll hit 230 Forest Avenue, one of downtown Laguna’s culinary hot spots. The restaurant’s bar

features craft cocktails and some of the most buzz-worthy martinis around. “Our cocktail ideas come from all over, from the places our staff has come from, where they grew up, where they’ve worked. ... That’s a factor to our drink menu,” says Rebecca Rule, a bartender and server at 230 Forest.

Seasonal cocktails are fixtures of the restaurant’s menu, and the Market Cooler is already one of its most popular handcrafted warm-weather sippers. The refreshing beverage consists of Bombay Sapphire gin, cucumber, lime and basil—the perfect finish to a day spent on the sand at Main Beach.

More local flair is served up inside nearby Nirvana Grille, owned and operated by Lindsay Smith-Rosales. “We’re going to try some new things,” Executive Chef Lindsay says of this season’s offerings at Nirvana. “Expect elements that capture the lightness of spring, like lavender and rosemary accents in our cocktails.

“We’ll [also] have a great passion fruit martini that has fresh organic passion fruit puree we make with our house-made simple syrup and a cayenne sugar rim,” she adds. “You get tart, sweet and spicy altogether.” Signature drinks will remain on the menu as well, but seasonally Nirvana will experiment with additional craft cocktails that incorporate strawberries, blueberries, cilantro and chilies.

With so many tasty sips being poured at bars across Laguna this season, no cocktail craving will go unquenched—and with top-notch craft drinks incorporating accents like all-natural sweeteners, herbs and produce, there’s no better time to sample Laguna’s bounty. **LBM**



Clockwise from top:  
Executive Chef Craig Strong  
of Montage Laguna Beach's  
Studio restaurant; trimmings  
are composted at Three  
Seventy Common Kitchen  
+ Drink; the Tuscan kale  
salad uses produce from the  
Montage garden; Executive  
Chef Lindsay Smith-Rosales  
of Nirvana Grille uses fresh  
eggs from her own chickens.







# GREEN CUISINE

*Laguna restaurants take their sustainable practices even further with local and organic food, energy conservation, composting and recycling.*

*By Sharael Kolberg | Photos by Jody Tiongco*



LAGUNA BEACH RESIDENTS HAVE FOUGHT HARD TO protect open space and rallied together to keep the ocean clean. Locals also can help preserve our town's sustainability by fighting with forks. Demanding food that is local, organic and seasonal is better for our bodies, our town and our planet.

Several Laguna Beach chefs and restaurants are making a concerted effort to serve delicious dishes with the health of their customers and the planet in mind. Some are even going beyond the food by recycling, using reclaimed building supplies and taking other innovative approaches to be environmentally friendly.

For instance, Madison Square & Garden Cafe uses biodegradable products and a tankless water heater, and was the first restaurant in Laguna to install a grease interceptor, which traps oil and prevents it from clogging the sewer lines. Meanwhile, Zinc Cafe & Market opts for biodegradable to-go containers and was among a handful of Laguna restaurants to participate in a pilot program for composting food scraps this past fall. Whether it's using local produce or keeping food waste out of the landfill, these eco-conscious eateries are taking steps to make their operations even greener.

## GARDEN GROWN

Walking the grounds at the Montage Laguna Beach, the resort's green efforts are evident right away. Strolling up to Studio, the signature on-property restaurant, guests can see the edible garden beds with fresh produce that's used for sustainable menu items, such as the Tuscan

kale salad with purple kohlrabi, duck heart pastrami and focaccia crouton.

Executive Chef Craig Strong says, "Not only is the garden beautiful and a great use of space, it allows us to grow many delicate items that you just can't buy because they have a 24-hour shelf life. They would lose their brightness and freshness if they needed to be shipped. People who come to Studio want their food to be delicious and sustainable, but also beautiful."

The seasonal garden includes items such as pole beans, kale, potatoes, strawberries, lemon trees and a variety of fresh herbs and lettuces. But the garden is just the beginning—Craig strives to be sustainable in most areas of the restaurant. He says a main part of his job is sourcing quality ingredients for the Studio cuisine. "I make many, many phone calls to our suppliers every day about what's in season, where it's coming from, how [it] is ... being grown," Craig says.

This practice of knowing vendors is also important for Executive Chef David Fuñe at Splashes restaurant. He adds, "By meeting very special farmers, fishermen and ranchers ... I gained a feeling of how much care, detail and love they have for each and every animal, egg, flower, green, carrot, berry. ... We preserve all that caring and love that went into providing all this wonderful food to us ... and proudly serve it to our guests."

Living and working on the coast in Laguna Beach, he is passionate about serving fish raised with strict quotas that protect the species for future generations. He tends to favor wild salmon from Alaska, which he says is the







Sapphire Laguna Executive Chef Azmin Ghahreman uses bread and honey from local purveyors.

U.S. benchmark for sustainability. But if he does need to use farmed fish, he makes sure it's raised in a way that's good for the environment and the health of his guests.

"If a customer does request something that might not be considered sustainable, I do the research to make sure we find options that will satisfy them 100 percent and be sustainable," Craig says. "If it's a fish they really like, I try to suggest other options, and the guest might be exposed to something they might not know about, but has the same flavor profile. It's a win-win."

## COMMON GROUND

Since opening Three Seventy Common Kitchen + Drink in 2012, chef Ryan Adams has stayed true to his motto: "Globally Influenced. Domestically Sourced." He tries to use produce grown within 100 miles of Laguna Beach and says it's important for people to become more conscious about eating sustainably. "For the good of the community, the planet and everyone around us," he says. "The population is increasing and people are living longer; if we aren't sustainable, we won't have anything."

His effort to purchase products domestically is evident in the menu with items such as the trout (sustainably farm-raised in Idaho) with potatoes (from California's Central Valley), beans and mushrooms (from the farmers market at the Orange County Great Park in Irvine) and home-made hazelnut brown butter.

Ryan also practices sustainability in other areas of the restaurant, such as reusing tables and chairs from another restaurant, recycling bottles and cans, and working with Waste Management

Orange County to compost food waste rather than sending it to the landfill. Items that can be composted include fruits and vegetables, baked goods, coffee grounds, tea bags, eggshells and paper products. "It may seem like a little bit, but down the line it's actually a lot," Ryan says. "If you're actually thinking about being sustainable, you're probably doing things to reduce your carbon footprint. You just have to be conscious."

Ryan believes that people need to get more involved in their neighborhoods by participating in projects such as community gardens and food composting programs. In an effort to build



Lumberyard has gone green by utilizing reclaimed wood for some of its fixtures.

## SUSTAINABLE CHECKLIST

To find out whether the food you're eating is good for you and the environment, ask the following questions at your favorite eatery.

- Where does the food come from? If it's shipped from across the globe, there's a high carbon footprint, and it's not going to be fresh.
- What are the practices at the farms that grow ingredients used by the restaurant? Are the animals free range and hormone free? Are the vegetables grown without pesticides? Is the beef 100 percent natural and grass fed?
- What does the restaurant do with leftover food? Is it composted, donated or dumped in the trash?
- How does the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program rate the fish served at the restaurant? Avoid yellowfin tuna and Patagonian toothfish—commonly marketed as Chilean sea bass—from certain areas. Visit [seafoodwatch.org](http://seafoodwatch.org) for more info and tips.

community, Three Seventy Common hosts a family-style Sunday Social where guests dine together at one large table. They may select from one of two entrees on a set dinner menu featuring vegetables that are hand-picked by Ryan at local farmers markets.

## PROTECTING MOTHER EARTH

At Sapphire Laguna, conservation is a personal mantra for owner and Executive Chef Azmin Ghahreman. "I am a firm believer that we are born with an expiration date that is stamped. In between, there is a dash," Azmin says. "You



have to make an effort in life and an impact. You can't leave a light on or waste water. If someone doesn't know better, we need to educate them." Azmin practices what he preaches to ensure that his establishment is environmentally friendly.

As for Sapphire's menu, not only does Azmin serve naturally raised chicken, sustainable fish and natural grass-fed American Kobe-style beef but also fair-trade coffee, organic milk and teas. Additionally, he buys local bread and honey from Bread Artisan Bakery and Backyard Bees, respectively.

He typically uses produce that's in season, but doesn't always buy organic because of the high cost that he doesn't want to pass on to customers. "California is the mother load of produce," Azmin says. "I try to use as much as possible within my own world."

Azmin focuses on what's served on the plate, but he also puts sustainability standards into practice throughout the entire restaurant. To protect our coastal community and prevent harmful runoff into the ocean, the restaurant uses grease traps, does not use chemicals to wash floor mats or walkways, and employs water-saving techniques such as a waterless urinal and top-quality ice machine that uses less water.

To conserve fuel and energy, the air conditioner is adjusted so it's not overused, the lights are dimmed and the cooks work together to pool resources. As Azmin explains, "Fuel has to come from the war zones that everyone is fighting over." In addition to limiting energy use, the restaurant also recycles all cardboard, glass, paper, light bulbs and batteries in an effort to protect the environment. Azmin says, "We come from earth and go back to earth, so we need to take care of Mother Nature."

## 'CLEAN' CUISINE

Lindsay Smith-Rosales, executive chef and co-owner of Nirvana Grille, describes the menu as "clean" Californian cuisine. Nirvana only serves all-natural meats, free from hormones and antibiotics, organic free-range poultry and sustainable seafood. The restaurant's practices include buying seasonal produce from farms within California whenever available as well as organic greens, herbs, rice and GMO-free products, as much as possible.

"I believe that we all have a choice to make a difference or ignore it like it is someone else's issue," Lindsay says. "We are all responsible for the Earth and what we consume."

As part of the restaurant's sustainability efforts, Lindsay uses fresh eggs from the five chickens she raises at her home. She says she hopes to start feeding leftover food scraps to the chickens and using their droppings for compost that will turn into soil for a large garden that's in the planning



Maro Wood Grill buys supplies, including its lighting, from local companies to reduce its carbon footprint.

stages now. Lindsay says, "If we can find a way to properly manage this, we will be able to utilize a lot of our food waste at the restaurant."

She admits that restaurants are the biggest generators of food waste while also overconsuming energy and other resources—practices that can be modified to reduce environmental effects. "These are simple changes that can make a positive impact on the community around us and the future for our children," Lindsay says. "If restaurants could work as a group, locally, instead of trying to undermine or outsell each other, we may have a solution to resources that support common goals of responsible purchasing."

## KEEPING IT LOCAL

At Maro Wood Grill, Executive Chef Debra Sims attempts to provide a menu that is sustainable, yet delicious. "I try to minimize the carbon footprint without sacrificing the integrity of the food," Debra says. The restaurant supports local farms and bakeries, and gets its coffee from The Laguna Coffee Co. She says sometimes customers even bring in produce they've grown in Laguna Beach, such as lemons, chilies, herbs or artichokes. The menu at Maro can change nearly daily due to the freshness and availability of seasonal produce. Not only does the restaurant support local food purveyors, but it also tends to buy supplies such as business cards, T-shirts and even light fixtures from local businesses.

Walking that fine line between ecology and food quality can sometimes mean not buying fish locally. "I am leery of serving fish from [the] Pacific Ocean with the Fukushima radiation leak

[in Japan], pollution and urban runoff," Debra says. She prefers to get fish from a sustainable trout farm in Idaho or from Scotland, where she says clean water practices are in place.

One of the most popular, and sustainable, menu items is the Maro Burger made with 8 ounces of grass-fed ground beef, Nueske's bacon, aged white cheddar and locally sourced artisan buns, organic iceberg lettuce, Rosso Bruno tomatoes, red onions and house-made aioli and coleslaw. In the future, Debra says, Maro would like to own a herd of cattle to raise locally, just for the restaurant.

As a consumer, Debra says one of the most important things to do is to know where your food comes from, even at the market. "Pay attention as a consumer and ask questions," she says. "If customers ask, restaurants will do it. Eat at local restaurants, not chain restaurants. Small restaurants can make better choices."

Not only are restaurateurs thinking about the type of food they are serving, but some are also taking it a step further and making green choices when it comes to the building and decor. At Lumberyard, the hostess desk and wine cabinet are made from reclaimed wood, Three Seventy Common's wood columns are made from Forest Stewardship Council-certified lumber, and Maro Wood Grill uses water-wise succulents for tabletop decor and in planter boxes.

So, the next time you find yourself complaining about how pricey some of Laguna's restaurants can be, check what's on the menu. You might be surprised to learn that you're paying for what you get and, chances are, you're getting food that is healthy, delectable and good for Mother Earth. **LBM**





Mark Pomerantz is a local favorite for his custom suiting.

# *the* GROOM'S HANDBOOK

*Don't head down the aisle without consulting our guide to popping the question and prepping for the big day.*

*By Somer Tejwani*

**YOU'RE READY TO PROPOSE, BUT WHAT'S NEXT?** THE wedding planning process can be daunting for everyone involved, but it's especially intimidating to guys, most of whom haven't been inundated with bridal magazines since childhood. To streamline the process, we've compiled some recommendations to get any groom-to-be ready for the big day. So whether you're wondering where to hold your bachelor party or trying to decipher just what the four C's really mean in the diamond industry, we've got you covered with this easy-to-follow guide.

## **THE PROPOSAL**

Laguna Beach is full of beautiful backdrops for a proposal—think watching the waves crash at Main Beach, taking in the panoramic views at Top of the World or



strolling the grounds of one of the luxury hotels that dot the coastline. For Aaron Stapp, who recently married his wife, Cristen, the pathway that snakes around Montage Laguna Beach was just the right spot to drop to one knee.

"It has such a beautiful view, and I couldn't imagine a more picturesque spot to pop the question," he says. "We still walk that path now with our dog, Gary, who was also there when I proposed, so it's nice to go back to that spot time and again."

When it came to perfecting the details, Aaron called on his mom, who also lives in Laguna, to help execute the plan. "We told Cristen, my wife, that we were all going to a barbecue at my mom's but that we should go on a walk before the barbecue. She went along with it! My mom and sister were nice enough to set up a trail of rose petals, chilled Champagne and a rose bouquet on a bench down by the Montage. As we walked down the path getting closer and closer to the bench where everything was set up, [she] knew it was about to happen," Aaron says. As the two approached the setup, he got down on one knee—and the rest is history.

Aaron was lucky enough to be able to involve his Laguna-based family in pulling off the plan, but for full-service assistance with a proposal, consider capitalizing on the expertise of a local hotel's staff. Places like the Pacific Edge Hotel are known for their indoor and outdoor beachfront spaces, sweeping ocean views and on-site staffers who specialize in tying up any loose ends.

"Some of our favorite proposals have included a surprise engagement party, where the unsuspecting soon-to-be fiancée thought she was just enjoying a sunset with friends in the bungalows," says Bill Tremper, the Pacific Edge Hotel's general manager. "We also had a recent engagement where the hotel team helped a fiancé create the perfect proposal with the question written in sand." The hotel's sales and catering coordinator, Karolin Stradling, is happy to help with even the smallest details, from spelling out "Will you marry me?" with rose petals to making sure a bottle of the bride-to-be's favorite bubbly is ready to be poured after she says "yes."

## THE RINGS

Now that the surprise of the proposal has worn off, it's time for you to choose wedding bands together. Some couples opt for matching styled bands, or engravings of their initials or wedding



Staffers at the Pacific Edge Hotel are available to assist with planning and executing romantic proposals.



Aaron and Cristen Stapp at Montage Laguna Beach



Engagement rings from Fredric H. Rubel in Laguna

date inside the ring. Whichever style you choose, make sure it will endure time and perhaps even have the strength to become a future family heirloom. Laguna jewelry store Fredric H. Rubel has been in the business of creating keepsakes for more than 80 years, and owner David Rubel has helped countless grooms-to-be find perfect sets of rings.

"The execution of the design is just as important as the design itself," David says, emphasizing the significance of quality workmanship in jewelry. "Make sure the setting work is done nicely and the craftsmanship is there. Just like when you buy furniture for your home [and] you look for durability, you should be looking for the same

quality of the design when you buy a ring."

Along with that advice, it's also key to understand the various types of rings as well as what drives the cost of an engagement or wedding ring. The price of a diamond is determined by the four C's: cut, clarity, carat and color. Cut refers to the diamond's shape, a determination based on how the facets of the diamond are arranged, and a quality cut can more than make up for a smaller diamond's size. Clarity refers to the internal flaws of the diamond as well as any external blemishes. These flaws typically aren't visible to the naked eye, but the fewer the flaws, the more valuable the diamond. The carat, simply put, is the weight of the diamond.





Laguna Beach-based professional stylist Leslie Christen helps a groom choose accessories for his big day at Garys, a men's specialty store, in Fashion Island.

A diamond's color is rated on a scale from D to Z. A diamond that merits a D rating is virtually colorless and holds the most value, while a diamond given a Z rating shows traces of yellow or brown coloring. Naturally colored diamonds, which are sometimes called "fancies" and come in colors like pink and yellow, aren't rated using the D-to-Z scale and, depending on the color of the stone, can be very expensive.

The engagement ring and wedding bands could easily be the priciest aspects of your wedding—protect these investments by getting the rings professionally appraised and insured against loss or theft.

### THE LOOK

Even the most rugged jeans-and-T-shirt groom wants to look stylish on his wedding day. Whether you prefer a classic three-piece suit, a formal tuxedo or a slim-fitting jacket-and-tie combo, any form of attire can be customized to complement your personality.

At a formal wedding—especially one that denotes a black-tie dress code—a classic black tuxedo is the only appropriate choice. For spring and summer weddings, a white dinner jacket is the ideal substitution for the traditional black. Daytime weddings, casual weddings and beach weddings all call for lighter colors and fabrics, like a gray or blue suit with a white shirt, or even linen trousers.

Asking for help never hurts, and Orange County is rife with professional stylists who can help grooms put together tasteful outfits for the big day. Leslie Christen, who has styled St. Regis guests for years and is the fashion editor for lifestyle website Greer's OC, takes clients to South Coast Plaza and Fashion Island for the most diverse selections of apparel. "Every time I go there, I know I'll get exactly what I want for my clients," she says, adding that she also favors local boutiques and values the one-on-one relationships she's cultivated with their owners. Leslie lists Mark Pomerantz in Newport Beach for

custom suiting, Garys and Penguin in Fashion Island and Simple in Laguna Beach as some of her personal favorites.

Best of all, a stylist can help with much more than choosing the right bow tie or debating the strengths of a navy or black suit—they're also qualified to handle tailoring, coordinate the drop-off of the groom's clothing and make sure that everything is perfectly pressed for the main event.

### THE BACHELOR PARTY

As the wedding date approaches and with most of the planning behind you, relax and give in to a bachelor party. Choose your best man carefully, as he's the one who's usually tasked with planning the epic night out. Forget Vegas and opt for a local stay-cation—one where artisanal cocktails are flowing and oversized flat-screen televisions are showing the big game, of course, but also one that's just a short drive from home come checkout time.

The Pacific Edge has been something of a secret



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**“THE BUNGALOWS ARE A GREAT GO-TO FOR BACHELOR PARTIES, WHETHER YOU RENT A BUNGALOW FOR UP TO 12 GUESTS OR TAKE THE WHOLE SPACE.”  
— BILL TREMPER**

spot for bachelor parties ever since the hotel transformed five oceanfront rooms into day-use, indoor/outdoor oceanfront bungalows. “The bungalows are a great go-to for bachelor parties, whether you rent a bungalow for up to 12 guests or take the whole space,” Bill says. Bachelor parties can check in for the day, order room service, relax in a living room that overlooks the ocean or tan on the private, oceanfront deck area.

When the guys are ready for dinner, Laguna offers eateries ranging from bustling downtown restaurants to waterfront venues with unbeatable local views. Tucked inside the Mediterranean-style Surf & Sand Resort is Splashes restaurant, where guests are served on an outdoor patio that overlooks the Pacific Ocean. Award-winning Executive Chef David Fuñe, who has appeared on Food Network’s “Chopped,” creates California coastal cuisine that’s delightfully raw and fresh. Indulge in light but filling fare like

ahi tuna tartare with Sriracha sauce, lightly fried artichokes and Brussels sprouts, and sea scallops with asparagus risotto.

Afterward, bring the crew to La Casa del Camino’s Rooftop Lounge for drinks. The Spanish-style hotel’s intimate deck has panoramic ocean views and a full bar. Watch the sailboats, spot whales and order appetizers from chef Craig Connole’s hearty menu—think warm

baby brie with wild berry sauce and toasted almonds, or a charcuterie platter with pate, prosciutto and salami.

The big day doesn’t have to be a stressful occasion, and neither do the events leading up to it. With some research under your belt and just a little help from the pros, you’ll have all of the tools you need to toast the first day of the rest of your life with style. **LBM**



The Pacific Edge Hotel’s ocean-view indoor/outdoor bungalows make for great bachelor party locations.



Scallops wasabi from The Cliff Restaurant

## SAY ‘I DO’ TO THE FOOD

For those lucky locals who decide to get hitched in Laguna, there are countless awe-inspiring locations to celebrate in town. Oftentimes, though, the food you serve is just as important as your wedding’s home base. Here, you’ll find some of our favorite spots that offer catering guaranteed to make your reception as flawless as your ceremony.

Getting married in a private home? Consider hiring **The Cliff Restaurant** to take care of the food and beverages. The restaurant designs custom meals based on your needs, handling tasks ranging from food preparation to decorating. Known for its shared appetizers like lemon grilled shrimp with lemon-garlic aioli and mini crab cakes, the restaurant can also set up seafood stations with healthy options like halibut ceviche and ahi poke. (949-494-1956; thecliffrestaurant.com)

Whether it includes a cocktail reception, a three-to-five-course dinner or a family-style served meal, your event will benefit from **Nirvana Grille**’s catering spreads that incorporate locally sourced fare. The restaurant is known for its variety of vegetarian catering items including “pepita” (pumpkin seed) and Gouda mini grilled cheese appetizers as well as mushroom and herb risotto. The eatery also serves non-veg options (think curried chicken salad on endive), and the menu’s meat-specific items are composed entirely of all-natural and hormone-free options like organic, free-range chicken and sustainable seafood. (949-637-4708; nirvanagrille.com)

For a Mediterranean-themed dinner, book **GG’s Bistro**. The Laguna restaurant can drop off food for a private event or stay with a team of servers. The restaurant is known for its tasty kebabs with chicken, beef, lamb and shrimp as well as appetizers like the smoky eggplant dip, falafel with lemon tahini dipping sauce, and grape leaf and spiced rice dolmas. (949-494-9306; ggscfiebistro.com)





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# Abstract Emotion

*Since arriving in Southern California in 1989, painter Hugo Rivera has drawn inspiration from the same surroundings he continues to impact.*

*By Cheryl Pruett*



Abstract painter Hugo Rivera has built a downtown Laguna gallery and a dedicated local following.

AT JUST 6 YEARS OLD, LAGUNA BEACH-BASED artist Hugo Rivera could be found coloring with crayons, a gift, along with other art materials, from his father. Back then, Hugo's "studio" was the floor of his father's home office in Guadalajara, Mexico. "He never kicked me out of the office, giving me paper and allowing me to sketch on the floor," Hugo recalls of his father, the late Jose Rivera. "I'm pretty sure [he] saw something in me."

Jose's intuition was proven accurate in February 2013 when Hugo, now 48, celebrated the first anniversary of the opening of the Hugo Rivera Gallery, perhaps his crowning achievement in a town known the world over as an artists' colony. Jose, a former topographer, sparked his son's creative talents and affected his education—an influence that doesn't go unrecognized by the painter today.

From a humble beginning with crayons and black-and-white sketches grew an artist whose work experiments with bold colors, textures, rhythm and a flow that provokes an emotional response from anyone who views his vibrant acrylic paintings of the female form. The abstracted bodies and faces are on display in Hugo's intimate gallery, a place where four other artists, including fellow acrylic painter Joni Cresci, share space.

"He's a leader in the arts ... community, which needs to grow," says Joni, who has also been a student of Hugo's, having taken three of the gallery's on-site workshops led by the artist. "He's for the community and makes Laguna a better place in the art world. He's making his mark on the town."

One of Hugo's main priorities in Laguna involves recognizing and mentoring talent like Joni, a Laguna transplant with an art pedigree that includes time spent as a printmaker in Northern California and a degree from San Francisco State University. She moved to Southern California two years ago and took her first workshop with Hugo in September 2011. She admits that she disliked painting on canvas until Hugo unleashed





that aspect of her artistic talent, effectively giving her an entirely new creative foundation.

"I've been able to grow," she muses. "He helped me open up. Sometimes you just meet those people in life that create changes."

## CREATIVE EVOLUTION

Though decidedly deconstructed, Hugo's work reflects a background rooted in science. Despite seeming destined to become an artist since childhood, he made the decision 30 years ago to get a degree in civil engineering, graduating from the University of Guadalajara in 1987. At the time he didn't see art as a potential career, he says, and chose to pursue engineering because of its practicability. In the end, however, his creative side won out over its logical counterpart, and with his father's support as motivation, he made the move to become a full-time artist.

He relocated to the United States in October 1989, composing mainly black-and-white sketches using graphite and charcoal pencils, and even Sharpie pens and markers, which he discovered upon arriving in the U.S. "It's amazing," he says of the brand. "My sketches were done with Sharpies; they didn't smear. When I sketch a model, I use Sharpies. ... I love the dark and richness of black and white."

His engineering background became an asset as early as the 1990s, when he began fielding commissions to paint murals in both churches and residences. A 30-foot mural in the St.



Clockwise from top left: A black-and-white sketch by Hugo using Sharpie markers and pens; one of the artist's acrylic paintings focused on the rhythm of the female form; the conclusion of a Hugo-led student workshop

Francis of Assisi Church in Huntington Park, Calif., was commissioned in 2001, of which Hugo remarks, "My civil engineering helped me to do curves, arches and perspective. I had no problem separating spaces."

For now at least, he's put murals behind him, instead choosing to focus on his acrylic painting career since 2007. "I fell in love with the human form, but wanted to get back to my abstract side," he says. "I fused abstract and the human form—classical and abstract became my style." He likes to play with contrasts, lines and color, he adds, explaining that the process is all about finding balance.

About six years ago, a commission to design

## AN ARTIST REVEALED

Laguna Beach-based artist Hugo Rivera is well-known for his figurative abstract paintings, his downtown gallery and his monthly participation in First Thursdays Art Walk. Here are five little-known facts about the artist behind the canvas.

- He's a vegetarian.
- He particularly enjoys the tacos at Coyote Grill.
- He once played in a mariachi band (but admits he didn't necessarily play well).
- He loves watching cartoon films like "Despicable Me," "Madagascar," "Shrek" and "Toy Story."
- He's a big fan of ice cream, and his favorite flavor is chocolate.



a mural at a home in Beverly Hills, Calif., grew to include a painting of the owner's wife that incorporated specific colors. The large piece of art spawned a series of commissions of similar works, allowing Hugo to develop a robust portfolio of acrylic portraits.

He took the initiative to produce a brochure of his work and distributed the pamphlet to several art galleries in the downtown Laguna area, which led to him landing a spot at Townley Gallery on Pacific Coast Highway in 2008. He exhibited at Townley until 2012, and today his eponymous gallery sits just feet from the space that first displayed his art.

Although depictions of the female form are something of a signature of Hugo's work, women are not his sole subjects. He prefers to paint abstracted portraits, he says, but often chooses to shine a light on musicians, horses, children and the faces of older people.

"The female form has so much rhythm," Hugo explains. "The more rhythm you have, the more interesting [the work is]. The female form gives me rhythm, motion and feelings." Still, he's quick to emphasize that his work is more about emotions than the physicality of his subjects: "That's what I'm trying to show. It doesn't matter if it's a man or a woman."



The Hugo Rivera Gallery opened in 2012 at 550 S. Coast Hwy.

#### LOCAL INSPIRATION

Hugo and his wife, Erika, moved to Laguna Beach two years ago—the same time everything seemed to fall in place, according to Hugo. The couple married on the beach near Las Brisas restaurant in 2010, back when Hugo was still a fixture at Townley. His local friends pointed out

that a rental was available in south Laguna, and then, in a moment of serendipity, a gallery space just 3 miles from the home became available downtown. The space, located at 550 S. Coast Hwy., now houses the Hugo Rivera Gallery.

"It's amazing how things happen so quickly," Hugo says. "I can't believe it. It seems like we already knew we would be in this area."

Prior to becoming a resident, Hugo would frequently visit Laguna's galleries while taking classes in art history, design, composition and education at Orange Coast College between 1991 and 2011. He continues to list Laguna as one of his primary inspirations: "Laguna, unconsciously, does inspire me. In the mornings I walk to the beach and go from Coyote Grill to Montage resort. Then, looking at all the birds, pelicans, waves ... sometimes the waves are so beautiful and the color of the sand and rocks—it inspires me, and I get energized."

Music also plays a very important role in inspiring many of Hugo's paintings. "Music transports you," he says. "It guides me and leads me. I follow the rhythm of the music. It's an accompaniment to painting."

When he first arrives at the gallery each day around 9:30 a.m., one of the first things he does is log in to his Pandora account to stream music. Depending on his mood, the tunes he chooses can range from standard and Latin jazz to Carlos Santana, reggae, blues, flamenco and tango. He credits his appreciation of music to his father, remembering how Jose would listen to the works



The artist's multidimensional work often involves colorful depictions of figures and faces.



of Beethoven and other classical masters. “My father appreciated art so much,” he muses.

Hugo can be found at the gallery three to four times a week, setting up other artists’ paintings in an alley-style courtyard set back from the highway or working on his own pieces. If he takes a lunch break, he’ll often eat at the gallery or stop by GG’s Bistro for a veggie hamburger with a salad—then it’s back to painting.

If he’s not painting, he’s taking photos of the gallery and his work, or interacting with clients and anyone else who stumbles in. “It’s educational. It feels comfortable for the clients and artists [for me] to answer questions from clients,” Hugo says. At the end of the day, he busies himself by putting away paintings, cleaning brushes and making sure everything else is in order before heading home to upload images and have dinner with Erika, who is expecting their first child in April. In contrast to the unpredictability of his art, Hugo’s days are relatively routine, at times even regimented.

He remains committed to inspiring another generation of artists through single-day, hands-on workshops held throughout the year. During

the six-hour seminars, Hugo shares his knowledge, demonstrating just how he composes his pieces, sharing helpful techniques and providing motivational guidance.

“The class is more about losing the fear of painting,” he says. “Some people take a workshop to see how I create, and they aren’t interested in being artists themselves. Some want to improve or enrich their technique. And some learn that you can break rules.”

In addition to maintaining the gallery and staging workshops, Hugo is planning a collaborative exhibition to be held this summer that will see several artists contribute to the same piece. He completed a similar project in 2013, producing 12 paintings in partnership with Mexican painters Vladimir Cora, whose work has been displayed at Hugo’s gallery, and Francisco Javier Vázquez Estupiñán, who paints and exhibits under the moniker Jazzamoart.

He’s also considering tackling another medium. “I want get back to sculptures,” he says. “Maybe that will be the next thing. My first early work was very abstract. I love it. I’m going back in that direction. ... My real passion is the more abstract.” LBM



A sculpture by Hugo, Terra, depicts the female form.

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# DINING ACROSS MEXICO

*From Los Cabos to Mexico City  
to Riviera Maya, delicious  
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south-of-the-border vacation.*

*By Micaela Myers and Allison Hata*



Local ingredients star in dishes like the bacon-wrapped shrimp at The St. Regis Mexico City's J&G Grill.

**AS SOUTHERN CALIFORNIANS, WE LOVE OUR** Mexican food—and with quick flights available from local airports to Mexico, going to sample south-of-the-border cuisine has never been more convenient. Here, we highlight three vacations that allow your taste buds to take top priority.

## LOS CABOS

In sunny Los Cabos, visitors don't have to stray too far from their hotel or resort to enjoy fine

dining and local flavors. Located on 28 acres overlooking the Sea of Cortez, the Sheraton Hacienda del Mar Golf & Spa Resort, Los Cabos recently relaunched its De Cortez Mezquite Grill, one of two Five Star Diamond Award-winning restaurants on the property. The restaurant's executive chef, Jose Salvador Campuzano, worked closely with the resort's executive chef, Manuel de Luca, to compile a new menu rooted in fresh, local ingredients.

"I wanted to continue honoring the established Mediterranean concept of the restaurant while aiming to create innovative dishes to advance its gastronomy," Manuel explains.

The resort is also home to several bars as well as Pitahayas Restaurant for wine and delicious Pacific Rim cuisine, Girasoles de la Hacienda for authentic Mexican fare and Tomatoes Restaurant for Mediterranean-inspired offerings. The selection of flavors allows guests to enjoy a variety of



options—as well as awesome views—without ever leaving the property.

Not far away at The Westin Resort & Spa, Los Cabos, guests will appreciate the stunning architecture of Juan Sordo Madaleno. His interpretation of El Arco (the arch) frames the sea at this expansive resort. Amenities include three pools, beach cabanas, a spa and putting green, as well as four restaurants and three bars.

The crown jewel of the property is the fine dining restaurant Arrecifes, where guests can enjoy hilltop views of the sea and creative cuisine such as tuna tartare with chipotle aioli, or duck breast with mashed plantain and mole from Oaxaca paired with sommelier-selected wines.

Great views also are served at El Ciruelo, which offers contemporary cuisine for lunch or dinner. Meanwhile, the resort's La Cascada provides a hearty breakfast buffet before you hit the sea for sailing, fishing, diving, surfing or skimboarding, and also offers an extensive wine list and regionally inspired dishes for refueling later in the day. Should you choose to stay poolside, stop by La Playa for shrimp, octopus or even a hamburger (but only after a margarita, of course).

Be sure to leave the resort at least once for a trip to charming San Jose del Cabo. After wandering the streets and hunting for local artisan souvenirs, visit the recently opened Rock & Brews to sample microbrews from breweries such as nearby Baja Brewing Co.

## MEXICO CITY

If you're visiting Mexico City, you'll want to stay and dine at the St. Regis—it's the best, as the doormen say. And while they may be slightly biased, it's difficult to resist the hotel's top-notch accommodations, amenities and gourmet eateries.

Located in the heart of the capital city, with views of the fountain of Diana the Huntress, the Angel of Independence monument and Chapultepec Castle from its Diana Restaurant terrace, the St. Regis is also a center for fine dining in the Distrito Federal (or El D.F., as it's known to locals) with two premier restaurants.

On the first floor, a multitude of international flavors are available at the hotel's newest restaurant, J&G Grill. In a concept developed by star chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten in partnership with the St. Regis, Chef de Cuisine Maycoll Calderon and sous chef Jose Luis Sanchez Ronquillo lead the young staff in creating dishes inspired by local ingredients while staying true to Vongerichten's vision.

It's clear within minutes of glancing over the menu that avocado is the true star of this kitchen.



Tomatoes Restaurant's breathtaking view at the Sheraton Hacienda del Mar Golf & Spa Resort in Los Cabos



La Cascada serves up a breakfast buffet full of local flavor at The Westin Resort & Spa in Los Cabos.

The avocado pizza is a signature starter, but also could be enjoyed as a delightfully light meal. Atop a crispy, thin crust, sliced avocados are layered with lime, cilantro, caramelized onion and diced fresh jalapeno with seeds removed for a milder flavor.

"We try to make simple things with simple techniques," says Jose, who has a background in cooking in the south of the city. "The menu has a lot of surprises."

Arguably one of the best dishes on the menu is a salmon sashimi with crispy rice. Served warm, its crunchy shell gives way to a soft blend of flavors that melts in your mouth. If there's room for a main course, the short rib glazed with riesling—is a stark departure from traditional red sauces—is complemented by hints of thyme and slices of shaved green apple, and pairs perfectly with a

dry Mexican shiraz wine. Save space for dessert because the chef's sweet corn biscuit incorporates two local traditions: corn and mescal. The sweet but not overpowering pastry is plated with a small scoop of mescal ice cream, accented by a few pieces of toffee popcorn for textural variation.

If J&G Grill is famous for its decadent dinner flavors, Diana Restaurant on the third floor is equally renowned for its Sunday brunch. Offering a true taste of contemporary Mexico City cuisine, Diana's dishes are listed on an iPad for easy viewing and ordering. Chilaquiles served with fried egg or chicken—or both—are just one of the local specialties on the menu, but even the scrambled eggs provide an authentic taste with seasoned tomato and beans in a crisp tortilla shell. Those indulging in brunch can take advantage of flaky pastries and a spread of





El Dorado Royale, a Spa Resort boasts a culinary theater, where dishes are prepared in open-air kitchens.

desserts that rivals the city's best.

Outside the hotel, the trendy and fashionable wine and dine in the chic Condesa neighborhood, where Azul Condesa is the piece de resistance. At the intimate eatery, chefs specialize in regional cuisine and deliver a different featured menu each month. Once seated on a lush terrace flooded with natural light and greenery, begin by sipping one of the restaurant's famed margaritas, which range from traditional and fruit-flavored varieties to more authentic flavors like tamarind, or bite into a ginger-salted orange before indulging in one of Mexico City's most beloved traditions: a shot of smoky mescal.

For lunch or dinner, sample local options like the grasshopper guacamole paired with a slightly sweet shredded pork pibil taco, which arrives topped with colorful pink onions and wrapped in a fresh tortilla made at the front of the restaurant. Meat eaters will be in awe of the hearty filet mignon or skirt steaks served with a spicy chipotle sauce—the perfect amount of heat to add flavor to a simple cut of meat. For dessert, guanabana triangles with a rich, dark berry sauce are a popular local option with a flavor comparable to a panna cotta cheese dish.

Wherever your taste buds lead you—be it Mexico City's high-end restaurants or a small taqueria on the street corner—El D.F. won't steer you wrong.

## RIVIERA MAYA

If the words “all-inclusive” have you imagining lackluster buffets, fishbowls of beer and tequila

administered through a dispenser, think again. At El Dorado Royale, a Spa Resort by Karisma in Riviera Maya, it's “gourmet-inclusive” with a focus on high-quality, fresh cuisine. The property is home to seven restaurants, including a culinary theater where dishes are prepared in one of five open kitchens alongside huge screens that broadcast the culinary process. Fifteen on-site bars and lounges—including a bar specializing in martinis, bars with swings, beach bars and nine swim-up bars—serve a broad range of premium alcoholic beverages. Meanwhile, farm-to-table takes on new meaning within the resort's 100,000-square-foot greenhouse, which yields an impressive 120 tons of crops.

Because of its foodie focus, it makes sense that El Dorado Royale launched an ongoing food and wine week program last year for guests wanting even more culinary- and beverage-themed experiences. In partnership with Jackson Family Wines, The Jackson Family Wines Culinary Series, by Karisma, is a monthly food and wine program spotlighting top chefs and wine masters from around the world.

Each weeklong event showcases a noteworthy chef and winemaker who work in conjunction with the Karisma Hotels & Resorts' team of chefs and sommeliers to provide guests with interactive epicurean experiences, including access and insight into highly sought-after wines, vertical tastings, educational classes with sommeliers and winemakers, cooking courses, special pairings and an exclusive guest chef and winemaker dinner.

Included in Condé Nast Traveler's listing of the top 100 hotels in the world, the AAA Four



Top: The Jackson Family Wines Culinary Series by Karisma; bottom: glazed short ribs at J&G Grill

Diamond resort is located on more than a mile of sandy beachfront along the Riviera Maya's shoreline. A variety of stellar accommodations and amenities on the property include in-room Jacuzzi tubs and swim-up plunge pools on the terrace that connect via a lazy river to one of the resort's 13 swimming pools. If you prefer to forego the traditional pools, simply head for the sand to enjoy a dip in the ocean. While El Dorado Royale is designed for adults only, Karisma's expansive portfolio includes a total of 11 hotels throughout the Riviera Maya area; the nearby Azul hotels (also gourmet-inclusive) are kid-friendly and even provide toys, strollers and more for the little ones.

Whether you're seeking authentic local fare or global gourmet, Mexico offers top culinary destinations from the Sea of Cortez to the Caribbean Sea served alongside a stunning coastline, warm weather and homegrown hospitality. **LBM**





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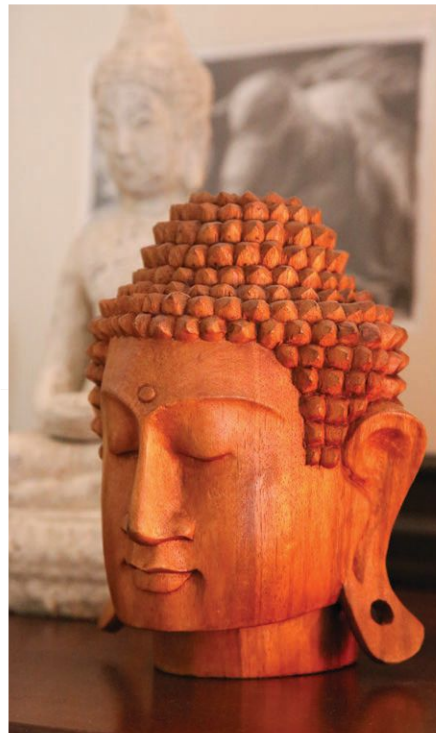


## LAGUNA'S HABITAT

# INTO THE CANYON

The cul-de-sac streets of California Cove make up one of Laguna's most family-friendly neighborhoods.

*By Sharael Kolberg | Photos by Jody Tiongco*



Located less than 5 miles from Main Beach, off El Toro Road and Canyon Hill Drive, the California Cove neighborhood of Laguna Beach is nestled against acres of open space. With only three streets and 108 single-family homes, the area is typically quiet, especially in comparison to other Laguna neighborhoods that see a continuous flow of beach-bound locals pass through or the annual onslaught of summer tourists. "We moved here so our kids could play outside with their friends and still be in the Laguna Beach school district without the worry of a busy downtown street," resident Tracy Bumgardner says of the neighborhood.

In fact, young families like the Bumgardners make up most of the California Cove community. What the area may lack in ocean views and proximity to the beach, it makes up for with kid-friendly streets that are within walking distance of Laguna Canyon's many wilderness parks and hiking trails. The streets are designed as cul-de-sacs, creating a layout that makes it easier for neighbors to get to know each other and host community potlucks, lemonade stands for children and other outdoor activities together.





#### FAMILY FACTS:

**Krista Schaeffer**  
**DAY JOB:** Krista is the owner and principal designer of Krista Schaeffer Interior Design, a Laguna Beach-based firm. **SPACE:** 1,450 square feet, two bedrooms, one loft, 2.75 baths **HOUSE** **TIMELINE:** Built in 1985, purchased in 2004 **FABULOUS** **FEATURE:** The kitchen pantry beneath the staircase



## DESIGN WITH INTENT

WHEN KRISTA SCHAEFFER MOVED INTO HER California Cove hideaway in 2004, she was thrilled to realize that her neighbors were so friendly and quiet, and she's since been able to turn her 1,450-square-foot home into a relaxing retreat that reflects her loves of travel and art.

In 2007, she gutted what she calls her "powder room" and created a space that's not only functional but also a soothing getaway during moments of stress.

"The hammered alloy sink bowl is like a large Tibetan meditation bowl," Krista says. "Sometimes I go in there when I'm stressed and, with the lights dimmed low, I rap on the bowl and wait in silence until I can't hear it ring anymore."

The room also features a modern, custom-made teak vanity without hardware, which looks more like a block of polished wood; a teak floating mirror that Krista designed; stark white walls made from polished Venetian plaster; and artwork including an assortment of ocean-inspired pieces that line the walls and are reflected in the mirror. "It makes me happy to be in there and look at the art," she says.

Krista's backyard is also a haven where she enjoys reading, writing and entertaining. In 2010, she installed an outdoor fireplace with a covered seating area that's draped with fabric curtains and a canopy and surrounded by lemon trees, lavender and sage. The details, such as the

black-and-white accents in her furniture cushions and landscape lighting, make the area feel more like an outdoor extension of her home than anything else.

Each piece of decor that exudes a natural, outdoorsy feeling in Krista's home was chosen with intent. From the Asian-influenced antiques to the Mies van der Rohe contemporary leather-and-chrome chairs that date back to 1927, Krista only purchases pieces that have meaning. In fact, many of the pieces she collects have sentimental value.

She adds, "I've traveled nearly all the globe, and I like my objects and art to have meaning from the cultures I've visited or some personal reference."



**FAMILY FACTS:** Ryan, Tracy, Riley (13), Toby (11) and Brady (9) Bumgardner, and Lupe, Suki and Cisco (Chihuahua mixes) **DAY JOB:** Ryan works as a division president for Park West Cos., a landscape construction and management firm; Tracy is a supervisor at Canyon Animal Hospital in Laguna Canyon. **SPACE:** 1,200 square feet, three bedrooms, three bathrooms **HOUSE TIMELINE:** Purchased in 2010 **FABULOUS FEATURE:** The Dutch front door that Ryan built for the family



## COASTAL CASUAL

WHEN RYAN AND TRACY BUMGARDNER WERE looking to return to Laguna Beach in 2010, they particularly hoped to find a neighborhood that would allow their three young boys to enjoy the outdoors. “We love California Cove because of the safety, the neighborly feel, and that the kids can go play outside and we don’t have to worry, especially since there’s little traffic,” Tracy explains.

“It’s a great neighborhood because it is part of Laguna, but more like a cozy little community in the hills,” Ryan says. “I love looking out across the canyon or up to the ridgeline above. And even though we are on the edge of town, we still enjoy

the feel of being local downtown.”

With a lifestyle that includes a mix of beach time and competitive water polo, the Bumgardners enjoy having a home that’s casual and expresses their love of the ocean. “It’s either salt or chlorine here,” Tracy says, and the driftwood decor pieces, bamboo blinds and collections of seashells make it more than apparent that this family lives for the beach.

“I love water polo and hanging out at the beach with all my buddies,” says 9-year-old Brady Bumgardner. “But when I’m home, my neighborhood is great because I have so many friends

here and we love to go exploring.”

With sandy feet arriving at the home’s doorstep almost daily, it’s no surprise that one of Tracy’s favorite things about the property is the courtyard: “It’s small but quaint, a great place to sit and read or have a small fire in the chiminea at night with a glass of wine, under the twinkling cafe lights.”

Like other families in this neighborhood, the Bumgardners hope to maximize the space by converting their garage into a family recreation room—just another spot to relax and make memories together.





**FAMILY FACTS:**  
Gary Lefebvre and Mark Gonzales, and Molly (terrier) **DAY JOB:** Mark is the director of diversity and inclusion for The Hershey Co.; Gary is a school psychologist for the Santa Ana Unified School District and an adjunct professor at Pepperdine University in Malibu. **SPACE:** 1,200 square feet, three bedrooms, 2.5 bathrooms **HOUSE TIMELINE:** Built in 1985, purchased in 2003 **FABULOUS FEATURE:** the Zen-like backyard that's landscaped with a variety of California native plants



## COMFORTABLE ZEN

GIVEN THE FACT THAT EXPANSIVE YARDS CAN be hard to come by in Laguna Beach, Gary Lefebvre and Mark Gonzales appreciate the spaciousness and serenity of their backyard and often dine outdoors, play with their dog Molly or just enjoy the fresh air and sunshine. "Living in California Cove has allowed us to get more space for our money compared to other parts of Laguna Beach," Mark says. "Yet, it's still just a short drive to town or the beach."

When the 1,200-square-foot home was originally purchased in 2003, however, the yard was in shambles. "It was completely overgrown," Mark

says. The pair put in a new grass lawn, plants and Zen-like landscaping that includes a large Angkor Wat statue that Gary had shipped from Cambodia as a Christmas present for Mark, and a stone bench that acts as a memorial for Gary's mother. The backyard also backs up against an expanse of open space, giving the property a definite rural feel.

Mark and Gary have carried the Zen theme inside the home as well with neutral-toned floors, walls, cabinets and counters accented by dark wood furnishings and Asian-inspired decor. Upstairs, a second-story loft space includes

sliding doors that can be opened to allow light into the living room or closed for privacy. "We hope our house makes people feel comfortable and relaxed," Gary says.

In addition, Mark and Gary feel that their home brings them peace because of their neighbors. "I own four homes in Laguna, but we choose to live in California Cove because the positive neighbors create a friendly environment and sense of community," Gary says. They even convinced Mark's brother and his family to move next door, adding, "Our nephews make living here even more fun." **LBM**



# REAL ESTATE *Showcase*



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Beautiful oceanview estate with private grounds and expansive living spaces: 4 bedrooms, 4½ bathrooms, huge master suite. Vaulted wood-beamed ceilings, open state-of-the-art kitchen, wood floors and three fireplaces. Enjoy all the amenities Emerald Bay has to offer!



## OCEANFRONT IN THREE ARCH BAY

\$7,995,000

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## I WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND MY SINCERE APPRECIATION & SAY **THANK YOU**

To Laguna Beach and all of my clients for allowing me to make 2013 wonderful year in real estate. I had the honor of helping 23 families with the sale or purchase of their home. My goal this year is to help 40 families accomplish their real estate goals. I am so grateful to everyone who kindly referred me to their family, friends and co-workers. Thank you for the trust and support to allow me to serve the needs of our community.



**LAGUNA BEACH** | 1645 TAHITI *Offered for \$3,195,000*

Completely rebuilt in 2005, this exquisite one-of-a-kind contemporary home was designed by renowned architect Walter Metez.

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*Represented Seller*



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### 27 TOULON, LAGUNA SUR, LAGUNA NIGUEL

Enjoy Catalina, Coastline and Sunset views from this Spacious Three Bedroom Laguna Sur Townhome with Three Fireplaces, Gorgeous and Spacious Granite Kitchen and Wine Area. Wonderful Floor Plan! Laguna Sur has Fabulous Amenities, including Two Pool / Spa areas, Tennis and Endless Walking Paths with Forever Coastline Vistas!

**Priced to Sell at \$1,159,000. Call Suzanne to show!**

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Top floor, north corner unit in the much desired, Laguna Lido! This is the largest plan in the Lido! This unit has a large granite kitchen, two beautiful baths, tons of storage and two large ocean view bedrooms! Never on the market before! Best panoramic ocean, Catalina, coastline views in the Laguna Lido. Elevator to lovely Totuava Beach! Fabulous gym, steam room, saline pool, beach lockers and kayak storage room. Secure, beautifully upgraded building.

**Offered for \$3,300,000**

## REDUCED TO \$2,695,000



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Feel the Warmth of the Sun and Ocean Breezes as you Enjoy your Meals on Your Large, Private Wrap-Around Deck, with Amazing Ocean Views! Custom Craftsmanship Throughout, Lovely Arched Doorways, Beamed Ceilings and Raw Italian Marble Floors. Charming and Delightful! Elevator to the sand, Beach Lockers, Fabulous Gym, Saline Pool, Steam Room... Come and Enjoy!

**Offered for \$2,695,000**

## REDUCED TO \$1,450,000



### LAGUNA ROYALE #84

Top Floor Unit has Incredible Views of the Laguna Coastline... and and Elevator to the Beach! Gorgeous Coastline, Catalina and Sunset Views from this Top Floor unit! Versatile unit has two sets of Sliding doors, one on either side of the Large Private Deck. New Appliances include Stove, Refrigerator and Washer and Dryer...Skylight in the second bathroom.

**Offered for \$1,450,000**



# Suzanne Robinson

DRE License #00915756



949.443.1902

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| www.OceanFrontLagunaHomes.com



**173 EMERALD BAY, LAGUNA BEACH**

**PRICE: \$29,500,000**

At over 9000 square feet, this premier estate sits on the Peninsula of Emerald Bay above the bluffs of the elite North Laguna Beach communities. From the superior perspective, no other property can match the unparalleled views of the serene beaches. Only 3 properties in Emerald Bay have deeded access to Irvine Cove's mean high tideline, a private twisting path just beyond the backyard leads to the discreet shores.

**2596 RIVIERA DRIVE, LAGUNA BEACH**

**PRICE: \$9,499,000**

Situated on Irvine Cove's coveted front row, this 5-bed, 5.5-bath home offers epic ocean and whitewater views in a comfortably luxurious 5,250-square-foot seaside setting. Directly across the street from the pristine Irvine Cove beach, this elegant residence is defined by indoor/outdoor living areas, including several ocean view terraces.

**13 SHREVE, LAGUNA BEACH**

**PRICE: \$7,295,000**

Rarely to come on the market, this luxurious coastal gem sits along the Pacific as only 1 of the 14 prestigious Montage Beach Villas. This coastal chic residence was expertly designed to marry the serenity of a life by the sea with the pride and sensibility of five-star resort-style living. From sunrise to moonrise, the tasks of day-to-day are enhanced by coastal bliss and made spectacular.

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**PRICE: \$3,199,000**

Designed by award-winning architect Joseph Ambrose, this exquisite home sits along the Laguna Beach coastline and offers unparalleled panoramic ocean views, a full-service elevator, walk-in wine cellar, custom wood flooring, and floor-to-ceiling glass windows to create a light and airy ambiance. This gorgeous property epitomizes coastal living at its finest!

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Central Laguna | 4BD/6.5BA | 4500+sf | \$3.2M | not in MLS



North Laguna | 4BD/4BA | 4450sf | \$3.975M | not in MLS



Mystic Hills | 5BD/5.5BA | 10,850sf lot | call for pricing | not in MLS



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**Emerald Bay : \$10,995,000**

73 Emerald Bay | Just Listed



**Emerald Bay : \$7,500,000**

526 Emerald Bay | Just Listed



**Emerald Bay : \$6,798,000**

1409 Emerald Bay | Just Listed



**Laguna Niguel : \$6,248,000**

31932 Monarch Crest | Just Listed



**Emerald Bay : \$5,498,000**

130 Emerald Bay | Just Listed



**Emerald Bay : \$2,650,000**

219 Emerald Bay | Just Listed



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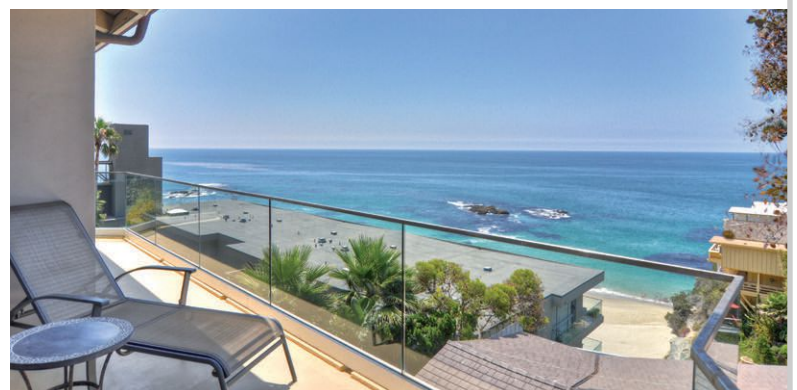
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31735 SEACLIFF DRIVE : NEW LISTING



LAGUNA BEACH \$1,895,000  
916 CATALINA STREET : NEW LISTING



LAGUNA BEACH LAND \$499,000  
415 NYES PLACE



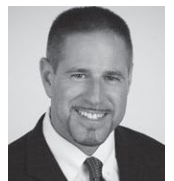
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DANA POINT | MONARCH BAY \$4,250,000  
325 MONARCH BAY DRIVE

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DANA POINT | MONARCH BAY \$3,250,000  
341 MONARCH BAY DRIVE

An incredible opportunity to own one of only twelve homes on the front row overlooking the sand across from the Monarch Bay Beach Club. This four bedroom, four bathroom beach bungalow has great potential for remodel or to build your beachfront dream home.



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31423 COAST HIGHWAY #59

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SAN CLEMENTE | NORTH BEACH \$1,895,000  
1529 BUENA VISTA - A

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# Taste of the Town

A restaurant resource for dining out in Laguna Beach

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thebeachcombercafe.com

### BJ'S PIZZA AND GRILL

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bjsrestaurants.com

### THE CLIFF RESTAURANT

577 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-494-1956;  
thecliffrestaurant.com

### THE DECK ON LAGUNA BEACH

627 Sleepy Hollow Ln.; 949-494-670;  
deckonlaguna.com

### THE GREETER'S CORNER RESTAURANT

329 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-494-0361;  
thegreeterscorner.com

### HUSKY BOY BURGERS

802 N. Coast Hwy.; 949-497-9605;  
huskyboyburgers.com

## JOHNNY ROCKETS

188 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-497-7252;  
johnnyrockets.com

## LUMBERYARD

384 Forest Ave.; 949-715-3900;  
lbumberyard.com

## NICK'S LAGUNA BEACH

440 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-376-8585; thenickco.com  
**OCEAN AVENUE**

237 Ocean Ave.; 949-497-3381

## ORANGE INN

703 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-494-6085;  
orangeinncafe.com

## PENGUIN CAFE

981 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-494-1353;  
thepenguincafe.com

## REMARK'S

853 Laguna Canyon Rd.; 949-715-8700;  
remarkslagunabeach.com

## RUBY'S DINER

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## SHIRLEY'S BAGELS

303 Broadway St., Ste. 110; 949-494-6296;  
shirleysbagels.com

## SPLASHES RESTAURANT AND BAR AT SURF & SAND RESORT

1555 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-497-4477;  
surfandsandresort.com

## STONEHILL TAVERN AT THE ST. REGIS MONARCH BEACH

One Monarch Beach Resort; 949-234-3405;  
stregismb.com

## TIVOLI TERRACE

650 Laguna Canyon Rd.; 949-494-9650;  
tivoliterrace.com

## TIVOLI TOO!

777 Laguna Canyon Rd.; 949-494-6044;  
tivoli-too.com

## Shaken, not Stirred

Amid the popularity of craft cocktails, local drink master Gabrielle Dion is expanding her trade to the thrill of her fans. The award-winning mixologist and bar manager of acclaimed restaurant Broadway by Amar Santana has opened her very own storefront at The OC Mix at SoCo in Costa Mesa. Dubbed The Mixing Glass, Gabrielle's specialty shop features the highest quality ingredients, tools and supplies, making it easy for anyone to mix fantastic drinks. Even better, expertly trained staff members and frequent guest chefs and mixologists will be on hand to teach techniques and tricks for perfect concoctions. "Now all of the clientele who love my cocktails at Broadway can come to the store and learn how to make them at home," Gabrielle says. Even with her career taking off in new and exciting directions, Gabrielle still feels a strong connection to Laguna Beach. "My ties to Laguna Beach will always be Broadway by Amar Santana," she shares. "The people there are like family and have supported me [and the opening of] The Mixing Glass." (themixingglassshop.com) —B.B.



Laguna mixologist Gabrielle Dion has opened The Mixing Glass in Costa Mesa.





Lamb pappardelle (left) and black ink linguine



Chef Alessandro Pirozzi of Alessá Laguna



The heirloom tomato and burrata salad is served atop fresh arugula with olives and mozzarella.

## CIAO, BELLA

Alessá Laguna gives diners a taste of home-cooked Italian cuisine.

By Linda Domingo | Photos by Jody Tiongco

TO DINE AT ALESSÁ LAGUNA IS TO WALK RIGHT INTO THE welcoming arms of chef Alessandro Pirozzi. The ever-smiling Italian built his namesake restaurant on the principles of family. Many of the dishes that come out of the kitchen are the products of recipes passed down from his grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles; most of his regular patrons are locals dining with their husbands, wives, sons and daughters; and anyone who dines here, under the watch of portraits of Alessandro's ancestors, becomes an honorary member of the chef's brood.

"This is a reflection of my background," he says. "It's traditional, real Italian food. ... We make all the pastas in house. We have fresh seafood every day. ... We make everything from scratch."

The wall of wine behind the bar encourages guests to sample a glass or three from the extensive list of Italian and Californian varietals. To start, the olive fritte dish marries salty Castelvetro olives with creamy fontina that has been lightly fried. The chef's passion for fresh produce shines in the heirloom tomato and burrata salad, served atop arugula with olives and mozzarella.

Where the chef's love is really evident, however, is in his pizzas and pastas. "I like ... when you start with flour, water, eggs ... and you work it and stretch it and cut it; you make something

that absorbs all the flavors of the sauce," Alessandro says, and it quickly becomes clear that he's able to turn any recipe into a romance novel. "I like to make pizza because I like [getting] the dough in your hands, and you're literally in this relationship for 30 or 40 seconds with [it]. You get it cold and get your energy and your heat from your hands into the dough ... stretch it super thin, throw it in the air. ... It's so good."

The funghi misti pizza comes with a mix of wild mushrooms; the aroma of the truffle oil is enough to sate taste buds, but the thin crust ensures that diners aren't too full for a pasta course.

Unlike many run-of-the-mill Italian restaurants, Alessá serves pasta dishes that differ greatly by sauce, technique and ingredients. In the same vein as the restaurant's family atmosphere, the lamb pappardelle is truly what home should taste like—warm and savory with lamb shoulder that's been braised for 16 hours until it's falling apart. For seafood lovers, the black ink linguine pays homage to Laguna's shoreline with clams, tiger shrimp and sun-dried tomatoes in a chardonnay sauce.

No authentic Italian meal would be complete without tiramisu, and Alessá's arrives elegantly in a martini glass, giving diners no less than a desire to lick the glass clean. **LBM**

**ALESSÁ LAGUNA**  
234 Forest Ave.;  
949-497-8222;  
alessalaguna.com

**HOURS:** Sunday-Saturday,  
11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

**TIP:** To further explore Alessandro Pirozzi's passion for pizza, stop by the new pizza-centric restaurant with a wood-fired oven he plans to open in nearby Corona del Mar this spring.





The Backflip roll combines spicy and Cajun-seared tunas.



San Shi Go's 27-seat sushi bar is one of the largest in town.



Thinly sliced yellowtail sashimi with jalapeno sauce (left) and the baked halibut roll

## A FRESH APPROACH

This hidden gem offers some of the freshest sushi in town with astounding views to boot.

*By Bria Balliet | Photos by Jody Tiongco*

SAN SHI GO'S LOCATION ON THE THIRD LEVEL OF THE VILLAGE Faire outdoor center may be slightly difficult to find, but this Laguna Beach staple is well worth the effort.

Opened in 1990, San Shi Go—meaning “three four five” in Japanese—has built itself a loyal following over its 24 years in operation, and it's easy to see why. The charming outpost is truly a sushi lover's dream. Its 27-seat sushi bar is one of the largest in town and allows patrons to watch the eatery's talented chefs whip up their orders right before their eyes. Alternatively, guests who prefer more natural scenery may choose to chow down in the dining room, which boasts large windows that offer views of the Pacific Ocean and Catalina Island. “I think it's one of the best views in town,” says manager and sushi chef Koichi Sakamoto.

Koichi has been at San Shi Go since its inception and brings more than 30 years of experience to the table. His passion for his work becomes evident as soon as you taste his dishes, and even more glaringly apparent when you chat with him. “I love creating the dish,” he shares. “I sometimes dream about it.”

Koichi's dreams of sushi are realized in the delicious fare offered at San Shi Go. To get a true sense of the restaurant's quality ingredients, try the yellowtail sashimi with jalapeno. Expertly

sliced yellowtail is topped with homemade jalapeno sauce and a thin sliver of pepper for added kick. Or, for tuna lovers, the albacore sashimi with crispy chips offers savory flavor with a hint of garlic. Both dishes' limited ingredients allow the clean flavors of the fish to be showcased, and the freshness speaks for itself.

Those who prefer their seafood in a more cylindrical form will be pleased by the vast number of sushi rolls listed on the menu. One of the lightest and most refreshing is the salmon lemon roll. Filled with avocado, cucumber and carrots, the veggie-packed roll is topped with fresh salmon and a paper-thin slice of lemon. The result is tangy, clean and healthy. Or, for a new and exciting option, try one of the eatery's Cajun-spiced rolls. The Backflip roll's combination of spicy tuna, Cajun-seared tuna, ponzu and red chili sauce is spicy and smoky with a hint of sweetness. “After you take a bite, you want to do a backflip,” Koichi says.

To complement their meals, patrons love to wash down their dishes with sake. Favorites include Sho Chiku Bai Ginjo, a fruity selection, and Ozeki Karatamba, a drier option.

No matter which dishes they choose, guests will be thrilled with the array of flavors, the friendly service and the gorgeous scenery that San Shi Go has to offer. Here's to another 24 years. **LBM**

### SAN SHI GO

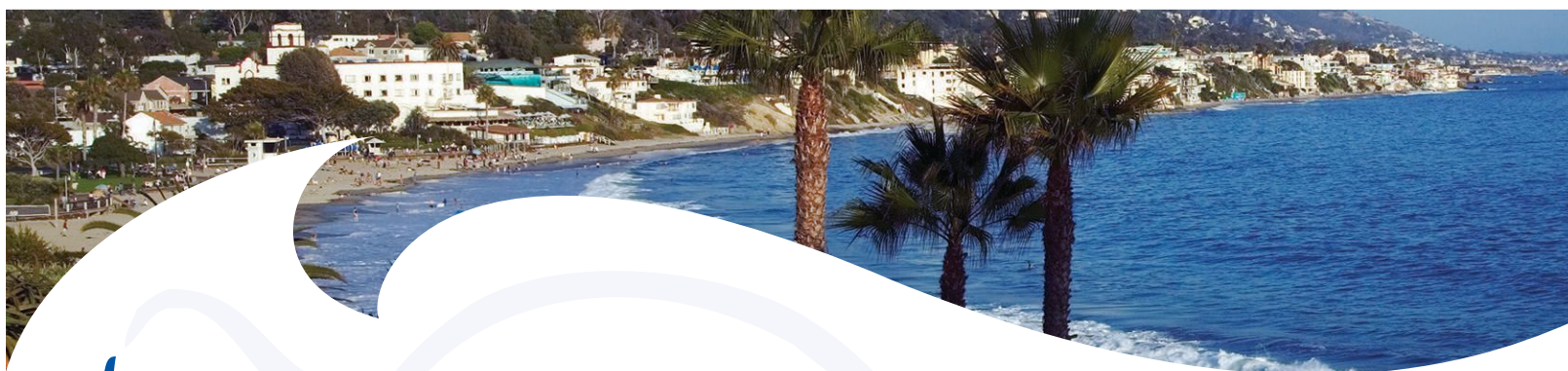
1100 S. Coast Hwy.,  
Ste. 303; 949-494-1551

### HOURS:

Sunday, Tuesday-  
Thursday, 5-10 p.m.;  
Friday-Saturday,  
5-10:30 p.m.

**TIP:** Become a regular at the sushi bar and you may be honored with a spot in the chopsticks rack behind the bar.





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MITCH RIDDER

### FOOD PANTRY RECEIVES DONATION FROM WHOLE FOODS

Whole Foods in Laguna Beach recently announced its final donations to the Laguna Food Pantry, which provides free groceries to low-income families in the area: a generous \$22,268. The funds were raised through the store's Feed4More register donation program, which ran during the months of November and December, an appropriate time given the holiday season. While checking out their organic and good-for-you produce and goodies, philanthropic Laguna Beach shoppers in the giving spirit had the option to donate any amount of their choice at the register—altogether garnering an amount that surpassed other, larger regional Whole Foods Market locations. In fact, for its size, which is smaller than other stores in the region, raised the most funds. The Feed4More donation program provided breakfast, lunch and dinner meals to families served by nonprofit recipients in its communities. ([lagunafoodpantry.org](http://lagunafoodpantry.org)) —A. T.

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[tommybahama.com](http://tommybahama.com)

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[broadwaybyamarsantana.com](http://broadwaybyamarsantana.com)

### CAFE ZOOLU

860 Glenneyre St.; 949-494-6825;

[cafezoolu.com](http://cafezoolu.com)

### K'YA BISTRO BAR & THE ROOFTOP LOUNGE AT HOTEL LA CASA DEL CAMINO

1287 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-376-9718;

[kyabistro.com](http://kyabistro.com); [rooftoplagunabeach.com](http://rooftoplagunabeach.com)

### THE LOFT AT MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH

30801 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-715-6420;

[montagelagunabeach.com](http://montagelagunabeach.com)

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1289 S. Coast Hwy, Laguna Beach | 949.497.2446 | [rooftoplagunabeach.com](http://rooftoplagunabeach.com)   



This Laguna Beach favorite, a neighborhood watering hole for over 75 years, is the place where locals gather. The drinks are stiff and reasonably priced with a wide selection of whiskeys, bourbons, and craft beers. Shoot some pool or enjoy nightly live entertainment.

214 Ocean Avenue, Laguna Beach | 949.494.3027 | [marineroomtavern.com](http://marineroomtavern.com)   



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Ritual Wellness, the brainchild of co-founders Marra St. Clair and Lori Kenyon Farley, has been offering organic fruit juices and cleanses to consumers for nearly four years. Originally available by order only, the popularity of their organic, raw, cold-pressed beverages created the necessity to expand the business. And expand they did, opening two brick-and-mortar locations since December 2012—one in The Camp in Costa Mesa and the other in Corona del Mar. Now, their continued popularity has encouraged Marra and Lori to open up their third Ritual JuiceBox retail store, here in Laguna, this year. The new location, slated to be located at 1100 S. Coast Hwy. in Laguna Beach, will be the company's largest, carrying Lori and Marra's beloved cold-pressed juices and their book, "The Juice Cleanse Reset Diet." Those who order cleanses on the company's website will be able to pick them up in-store (validated parking included). The store's convenient location also will allow passing shoppers, health-conscious individuals and busy workers to easily stop by and pick up a refreshing and healthful alternative to the processed, sugar-filled coffee drinks to which we've all become accustomed. Health and convenience finally have met in a delicious way. (ritualcleanse.com) —B.B.

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## On the Move

Local fans of Laguna Culinary Arts (LCA) will now need to make a longer trek to visit the establishment, which shuttered its Laguna Canyon doors at the end of February. Originally opened as a culinary school in 2001 and then expanding to include The Neptune School of Wine—as well as separate wine and cheese retail shops—LCA founder Nancy Milby recently decided to divvy up her business and move to the hip SoCo district in Costa Mesa. Nancy will continue to co-helm The Neptune School of Wine and the retail wine shop, LCA Wine, along with master sommelier Peter Neptune. The culinary program, which was recently handed over to acclaimed French chef Laurent Brazier, also will move to the Costa Mesa area, but will set up shop in the Macy's Home Store under a new moniker: La Cuisine Culinary Arts. While Laguna residents and wine connoisseurs are surely sad to see LCA go, the specialty school appears to have a bright future ahead. (lagunaculinaryarts.com) —B.B.



Nancy Milby, founder, Laguna Culinary Arts

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## Slapfish Swims Into Laguna

Beloved Huntington Beach eatery Slapfish will be making Laguna Beach its second home this spring. The joint venture of chef Andrew Gruel and environmental economist Jethro Naude, Slapfish began as a food truck with a focus on simple, delicious and sustainable fare before the duo opened their first storefront in Huntington Beach. Their company aim is to educate seafood lovers about making the right choices when it comes to eco-friendly seafood that tastes better and is better for the environment. Their new location will sit steps away from Main Beach and will embrace a “grab-and-go” mentality, featuring meals that are easy to eat en route to the sand. Menu items will include classics such as lobster and shrimp rolls, fish and chips, chowder fries and Slapfish’s famous Clobster Cake—half crab and half lobster. In line with the owners’ goal of sustainability, the building will utilize recycled and reclaimed resources throughout the eatery with the goal of earning the same three-star certification from the Green Restaurant Association that the Huntington Beach location was awarded. When the doors open in April, diners can expect friendly service, convenience and some of the freshest and most delicious seafood around. (slapfishrestaurant.com) —*B.B.*



Slapfish, slated to open in April, brings simple and sustainable fare to Laguna.

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## CONTRASTING CREATIONS

Southern California transplant David Blake and New York City-based Don Voisine create art as distinct as their home bases.

*Section by Ashley Ryan*



"Blind Man Sees All" by David Blake at Artists Republic 4 Tomorrow

### DAVID BLAKE (ARTISTS REPUBLIC 4 TOMORROW)

**HOME BASE:** Grew up in Johnsbury, Ill., and relocated to Southern California seven years ago

**BACKGROUND:** Studied business at North Central College in Naperville, Ill., but began painting in his late 20s after realizing how expensive it would be to purchase art to decorate his walls

**MEDIA OF CHOICE:** Silkscreen ink and acrylic paint on wooden boards, prints produced on paper

**PREVIOUSLY SHOWN IN:** Los Angeles, Chicago and Las Vegas

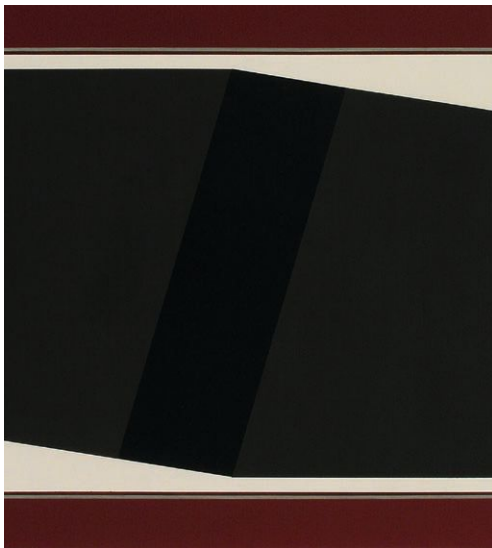
**WORK:** David's latest works paint a picture of past and present society in Orange County's coastal communities. Amalgamations of 1960s-era advertisements, bold paint and text overlay, his pieces illustrate the profound contrast between Southern California's rampant consumerism and the laidback attitude of local surf and skate culture. Combining brightly colored paint with the muted tones of vintage magazines and celebrity portraiture, his pieces are reminiscent of pop art from a bygone era.

David admits that when he first embarked upon his journey from Chicago to Orange County, he'd already developed an idea of what living along the California coast would be like. The image in his head, however, was altered by reality, and he's poured both his early misconceptions and the resulting truths into his art, juxtaposing the tenets of materialism with the ideals of the surf and skate culture for which California is known.

He explores his interest in 1960s art by borrowing material from surfing advertisements and magazines from the same period. Whether he is using an image of a surfer or simple text, he incorporates selections that contribute to the overall message of the piece, striving to make art that is both personal and relatable while still reflecting local society.

David's latest exhibition, "Greetings From the O.C.," will showcase art based on this surf-versus-vanity culture. New works will be on display at the Artists Republic 4 Tomorrow gallery through March 30, with an opening reception on the first night of the exhibition from 6-9 p.m. (949-988-0603; ar4t.com)





"Lean" by Don Voisine at Peter Blake Gallery

#### DON VOISINE (PETER BLAKE GALLERY)

**HOME BASE:** Born in Fort Kent, Maine, but has lived in New York City since 1976

**BACKGROUND:** Trained at the Portland School of Art and the Concept Center for Visual Studies, both in Portland, Maine, and was awarded an honorary bachelor of fine arts degree from the Maine College of Art

**MEDIA OF CHOICE:** Oil paint on wood panels, sometimes with acrylic undercoats

**PREVIOUSLY SHOWN IN:** New York; San Francisco; Sacramento, Calif.; Maine; New Haven, Conn.; Washington, D.C.; Miami; Berlin; Vienna; and Paris

**WORK:** Don's minimalist abstract paintings typically focus on a central element, usually a square or rectangular shape. This, along with his customary straight lines and bars, makes his work very architectural in nature.

One element that is paramount to Don's work is the use of color. The central element is typically dark—either black or charcoal gray—and set against a white background or outline. Bursts of color come in thick bands that line either the top and bottom or the sides of the piece, radiating off of the canvas in contrast to the dark and light shades.

Each painting contains a strong sense of movement, propelling it to another level as the viewer imagines the shapes spinning atop the panel. There is a visual link between the different works, but every piece brings forth a unique emotional element that draws the viewer in.

Following shows in New York and Connecticut, Don will have 10 paintings displayed at the Peter Blake Gallery beginning April 12. More than half will be recent pieces that have not yet been exhibited. (949-376-9994; peterblakegallery.com)

## HUMANITARIAN ARTISTS GIVE BACK

There's a new way to give back to the less fortunate in Laguna—by buying a piece of art. Last October, the Laguna Gallery of Contemporary Art transitioned to a fully humanitarian gallery, making it the first of its kind in the country, according to Christiana Lewis, the gallery's art director. To further the cause, every artist showcased at the gallery now donates between 10 and 70 percent of proceeds to a variety of organizations focusing on autism, suicide prevention, domestic violence, childhood neglect and abuse, human trafficking, education, homes for the underprivileged and HIV/AIDS research.

"I loved my job, but something was missing," Christiana explains of the transformation. "If we're not helping, what are we doing here?" Since the switch, the gallery has received a tremendous amount of support from both local and international buyers. Artwork shown at the gallery includes a range of diverse styles, such as Jacek Lazuka's contemporary pop art, Jon Seeman's abstract sculptures and Bridgette Shaw's mixed media pieces.



JODY TONGCO

At Laguna Gallery of Contemporary Art, a portion of proceeds from art sales go to charity.



"Downbeat Boogie, Man" by Sandra Jones Campbell

## A LONG-STANDING GALLERY

This season, Pacific Edge Gallery celebrates 28 years of highlighting Laguna Beach's creative community by debuting two exhibitions by local artists represented by the gallery.

During the month of March, painter Sandra Jones Campbell reveals an obvious passion for both art and music as she combines the two in her artwork for "Get Jazzed."

Then, in April, a group show features gallery artists Maria Bertran, Tom Swimm, Jacobus Baas and Bryan Mark Taylor. Tom's exhibit will be titled "Harbors of the World," and Maria, Jacobus and Bryan will display new oil paintings created in the city of Laguna to commemorate the gallery's considerable impact as a pillar of the artistic community. (pacifiedgallery.com)



a&g

ARTISTS AND GALLERIES

## GALLERY EVENTS

### “ART THAT’S SMALL AT CITY HALL”

The Laguna Beach Arts Commission has coordinated a citywide art competition open to local artists, and from March 17 to April 24, all accepted submissions will be on display in an exhibition at Laguna Beach City Hall. (949-497-3311; lagunabeachcity.net)

### COASTAL EDDY, A GALLERY

“Transitioning Portals” features paintings from artist Lauren Mantecon’s “Portals” series alongside clay sculptures by local high school and college students through March 29. These clay interpretations serve as a means through which to compare and contrast Lauren’s work while allowing up-and-coming artists to gain exposure. (949-715-4113)

### DAWSON COLE FINE ART

Continuing through March 27, “Making Faces” examines modern portraiture and how the art form has maintained prominence throughout history to become what it is today. The exhibit features works from contemporary artists, including Chuck



“Cosmic Dream 13-V” by Sunny Kim at Sandstone Gallery through March 31



“Nicks” by Glenn Ness at Sue Greenwood Fine Art

Close, Jian Wang and Richard MacDonald. (888-972-5543; dawsoncofineart.com)

### FOREST & OCEAN GALLERY

Visit the recently expanded Forest & Ocean Gallery on March 15 for an artistic discussion and refreshments. The new space will spotlight photographers Tom Lamb and Hans Rindfleisch, as well as sculptor Paul Woodward, from March 10 to April 6. (949-371-3313; forestoceangallery.com)

### JOANNE ARTMAN GALLERY

“Yes,” which runs through March 31, showcases new works by Colombian-American fine artist America Martin. Her annual solo exhibition features three new series: “Native American,” which focuses on the people and places of New Mexico; “Bathers,” an homage to Paul Cézanne’s famed series of the same name; and “Still Lives,” an ode to the vibrant colors and shapes of fruits and flowers. (949-510-5481; joanneartmangallery.com)

### LAGUNA ART MUSEUM

In celebration of Wayne Thiebaud’s recent gift of one painting and six prints, the Laguna Art

Museum is presenting “American Memories,” an exhibition of 60 to 70 pieces spanning the artist’s career, through June. The assemblage highlights the artist’s repertoire through paintings, drawings and prints that depict a mixture of everyday objects and landscapes painted in the valleys of Sacramento. (949-494-8971; lagunaartmuseum.org)

### SANDSTONE GALLERY

Float on over to Sandstone Gallery to view two dreamy exhibitions: Sunny Kim’s “Cosmic Dreams” and Ann Kim’s “Dreamscapes” through March 31. Both artists convey intense emotion through works based on the beauty of the heavens and nature, respectively. (949-497-6775; sandstonegallery.com)

### SUE GREENWOOD FINE ART

The group exhibition titled “American Flashback” runs through April 15, hosting artists Francis Livingston, Robert LaDuke, Jason Kowalski and Glenn Ness. The showing features Americana-themed artwork that paints a picture of simpler times. (949-494-0669; suegreenwoodfineart.com) LBM



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# WHY NOT IN LAGUNA?

Our guest columnist proposes that the city host a culinary film festival.

By Beth Phaner

JODY TIONGCO



COURTESY OF SF FOOD & FARM FILM FEST

Laguna Beach Uncorked! served up wine and food tastings for the past two years.

San Francisco's Food & Farm Film Fest invites chefs to create pairings.

GOOD EATS AND ENTERTAINING MOVIES LONG have been considered a winning combination. Whether it's dinner and a movie, or catching a flick on TV while munching on popcorn, it's always been a desirable duo.

Several major foodie cities, including New York City, Chicago and Sacramento, Calif., among others, have embraced our nation's foodie culture by hosting film festivals with an emphasis on culinary-related features and short films. In fact, Sacramento, unofficially known as "America's Farm-to-Fork Capital," hosts a festival of short food films that showcase Northern California's regional bounty, including movies on craft beer and sea urchin harvesting. Meanwhile, San Francisco's Food & Farm Film Fest focuses on the food-consciousness movement by inviting local chefs to create pairings for each day's films. Among the array of films often screened at these culinary festivals are food-centric movies ranging from "Big Night," "Julie & Julia" and "Ratatouille" to food documentaries and short films covering subjects as diverse as fish tacos, dumplings, fondue, macarons and more.

Besides screening movies, foodie film festivals often feature tastings and other special events such as meet-and-greets with filmmakers, chefs and other participants in the food and film communities. Additionally, the Food Film Festival in New York City, Chicago and Charleston, S.C., bestows awards in various categories, including Best Feature, Best Short, Best Food Porn, Best Film Made Locally and Food Filmmaker of the Year, among others.

With our town's acclaimed restaurants and innovative chefs, not to mention the Laguna Beach Film Society and scores of local film buffs, Laguna seems like the perfect setting for a foodie film festival. I envision a festival that would run for several days with national and international food films being screened at various venues around town, including Laguna's South Coast Cinemas and the Forum Theatre on the Festival of Arts grounds. Perhaps short films could be shown on outdoor screens at parks or beaches. In addition, there should be a central outdoor location where tastings, parties, meet-and-greets with chefs and filmmakers, and other special events can take

place—perhaps at the Festival of Arts grounds where Laguna Beach Uncorked!, an international wine and food festival, took place for the past two years before being canceled this year.

Local restaurants could get involved by participating in tastings, having chefs available to meet and speak to filmgoers and offering dining specials that coincide with some of the films being shown. Besides boosting the local economy by bringing in an audience of epicureans and film devotees, a culinary film festival would appeal to locals' interests and generate buzz for Laguna's renowned restaurant scene.

Film festivals offer a collective viewing experience that often leads to interesting conversation and conviviality with like-minded moviegoers. A culinary food festival in Laguna would generate enthusiasm for tantalizing bites and first-rate films. After all, what could be better than a visual film feast that also pleases the palate?

*Beth Phaner is an Orange County-based freelance writer and editor who enjoys writing about food, film, travel and local culture. LBM*

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU! IS THERE SOMETHING YOU'VE SEEN IN ANOTHER CITY THAT YOU'D LIKE TO SEE IN LAGUNA BEACH? WRITE TO US AT [EDITOR@LAGUNABEACHMAG.COM](mailto:EDITOR@LAGUNABEACHMAG.COM). YOU COULD BE OUR NEXT GUEST COLUMNIST.





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