

FRONTIERA

SAN DIEGO | NOVEMBER | 2008

THE RESTAURANT ISSUE 2008!

THE DISH!

**THE 50
HOTTEST
RESTAURANTS
CHEFS &
PLATES
IN S.D.!**



+PLUS

**CHOW DOWN IN SHANGHAI
EI BIZ'S NEW BOY
THE ACTION HEROES OF SUSHI
CULT WINE CREDI!
THE PARIS EAT SHEET
AND ALL THE BEST PARTIES...**

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EDITOR'S NOTE

AUGUST 2008



GILLIAN FLYNN
WRITER

San Diego is going molecular.

That's right, *Weird Science* is coming to town, and I'm not talking about teenage boys' dreams to generate the ideal creature from their bedroom. Goodness knows San Diego has enough pretty people! I'm talking molecular culinary tricks, brought to you by none other than an El Bulli alum. For this annual restaurant issue, we got the bared-breath scoop on the replacement for El Bizcocho wunderkind Gavin Kaysen (who fled from the Rancho Bernardo Inn eatery to New York, where he has already earned a James Beard Award). So is the new guy up to snuff? Let's just say he's Michelin rated, was reared at Patina and, yes, did time in the Basque region where molecular gastronomy—a reinvention of the cooking process—is all the rage. 'Nough said.

There has never been a more thrilling time to wine and dine in San Diego, but the allure goes beyond foam, gelée, sweetbreads and innards (though we do cover the tip-to-tail trend in "The Offal Truth"). This is about drop-dead gorgeous design! To wit, we tracked down Thomas Schoos, the hot-stuff L.A. designer reampping La Jolla's Top of the Cove, the latest project from those enterprising gents of *EnDev* ("Blueprint Special"). Hans off guys! Bringing in big guns like Schoos (he did Santa Monica's Hundley Hotel and Tao in Vegas) is further proof that our dining scene is a force to be reckoned with.

Meanwhile, our hometown architects and chefs continue to prove their moxie with bang-out designs like Cowboy Star in the East Village, which doles out grass-fed beef and gussied-up bourbon. From food to form, it's rustic-chic done right. The same architect, Matthew Ellis, brought us Harney Sushi in Oceanside—I know, I know, we can't stop writing about that tattoo-heavy burg. But from culture (a new museum and the expansion of the surf museum, for starters) to haute cuisine, O-Side really is on the up. Get it from the horse's mouth with our back-page subjects, the Harney honchos ("On a Roll").

In this issue's mammoth 12-page feature, "To Live and Dine in S.D.," we put our finger on the pulse of all the new foodie bugs. You see, it's not just Downtown and La Jolla offering gourmet fare. We've told you about North Park, which continues its reign with the new Linkery and a bluegrass brunch gone urban. And Point Loma? Everyone who's anyone is talking about Roseville. Meanwhile, University Heights is morphing into a run-don't-walk 'hood thanks to one café's escargot risotto.

As always, *Riviera* is your source for reservations and your go-to guide for the best date spots (Bleu Bohème in Kensington, hands down), and I'm your Girl Friday, pounding the pavement and rough it once in a while! with a San Diego restaurateur playing serious cowboy, dedicated to a think-locally ethos that's leading him into the hormone-free cattle biz. Giddy up! STYLIST@HARRISMANAGENCY.COM

THE L.A. IMPORT The Brentwood-based Frida handpicked San Diego for the second location of its design-minded Mexican restaurant, where art is of the essence. As the name suggests, the concept is in honor of everyone's favorite big-browed painter (not to Salma Hayek). Well-prepared tacos de ribeye are served with cubed-fruit sangria, but the décor steals the show. The eye-paralyzing, wall-sized modern artwork is a welcome departure from other S.D. Mexican joints, which seem to have been decorated around the time of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo. **2015 Birch Rd., Chula Vista, 619.216.8666, www.fridarestaurant.com.**

[URB GARDEN]



O BROTHER, WHERE ART BRUNCH? Urban Solace's Matt Gordon is an anomaly among his farm-fresh North Park neighbors. Early on, he avowed to serve what tastes best, even if it meant trucking it in from the Ozarks. That's resulted in some pretty hefty repur for the former Healdsburg wine country chef, whether for his spice-crusted pork belly or his watermelon salad, a minor religious experience as far as wet, sweet roughage goes. But it's the bluegrass brunch—a few Ralph Stanley-worshipping musicians packed into a corner of their large, sun-drenched patio—that's been hauling in Urbanites by the hundreds on Sundays. **3823 30th St., North Park, 619.295.6464, www.urbanolace.net.**

FROM TJ, WITH GRUB Tijuana's never been so life-threatening. Coincidence or not, culinary titans like chef Javier Plascencia are coming to S.D. After building an edible empire in TJ, his family opened **Romesco Baja Med Bistro** in Bonita, wowing ex-pats and gringos with dishes like duck in tamarind mole. **4346 Bonita Rd., Chula Vista, 619.475.8627, www.romescobajamed.com.**

NICE RACK While Addison is the destination dining star, the more casual **Amaya** is far from second-rate at the new Grand Del Mar Hotel. We expected nothing less from developer "Papa" Doug Manchester, who's big on grandeur and indulgence. Their Colorado lamb rack is massive and the buttery, flaky triangle of spinach spanakopita served as the side would win over most Greek granannies. **5300 Grand Del Ct., Del Mar, 858.314.2727, www.thegranddelmar.com.**

THE S.F. IMPORT The famed dive bar **Toronado** chose our culinary mecca of North Park for its second locale, where beer snobs congregate and giggle. Like its flagship in the Lower Haight, the beer list is *Ulysses*-esque (49 bottles from Belgium alone) and sausages and grilled cheese sandwiches buffer the rummy. **4026 30th St., North Park, 619.282.0456, www.toronadusd.com.**

WAX ON! Ask not for cheddar-smothered chimichangas. Eight years ago **Candelas** hit the Gaslamp with nouveau Mexican like blue-cheese and chili calamari and lobster tail flambéed in reguila. Now they've taken their Mexico City-inspired concept to Coronado. Sure, it offers tourist-friendly tacos by day, but by night expect that same anti-refried bean fare in a sparkling new concrete and glass eatery that's just a ferry landing away. To rebellion! **1201 First St., Coronado, 619.435.4900, www.candelas-coronado.com.**

[ROUGHING IT]

BEST TRAILER FOOD EVER Chef Paul McCabe has cooked in some unusual places while waiting for his \$4.5 million restaurant (designed by architect Andre Kikoski) to open at the newly modern **L'Auberge Del Mar**. First he perfected his seasonal, sustainable menu in a mock professional kitchen in his home garage. Now McCabe is creating foie gras terrine with strawberry dust and Pop Rocks, lobster corn dogs and coffee-crusted buffalo steaks—out of a kitchen in a tractor-trailer! **1540 Camino del Mar, Del Mar, 858.259.1515, www.laubergedelmar.com.**



HALF TIME The debate has become wine party fodder: does **The Better Half's** concept of serving only half bottles optimize the customer's options, or merely run up the bill? Either way, former Blanca GM Zubin Desai has turned a tough Hillcrest location into a little goldmine. And chef John Kennedy's "Leaning Tower" of beers is a gem—edibly and architecturally. **127 University Ave., Hillcrest, 619.543.9340, www.thebetterhalfbistro.com.**