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Tra di Noi Ristorante, Malibu

A Gift From Italy



Tarcisio Mosconi and Antonio Alessi, owners of Tra di Noi Ristorante in Malibu, love to source fresh produce and fine wine from the farms and vineyards surrounding their restaurant. But no one in Malibu is currently curing prosciutto or making fresh mozzarella cheese from buffalo milk.

“So,” Alessi declares, “if we can’t get it next door, we’ll get it fresh via next-day air from Italy.” Enter Giuseppe Ariola of **Ariola Imports** (ariolaimports.com). The restaurateurs won’t trust anyone else to bring in high-end products like prosciutto San Daniele that’s been aged 18 months, mozzarella di bufala from Campania, and white truffles. Ariola’s family has been producing olive oil in Italy since 1850. Giuseppe came to America at his father’s bidding to check on restaurant accounts here. Eventually that, and a serendipitous purchase of a \$400 van, led Ariola to create his own importing company. Ariola relies on longtime relationships with food producers in Italy, including his father and that special extra-virgin olive oil. For every product he brings in, Ariola says, “I know the manufacturers. I come from Napoli where they make the buffalo mozzarella. My friend produces the San Marzano tomatoes. I’m famous for these tomatoes in Los Angeles.” And now Ariola is delivering those peeled, canned, amazingly flavorful Italian tomatoes to restaurants and markets all over Los Angeles County, Orange County, Ventura County, Santa Barbara County and San Diego County.

Cured meats like Guanciale Baciante (pork jowl), Felino Salame (soft salami), and aged cheeses like Pecorino Toscano, Parmigiano Reggiano, and Ricotta Salata are delivered to Rome by their makers. Then they’re flown on an Ali-

talia plane to LAX. Ariola explains, “We pick it up at the airport and start delivering it the minute we receive it. Wednesday morning it leaves Italy; Wednesday night it’s in the restaurant.” Less-perishable goods like dried pasta, olive oil, canned tomatoes, wine, and artisan beer come over on containers every 10 days.

Francesco Velasco, executive chef of Tra di Noi, is like a kid in a candy store when visiting the Ariola Imports warehouse in Duarte. His eyes light up when he talks about getting Italian products fresh from their source. “Once you know the real thing” he begins dreamily and then can’t even finish the thought before he spies some dried pasta and begins detailing what he does with it in the restaurant. “There’s pasta—candele—artisanal pasta from Naples: We cook it in a really big pot, cut it, stuff it, and bake it.” The candele are very long tubes, not as wide as cannelloni rolls but slightly bigger than ziti. Velasco stuffs the candele with a ricotta-basil mixture. Then he creates a sauce using Ariola’s tomatoes and guanciale along with sweet onions. This dish, topped with breadcrumbs and olive oil, is called Macaroni Ripieni and it’s a gift from Italy.

Tra di Noi and Ariola Imports are teaming up to bring even more gifts from Italy this month. During December, gift baskets of imported Italian products will be for sale at Tra di Noi. The Napoli basket, stuffed with foods from Naples and the region of Campania, costs \$300. The Toscana basket, full of items from Florence and the region of Tuscany, costs \$200. And The Sicily basket carries gifts from the island of Sicily for only \$100.



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“So,” Alessi declares, “if we can’t get it next door, we’ll get it fresh via next-day air from Italy.”

- Antonio Alessi



Giuseppe Ariola, Francesco Velasco, and Tarcisio Mosconi at Ariola Imports in Duarte.



*Francesco Velasco
Executive Chef*



*Owners: Tarcisio Mosconi
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A sneak-peek at the exquisite decor at Sabor Cocina Mexicana (see page 92).
Photograph by Gary Moss

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Editor's Note



GARY MOSS

Putting a Bow on 2010

The past 12 months have provided the usual highs and lows—we've welcomed new friends and said good-bye to others; we've made some gains and suffered losses; we've glimpsed bits of our future and looked back to where we came from—and all this has brought us together again in the final days of the year.

I'm not trying to oversimplify things. When specifics are applied to the above situations the facts of our lives change, and, accordingly, so must our focus. Even when life appears to be "business as usual," it really is never quite so tidy. Within this constantly evolving world, however, there are some things that remain with us.

In 2011, *805 Living* will continue to cover your hometown, as well as the rest of the region, with the same high-quality stories and photos thanks to my über-talented editorial team. What *will* change is our publishing schedule. We think that combining our January and February as well as our July and August issues into single volumes will strengthen our business model and give us the opportunity for continued growth. We'll deliver more copies in 2011 to keep up with the demand, and they will remain complimentary as always. Keep your eye out for our January/February "Follow Your Passion" issue—it's going to be terrific.

As I wish you the merriest of holidays and the happiest of new years, I also want to extend a note of gratitude and admiration for something that, thankfully, never changes from year to year: our community's support for philanthropic and charitable organizations. Each donation helps out our neighbors, our families, and our friends, and becomes an investment in our future. Please give to the organization of your choice during this season of celebration and continue to make it a season of giving back.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lynne".

Lynne Andujar, Editor in Chief
and Associate Publisher
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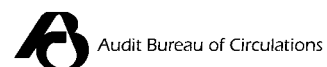
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Behind the Scenes

HOLIDAY HABITS

It could be a particular type of cookie or an annual outing. It might be reading those dishy holiday letters or imbibing in some spiked eggnog. The holidays have a way of putting us in a familiar loop, taking care of the season's extra social obligations; participating in our own religious, family, or personal observances; and repeating history with our food, drink, and activities—even if such traditions are only traditional to us. This month we asked our contributors to fill in the following sentence: "It's not the holidays without _____." (Have your own answer? Share it with us on Facebook.)

Advertising sales representative **AMRA CHUDLEIGH**: It's not the holidays without my daughter and family. As our family has evolved, sometimes we may not celebrate the holiday on the exact date it was intended. Christmas or Thanksgiving may fall a day or so ahead of what the calendar dictates to make sure everyone is accounted for, and what I've realized over the years is simple: The date doesn't matter. All that matters is that we're together. It also wouldn't be the holidays without a Life Savers book in my stocking, no matter how old I am.

Contributing columnist **MARYANN HAMMERS** (*Mind/Body/Soul*, page 52): It's not the holidays without a family squabble. The holiday season marks the one time of year that my parents, my four sisters, their husbands, their kids (ranging in age from screaming babies to late 20s), the assorted boyfriends/girlfriends of my nieces and nephews, and random other friends gather together in my mom's small house in LA. Sounds so cozy, but I don't think we've ever managed to get through the day without someone getting hurt feelings. No wonder that my dear, late grandmother (who never raised her voice in her 89 years) referred to us as the Fighting Hammers.



Executive editor **ANTHONY HEAD** (*Taste/Spirits*, page 88; *Armchair Oenophile*, page 91; and *P.S.*, page 112): It's not the holidays without these three films: *A Christmas Story*, to bring alive my home-state's unofficial pre-varicator, Jean Shepherd, and his childhood memories; *Scrooge*, a wonderful musical adaptation of Charles Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol*; and *It's a Wonderful Life*, the near-perfect Frank Capra paean to the Christmas spirit à la Jimmy Stewart. Go to AnthonyHeadWorks.com to discover more stocking-stuffers.

Assistant to the editor and publisher **CARMEN LEIVA**: It's not the holidays without holiday family dinner get-togethers. We have a very large extended family. The holidays for us revolve around good meals at warm and cozy dinner tables. We catch up on the year that's passed, and it's a great chance for our kids to see their cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Follow Leiva at twitter.com/cafe_mommy.

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Senior editor **LAURA SAMUEL MEYN** (*Social Savvy*, page 54, and “Winter Wonderland,” page 78): It’s not the holidays without *adult* Christmas stockings. My sister and I began putting together stockings for our parents when we were teenagers, and it’s a tradition we’ve carried into adulthood. Everyone really gets into collecting small gifts like note cards, mini-bottles of wine or champagne, kitchen gadgets, and favorite pens to round out

the chocolates, nuts, and clementines. On Christmas Eve, we pass the stockings around for surreptitious stuffing (no peeking allowed), and hang them up until the next morning.

Contributing editor **CYNTHIA HOUSE NOONEY** (*Pulse*, page 23): It’s not the holidays without wrapping presents into the wee hours—waiting until the last minute seems to be my own self-imposed tradition. I work harder at making sure my children grow up with more enjoyable traditions, like eating warm cookies while we trim the tree (an homage to my husband’s upbringing), and going ice skating on Christmas Eve (a nod to my past). The tradition I want most to impart, however, is the gift of giving. By stuffing stockings for soldiers and donating toys to needy children, I hope to be teaching my sons something they’ll want to pass on.

Contributing editor **JEMMA WILDERMUTH** (*Finds/Style*, pages 36 and 38) says good-bye this month to concentrate on Create Studio, her art studio: It’s not the holidays without taking stock in what we are grateful for. I have enjoyed nearly four years as fashion editor for the *Finds/Style* pages, and with a heavy but happy heart I’m moving on in 2011 to explore an entirely different artistic medium. So I am grateful for *805 Living* and all its wonderful contributors. To see more of Wildermuth’s business, check out createstudiofun.com.



Advertising sales representative **JENNIFER VOGELBACH**: It’s not the holidays without our rambunctious yellow Lab, Butterscotch, knocking down the Christmas tree at least once. When that 9-foot tree goes up in the family room, she owns it: running around it, slithering underneath to snuggle on the tree skirt, and lapping up all the water in the stand. For hours she’ll push her tennis ball under the tree then dive after to retrieve it. We’ve lost some precious ornaments through the years and we love our tree, but we love our dog more. That’s the Christmas spirit in our home. ■

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GIFTS THAT SAY "WOW"

Signature Scents

Creating signature perfumes isn't just for celebrities. At Sarah Horowitz Parfums in Westlake Village (sarahhorowitz.com), customers design their own personal formulas during >>



GARY MOSS

the “Blending Bar Experience.” Sensory-appealing selections are made from 100 oils, such as bergamot, jasmine, and sandalwood. At the end of the 30-minute session, clients walk away with a completely customized fragrance (\$45 minimum fee with a \$40 minimum purchase). It’s a “fantastic abbreviated journey,” says Marlene Stang, senior perfumer, who, in addition to owner Sarah Horowitz, leads customers through a more involved process called “Fragrance Journey,” which incorporates 200 oils and lasts 60 to 90 minutes. (“Fragrance Journey” prices range from \$350 to \$1,000.)

Shell Seekers

Oyster lovers rejoice: The hosts of Lost Isle Adventures in Morro Bay (lostisle.org) are devoted to satisfying sophisticated palates: They treat guests to leisurely tours along the back bay, where two Pacific Oyster farms are located. (Seals, otters, and double-breasted cormorants are apt to be spotted along the way.) Beginning in January, oyster barbecues, complete with sparkling wine, are available upon request at cruise’s end. Guests can enjoy the sustainable delicacies raw or grilled. A one-hour cruise is \$45 per person.

Make It Personal

Handcrafted treasures from Love Heals in Ojai (loveheals.com) start with the company’s online jewelry design studio, which guides guests through the process of

making customized necklaces, bracelets, and earrings. Antique-inspired pendants on woven strands result in meaningful statements. Custom jewelry can also be created at the Ojai boutique.

Sea-Worthy Splurge

Some things are just too good to pass up. A weeklong Athens-to-Rome Wind Surf cruise (windstarcruises.com) departs October 22, 2011, and will be hosted by Fabio Viviani, executive chef and owner of Café Firenze in Moorpark and the “fan favorite” during season five of reality TV show *Top Chef*. Passengers visit Milos and Monemvasia in Greece, as well as Messina, Amalfi, and Ischia, in Italy. An added plus: Viviani conducts a lecture and cooking demonstration while sailing the deep blue sea. Cruise fares are from \$2,599 per person.

Go Ahead, Feed the Animals

The Santa Barbara Zoo (sbzoo.org) is home to more than 500 animals, and that makes for many rumbling tummies. The “Foster Feeder” program allows sponsors to cover the cost of care for a favorite zoo animal for

Sensory-appealing gifts like creating unique, custom scents at Sarah Horowitz Parfums (far left), or learning how to cook from Café Firenze chef Fabio Viviani (top) while cruising to Greece and Italy (bottom) would warm even Scrooge’s heart.

one year; sponsorships start at \$25 and go as high as \$1,000. Private “Behind the Scenes” tours through exclusive areas (inaccessible to the public) provide additional animal-care information; a tour is \$500 for up to six people, \$1,000 for seven to 10 people. Want to be a “Keeper for the Day”? Participants get to work alongside zookeepers as they conduct daily tasks. Zoo members can do so for \$400, non-members for \$500 (participants must be 18 years or older and able to show proof of a negative TB test). Or opt for the “Backstage Pass,” an hour-and-a-half up-close encounter with up to three animals; \$150 for adult zoo members, \$200 for adult non-members, and \$75 for children from ages 5 to 17 (and who are accompanied by a paying adult).

Soaring Spirits

Indulging in a glider ride may be just the fix for lofty appetites. The mile-high scenic flight offered by Windhaven Glider Rides in Santa Ynez (gliderrides.com) takes passengers 5,280 feet above sea level to see the Santa Barbara coastline, Lake Cachuma, and the highest peaks of the Santa Ynez Mountains. Each two-seat glider is flown by an FAA-certified pilot. Age restrictions don’t apply and wheelchair-bound passengers can be accommodated. An important tip: Don’t forget the camera. The price is \$125 for a 15-minute flight, \$190 for a 22-minute flight, and \$245 for a 30-minute mile-high flight.

Bottoms Up

The pleasures of wine are vast and varied, and Paso Robles-based First Crush Winemaking Experience (firstcrushwinemaking.com) is devoted to sharing some of the winemaking process—from berry to bottle—with customers who are willing to get their feet (and hands) dirty. Participants of the 2011 Grape Escape Harvest Getaway will pick, crush, and stomp grapes that can ultimately become their own professionally styled wine. They’ll also get to create custom labels and enjoy wine and food pairings from local winemakers and chefs. (Getaways occur during fall weekends.)

—Cynthia House Nooney



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Together we'll go far



For the Paint-Hearted

No Clean Up Required

Want to enjoy a fun bonding activity or commemorate a milestone? If so, Paint Jam Parties of Santa Barbara (paintjamusa.com) might be the answer. These turnkey events can be set up anywhere—at a park, a winery, or the beach, and they're designed to inspire creativity among all ages. Participants express themselves with big brushes and big colors.

"There's nothing intimidating about it," says co-owner Jana Brody. "No tiny palettes, no small brushes, just large canvases on which to let loose."

The idea for the business was based on co-owner Agnes Efron's experience while living in Hong Kong, explains Brody, where people gather at warehouses to paint together. "There's no land, no outdoor spaces to create, so artists meet indoors. This release from everyday life is called paint jamming. We want to provide the same type of opportunity here."

Brody points out that neither artistic experience nor talent is required. In fact, it's the adults, who've never painted before, whom she enjoys watching most: "It's rewarding to see them walk away with something after beginning with a blank canvas. Everyone has it in them to mix color."

As participants leave with their personal masterpieces, Paint Jam party hosts clean up. "That's what we're here for," says Brody. "We don't teach classes, we throw parties." —C.H.N.



Rock 'n' roll, raw sophistication, and smart style come together at Suemi Designs, where the art of accessorizing can be seen in industrial rings (left) and vintage-inspired leather bags (below).



Suemi Designs founder and jewelry designer, Rich Radenbaugh.

Rad Designer

While attending a friend's birthday celebration in a club in Las Vegas, Rich Radenbaugh received an on-the-spot cash offer for a ring he was wearing and had designed. "I was low on funds at the time, so that hundred dollars saved the day," recalls Radenbaugh, who hails from Agoura Hills. It also prompted him to pursue a new career.

Using proceeds from the sale of his motorcycle to create Suemi Designs, Radenbaugh began peddling his wares in Southern California, where he landed his first account with upscale boutique Lisa Kline in L.A. Soon after, actor Adrien Brody, then an Oscar nominee for *The Pianist*, appeared on a magazine cover wearing one of Radenbaugh's rings. "That was a great day! I got lucky," says the designer.

Nowadays, Radenbaugh's collection of handcrafted women's leather belts can be found at Madison in Westlake Village and Malibu (madisonlosangeles.com). His unique designs incorporate vintage ornaments and appeal to a wide audience—from 16-year-olds to suit-wearing professionals, says Radenbaugh, whose style sensibility is about blending rock 'n' roll with dressing well. A popular gift item? His unisex rings, which are available online (suemidesigns.com). —C.H.N.





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Talia Emery, M.D.

RARE READS

Interior designer Kymberley Fraser couldn't believe her good fortune when a client asked if she could help find homes for his rare book collection. She says the client had amassed antique vellum books from the 16th and 17th centuries over the last 30 years during travels to Europe and was ready to "share them with the world." >>



Vellum books, made from a parchment derived from pigskin or calfskin, can create Old World sophistication at home.

Denise James

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» Pulse

Antique vellum books are just one of the unique decorating finds that Kymberely Fraser showcases at A Beautiful Mess.



GARY MOSS

Fraser, proprietor of the new A Beautiful Mess antiques store in Agoura Hills (3finegrains.com), is passionate about antiques and textiles and can't get over the exquisite color of these books with covers made from pigskin or calfskin. "The colors are creamy and luminous because of the way the skin has aged. The handwritten scripts on some of the bindings are beautiful too," she says.

As far as the contents, subjects include theology, history, poetry, stories, and music. Most are handwritten on cotton paper in Latin, French, or Italian. Each tome is individually priced, ranging from \$160 to \$7,500. —C.H.N.

.....

Holiday Helpers for the Un-Fun Stuff

Need an extra hand (or two) during the holiday season? The Domestic Assistants of Ventura (thedomesticassistants.tumblr.com) aren't the slightest bit overwhelmed by to-do lists: "We're game for anything," says Daniel Richman, who, along with his wife, Jennifer, fulfills requests this time of year for holiday shopping assistance, gift wrapping, organizing, and other pressing chores.

Richman says they created their business to help make customers' lives easier. They've landscaped, cleaned house, organized rooms and storage units, and completed move-ins and move-outs. "There's no task we're afraid to tackle," he adds.

The pair got started by helping friends; word about their handy teamwork soon spread among wider circles. A strong referral network has sealed their reputation as trustworthy, dependable, and hardworking. "The Domestic Assistants are excellent organizers and enjoyable to be around," says repeat client Anthea Adams. "Their affordable rates [\$20 per hour] keep me coming back for more." —C.H.N.



A HOLIDAY GIFT FOR YOUR SCHOOL

Shop. Dine. Skate.

Earn a donation to your school!
November 19 - December 24

Shop at The Promenade, The Lakes or The Commons this holiday season and you could earn a valuable gift for your school. Up to \$10,000* will be given away!

5% of Sales to Your School

It's the perfect reason to pick up gifts for family, friends, and your favorite teachers. Dash off to a movie, spend an evening ice skating or enjoy delicious dining at your favorite restaurant. Between November 13 and December 24, 5% of your total purchases will be donated as a holiday gift to your school!

Easy to Give and Receive

Follow these simple steps to Stuff Your School's Stocking:

- ❄ Shop and collect your receipts from any stores or restaurants at The Promenade, The Lakes, and The Commons between November 19th - December 24th
- ❄ Bring your receipts to the on-site concierge from December 13th - December 24th (12-3pm, 4-8pm) and let them know which school you are supporting
- ❄ We'll provide a check to your school in January, 2011



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VAHAN

>>Pulse

Basket Series Vase (2010) by Eric Dandurand of Harmony Glassworks.



Shopping in Harmony

Plan a trip to the tiny Central Coast town of Harmony (population 18) just off Highway 1 for artisan holiday gifts for nearly everyone on your list. Stop by **Harmony Pottery** (805-927-4293) for gorgeous handmade dishes and unique art pieces. Walk across the street to **Harmony Glassworks** (harmonyglassworks.com) for an array of jewelry, decor, art, and large-scale furniture installations like sinks and coffee tables from a variety of glass artists. Take a glassblowing lesson (\$125; arrange in advance) or buy a gift certificate for that artistic soul on your list. Sample the wares at **Harmony Cellars** (harmonycellars.com) and pick up a bottle or two for emergency gift-giving. Once you've seen all there is in Harmony, pop up to Cambria—just 6 miles up the road—for charming boutiques and delicious lunch spots (cambriachamber.org). —*Mallory McCreary*

LAST-MINUTE ENTERTAINING FOR HARD-TO-FEED FOLKS

There's a new line of ready-to-bake vegan and gluten-free cake mixes from Los Osos-based Wholesome Chow (\$5.25 per package; wholesomechow.com), which aren't just easy but *gourmet-delicious* as well. There are popular mixes—vanilla, chocolate, cornbread—and decidedly sophisticated choices—chai, lavender, chocolate chai, chocolate lavender, and lemon poppy seed—that turn into decadently moist, luscious concoctions worthy of the finest drop-in visitors, vegan or not. While the flavors certainly have year-round appeal, adding a holiday twist is easy:

- Add frozen blueberries (Hanukkah) or raspberries (Christmas) to the Luscious Lavender mix for festive muffins or quick breads.
- Add extra chocolate chunks to the Decadent Chocolate mix and top with a glaze of 1 cup sugar, ½ teaspoon vanilla extract, ½ cup cocoa powder, 2 tablespoons plus 2 to 3 teaspoons of soy or almond milk, and ⅛ teaspoon peppermint extract. Once glaze has set, top with crushed candy canes.
- Soak ½ cup dried cranberries in enough golden rum or orange liqueur to cover, then drain and add to the Chai Spice mix; top with a dried-fruit compote or a glaze made with powdered sugar and the remaining liqueur.

The best part: Aside from the quick prep and the delectable end results, there's absolute freedom to lick the beaters since the mixes don't use eggs.

—M.M. ■

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Finds

By Lynne Andujar

CABIN FEVER

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"Mad Bomber Hat" (\$40); L.L. Bean; llbean.com.



"Tree Trimmings Doormat" (\$75); Anthropologie, anthropologie.com.

"Maine Guide Duct Tape" (\$13 for set of two); L.L. Bean, llbean.com.



Juniper Ridge "Sierra Cedar" bar soap (\$6); Beautyhabit; beautyhabit.com.

"Pinecone Candles" (\$10-\$17); Cost Plus World Market at The Promenade at Westlake, and Santa Barbara; worldmarket.com.



"Squirreled Away Lamp" (\$88); Anthropologie, anthropologie.com.



Stonewall Kitchen "Barn Maple Syrup" (\$18); Bread Basket Cake Company, Camarillo, 805-482-1337; and stonewallkitchen.com.

Michael Aram copper "Bark Vase" (\$90); Saks Fifth Avenue, Santa Barbara, saks.com.



"Tartan Coasters" (\$16); Williams-Sonoma Home, wshome.com.

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Finds ^{STYLE}

By Jemma Wildermuth



BLACKOUT

Time tells all with these noir watches.

1. Raymond Weil "Gent's Nabucco Rivoluzione Chronograph Automatic" (\$4,995); Dejaun Jewelers, Westlake Village, dejaun.com.
2. Marvin "Origin M108" (\$950); Van Gundy Jewelers, Ventura, vangundys.com.
3. Zenith "El Primero Retrotimer" (\$6,900); Dejaun Jewelers at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, and at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park, dejaun.com.
4. Breitling "Avenger Seawolf Chrono" (\$3,276); Jewelry Couture, Ventura, jewelrycouture.com.
5. Nixon "The Spencer" (\$250); Nordstrom at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks; and at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park; or nordstrom.com.
6. Tag Heuer "Aquaracer 500M" (\$2,750); Jewelry Couture (see previous).
7. Millage "Greenwich" (\$1,200); Malibu Rockstar Couture Jewelry at Malibu Country Mart, Malibu, 310-456-7374.
8. Officine Panerai "PAM 292 Radiomir Black Seal Ceramica" (\$8,000); Polacheck's Jewelers at The Commons at Calabasas, Calabasas, polachecks.com.
9. Ernst Benz limited-edition "PVD ChronoScope" (\$5,650); John Varvatos at Malibu Country Mart, Malibu, johnvarvatos.com.

INSPIRED GIFTING



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SHE'LL BE ALL AFLUTTER FOR A TREND-FORWARD FEATHERED CLUTCH THIS HOLIDAY. TELL HER YOU "GET IT" AND CHOOSE AN EDGY BLACK HUE TO KEEP THIS LOOK GROUNDED IN STYLE.

ANN TAYLOR



MISSING NOTHING

WHAT THEY LACK IN LENGTH, THEY MAKE UP FOR IN PANACHE – GIFT HER WITH THIS SEASON'S FUN, FINGERLESS GLOVES AND LET HER LAYER ON THE STYLE THIS WINTER.

BANANA REPUBLIC



BRACE YOURSELF

ONE FOR HER, TWO FOR YOU. STOCK UP ON BRIGHTLY-HUED BANGLES FOR BOTH OF YOU THIS SEASON. DID WE MENTION THAT MULTI-TASKING CAN BE MAGICAL?

MACY'S



SLIP INTO STYLE

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PARTY PERFECT

'Tis the season to look white-hot.

"Cascade Knit" dress (\$158); White House Black Market at The Lakes, Thousand Oaks, whitehouseblackmarket.com.

Amber Thayer "The Saint" necklace (\$275); amberthayer.com.

Denise James Jewelry Designs freshwater pearl bracelet (\$1,500); The Malibu Colony Company at Malibu Country Mart, Malibu, malibucolonyco.com.

Michele "Ceramic Deco Diamond" watch (\$1,995); Dejaun Jewelers at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, and at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park, dejaun.com; or Jewelry Couture, Ventura, jewelry-couture.com.

Diamond and pearl earrings (\$3,890); Malibu Rockstar Couture Jewelry at Malibu Country Mart, Malibu, 310-456-7374.

La Perla "Ivor Suspender" garter belt (\$65) and Falke "Seidenglatt" stockings (\$36); J Girl Lingerie and Cosmetics, Westlake Village, jgirlingerie.com.

"Cybelle" metallic suede pump (\$795); Jimmy Choo at Westfield Topanga, jimmychoo.com.

Deux Lux "Aurora Zip" wallet (\$40); Bull Couture, Thousand Oaks, 805-497-2855.

"Rising South Sea Pearl" ring (\$2,250); Daniel Gibbings Jewelry, Montecito, danielgibbingsjewelry.com.





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By Mallory McCreary



SEAWORLD SAN DIEGO

SeaWorld gets into the spirit with the 320-foot "Holiday Tree of Lights," ice-skating, and holiday-themed animal shows.

For the Little Ones

The **San Diego Zoo** (sandiegozoo.org) is staying open until 8 p.m. from December 11 through January 2 as part of its "Jungle Bells" celebration (it will close early on December 24; Santa says he has to leave early that day). The extended hours feature snow flurries, twinkling lights shaped like animals, holiday treats at the zoo's restaurants, and live performances from acrobatic elves and a handbell choir. Dr. Zoolittle's show in the Children's Zoo is a take on *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* with animals, and "Animal Magic for the Holidays" allows guests to interact with the stars of this special show.

SeaWorld San Diego's "Christmas Celebration" (seaworldsandiego.com) takes place daily December 18 through 31 and includes the sea lion and otter comedy show, "Clyde and Seamore's Night Before Christmas," and "Shamu's Christmas" with live choirs, musical soloists, and the world's most famous killer whale. There's also an ice-skating rink, "The Polar Express 4-D Experience," and a 320-foot "Holiday Tree of Lights."

FREE TO BE MERRY

Prohibition was repealed on December 5, 1933, and the **Sir Francis Drake Hotel** (sirfrancisdrake.com) in San Francisco's Union Square is celebrating all month long with the "Ultimate Repeal Day Package" (from \$329 through January 31). The Drake has a history of hosting flappers and bootleggers since it opened in 1928, and even maintains a secret speakeasy between the first and second floors of the hotel (a tour of it is included in the package). The deal also includes accommodations in a king deluxe room, valet parking, two signature cocktails, and a \$50 dining credit.

Psst! Guests who know the secret password (it's "bootlegger") also get their choice of complimentary amenities, including cocktails, a bottle of liquor delivered in a brown bag, an in-room dining credit, or a room upgrade.

The sumptuous **Bar Drake** in the lobby of the Sir Francis Drake Hotel serves 1920s-inspired cocktails and showcases an impressive display of whiskies—some dating back to the 1930s.



Hot Tip:

Give the gift of relaxation to that special someone (or yourself) with a holiday package at the Philippe Starck-designed Ciel Spa at the SLS Hotel in Beverly Hills (\$190, through December 31; cielatls.com). The two-hour treatment includes an invigorating coconut and vanilla body scrub and a 20-jet "experience" shower in the wet treatment room, a relaxing soak in a spa suite, and a 60-minute Relaxation massage—plus a lavender-and-flaxseed-filled eye pillow to take home with you.

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805.278.0388

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At left: A soaring Christmas tree in the lobby of downtown LA's Millennium Biltmore Hotel (open since 1923) showcases the stunning Italian Renaissance architecture of the property.

Below: The impressive sugar castle creation of chef Jean-François Houdré is an annual holiday tradition at the Westin St. Francis in San Francisco.

Celebrate in the City

See all that's new in downtown LA with a stay at the historic **Millennium Biltmore Hotel** (millenniumhotels.com), named one of the "Top 10 Hotels Decked Out for Holiday Travelers" by Orbitz last year. Several winter-themed packages, which include accommodations and valet parking, take advantage of all that downtown LA has to offer:

- "Secrets of the Fashion District" includes a three-hour guided shopping tour of the 100 blocks of live-work lofts and designer shops—apparel and accessories, textiles, flowers—in the LA Fashion District (includes shopping bag, map, bottled water, and snack bar), plus two signature winter cocktails and gingerbread cookies. The deal (from \$250) requires a seven-day advance reservation; use promo code "FASHIOND."
- "Silver Bells Signature Package" (from \$169 through December 30) includes a full breakfast buffet and evening turndown with four flavors of gourmet chocolate sleigh bells.
- "Winter Wonderland" (from \$149 through January 17) includes two tickets and skate rentals to *Downtown on Ice*, the outdoor ice-skating rink directly across the street from the Biltmore in Pershing Square, plus fresh gingerbread and signature winter cocktails for two.
- The "New Year's Eve" package (from \$369; December 31 only) includes a four-course dinner for two in Smeraldi's Restaurant, two tickets to the New Year's celebration featuring live music and dancing, midnight champagne toast and balloon drop, and a full breakfast buffet for two on New Year's Day.

THE SAN FRANCISCO SUGAR TREAT



The **Westin St. Francis**—the only hotel located right on San Francisco's Union Square (westinstfrancis.com)—has been decorated for the holidays with more than \$60,000 in adornments created by Joe Vincent Designs. There are impressive themed Christmas trees and holiday vignettes around the property, but the most spectacular decoration is executive pastry chef Jean-François Houdré's signature 12-foot rotating holiday sugar castle, a tradition since 2005. The castle is in the style of a French château with more than 20 grand circular

towers, about 30 rooms with illuminated windows—and it weighs more than 1,200 pounds. Two packages offer additional seasonal merriment:

The "Macy's Shopping Package" includes accommodations plus a \$100 gift certificate to the West Coast's largest Macy's, just steps from the hotel (from \$250).

The "Glide Into the Holidays Package" includes admission for two to the Safeway Holiday Ice Rink in Union Square, skate rentals, and a one-night stay (from \$180; good through January 8).

DON'T MISS:

Walk of the Inns, Palm Springs, December 9–10: a tour of historic, boutique, and small inns; visitpalmsprings.com.

Meridian Vineyards Holiday Open House, Paso Robles, December 11: Sample exclusive wines and make a holiday wreath with vines cut from the vineyards; meridianvineyards.com.

39th annual **San Diego Bay Parade of Lights**, December 12 and 19; sdparadeoflights.org.

102nd annual **Newport Beach Christmas Boat Parade**, December 15–19; visitnewportbeach.com.

Second annual **Nutcracker Holiday Tea** at The Grand Del Mar, San Diego, December 18–21: family-friendly tea service followed by a 45-minute performance of *The Nutcracker Suite*; \$48 for adults, \$22 for children (ages 4 to 12); thegranddelmar.com.

Christmas at Hearst Castle: See handmade decorations in select rooms as part of the Experience Tour; hearstcastle.com.

Outdoor ice-skating all month at San Diego's Hotel del Coronado (hoteldel.com) and Horton Plaza (sdice.com); and at San Francisco's Embarcadero Center (embarcaderocenter.com) and the Holiday Ice Rink at Union Square (unionsquareicerink.com). ■

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By Mark Langton

THROUGH 12/20

Through December 20: IN FOCUS: A PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBIT

Hillcrest Center for the Arts, Thousand Oaks. Thirteen accomplished photographers display their works, including Donna Granata (Focus on the Masters founder) and Brian Stethem (California Lutheran University professor). Themes include landscape and portrait photography, photographic abstraction, and cultural studies. (conejoarts.org)

Through December 31: CALIFORNIA-STYLE SLEIGH RIDES

Ventura Harbor. Nightly tours of the Ventura Keys and Harbor take guests past shoreline homes with holiday lighting displays. Full bar and seasonal beverages are available. (venturaboatrentals.com)

Through January 2, 2011: COFFEE: THE WORLD IN YOUR CUP

Santa Barbara Natural History Museum. Discover the history of one of the world's most traded commodities, as well as how it affects myriad cultures physically, spiritually, and economically. (sbnature.org)

Through January 21: WHERE WE FIND OURSELVES

Ventura Beach Marriott. This group photography exhibit, by four graduate students in Brooks Institute's Master of Fine Arts in Photography program, is a collection of work reflecting journeys in spirituality and identity. (facebook.com/visionsgallery)

December 2–26: THE MYSTERY OF IRMA VEP

Alhecama Theatre, Santa Barbara. This campy mash-up of Victorian melodrama, Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, and *The Mummy's Curse* features two actors in a dozen roles, with creative cross-dress costuming and comedy. Presented by the Ensemble Theatre Company. (ensembletheatre.com)

December 10–21: A FAMILY CHRISTMAS SPECTACULAR

The Lakes at Thousand Oaks. Produced by Bella Vita Events, Jingle Bell Productions, and legendary television personality Bob Eubanks, this event promises to be "Currier & Ives meets 21st century technology." There's a light show choreographed to Christmas music, electric trains, Santa and his elves, toys, a boutique, and more. Local choirs perform nightly. (afamilychristmasspectacular.com)

December 12: DAVID MANN CHOPPER FEST

Ventura County Fairgrounds. Today's choppers can be found in many shapes and sizes, futuristic and "old skool," and this show is one of the best places on the West Coast to see them. More than 150 bikes will be on display. (chopperfestival.com)

December 18–19: COMFORT AND JOY

Alex Theatre, Glendale. The renowned Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles features a 150-member choir performing a collection of seasonal works, the dazzling "Black-Light Puppet Spectacular" choreographed to the *Twelve Days of Christmas*, and more. (gmcla.org)



12/12



Here's an idea:

WINEART AT THE WAV:

Wine and art lovers will welcome this ongoing event at the Working Artists Ventura (WAV). This unique live-work complex houses professional and emerging artists and performers from all genres, and you can interact with them on a rather casual basis while taking walking tours of their studios. In addition to wine and food tastings, there will be live entertainment. (wavartists.com)

Family Fun

12/18



Through December 31: THE HOLIDAY EXTRAVAGANZA

Great American Melodrama, San Luis Obispo. A three-part performance of holiday hoopla begins with a one-act version of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, followed by the company's own fractured fairy-tale opera. The show concludes with a Holiday Vaudeville Review. (americanmelodrama.com)

December 11: JINGLE BELL HIKE

Conejo Community Center, Thousand Oaks. This annual event presented by the Conejo Recreation and Park District features holiday crafts, hot chocolate, photos with Santa, and a quarter-mile guided hike through the Conejo Valley Botanic Garden, which is specially decorated for the holidays. Fee; pre-registration required. (crpd.org)

December 11–12, 17: PARADE OF LIGHTS

Channel Islands Harbor, Ventura Harbor, Santa Barbara Harbor. A variety of holiday-themed activities at these nautical locations culminate with water-borne parades of local boats decked out with lights and decorations. (channelislandsharbor.org, venturaharbor.com, santabarbaraca.gov)

December 4–5, 11–12: CHRISTMAS AT THE FARM

Underwood Family Farms, Moorpark. In addition to fresh fruit and vegetables, the farm features a festive holiday-themed weekend with vintage tractor-drawn wagon rides and visits with Santa Claus. (underwoodfamilyfarms.com)

December 18: TROLLEY TOURS TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

Avila Beach, San Luis Obispo. Take a trolley to the historic Point San Luis Lighthouse and enjoy a docent-led tour. Reservations required. (sanluislighthouse.org)

December 18–19: THE NUTCRACKER

The Granada, Santa Barbara. The State Street Ballet transforms the historic theater into a fantasy landscape. Tchaikovsky's classical score accompanies this beloved tale of adventure. (granadasb.org)

January 6–9, 2011: MARIACHI MUJER

Various locations, Guadalupe, Santa Barbara. This acclaimed all-female group composes, arranges, and performs mariachi music. They've appeared internationally at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and at the Santa Barbara Bowl's 2010 Mariachi Festival. (myspace.com/vivaelartedesantabarbara)



12/18–19



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Insider

HOTticket

BOOK YOUR SEATS NOW FOR THESE HOT UPCOMING EVENTS.

DECEMBER

Through January 2, 2011: **NEXT TO NORMAL**, the rock musical that won the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama as well as three 2009 Tony Awards, comes to the Ahmanson Theatre in Los Angeles. *Rolling Stone* called the Broadway smash “An emotional powerhouse. The best musical of the season—by a mile.” It features Alice Ripley in her Tony Award-winning role. (centertheatregroup.org)

December 14: Relive the days of original hardcore punk with **THE DEAD KENNEDYS** at the Majestic Ventura Theater. (venturatheater.net)

December 16: **THE JUDDS**—mother and daughter duo Naomi and Wynonna Judd—are one of the most successful acts in country music history, winning five Grammy Awards and charting 14 number-one singles. They are touring for one last time in 2010 and will be at the Chumash Casino in Santa Ynez. (chumashcasino.com)

December 21–24: Join Cabrillo Music Theatre for an evening of family entertainment at the **CABRILLO HOLIDAY SPECTACULAR**. The performance at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza features rousing holiday musical arrangements played by Cabrillo Music Theatre's orchestra, plus a chorus line of 14 high-kicking dancers. (toaks.org/cap)

JANUARY 2011

January 14: The world-famous **POPOVITCH COMEDY PET THEATRE** performs at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Witness animal acrobatics and high jinks from this talented troupe of jugglers, clowns, cats, dogs, and birds. These performers have appeared in more than 20 countries as well as on *The Tonight Show*, *Late Night With David Letterman*, and *America's Got Talent*. (toaks.org/cap)

CONFIDENCE

IN YOURSELF AND
YOUR SURGEON

January 14: Heralded as “the next *Riverdance*” by The *Sunday Times* of London, the international troupe Bellydance Superstars presents **BOMBAY BELLYWOOD** at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. The performance features 16 top professional dancers in spectacular costumes who combine the art of belly dance with other styles (including Indian and ballet) backed by master percussionist Issam Houshan. (toaks.org/cap)

January 15: Featuring stars from Broadway and television as well as local artists, **UPRIGHT CABARET** fuses the songs of musical idols with cabaret to create the American Icon Series. This performance, at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza, is themed “The Mighty Mississippi” and features the music of Louis Armstrong, Elvis Presley, and Prince. (toaks.org/cap)

January 20: **THE PEKING ACROBATS** bring their 2,000-year-old feats of physical artistry to The Granada in Santa Barbara. These incredible athletes seemingly defy the laws of physics. (granadasb.org)

January 22: The Center for the Arts at Pepperdine University presents jazz, pop, and R&B singing legend **AL JARREAU**. With five Grammy Awards, Jarreau has a vocal style that is truly unique. (arts.pepperdine.edu)

January 22–23: The Santa Barbara Symphony presents its first collaboration with Santa Barbara’s preeminent ballet company, State Street Ballet, to perform Aaron Copland’s **APPALACHIAN SPRING**. The program also features Stravinsky’s playful *Pulcinella* suite and Schubert’s Symphony No. 5. (thesymphony.org)

January 27–February 6: As one of the more star-studded U.S. film festivals, the **SANTA BARBARA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL** returns for its 26th year. In addition to an array of screenings at The Arlington Theatre, there are celebrity seminars and panels open to the public. (sbfilmfestival.org)

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FEBRUARY

February 2: Camerata Pacifica's **SPEAKEASY** features award-winning pianist Warren Jones at the Wine Cask in Santa Barbara. The interactive format allows the audience to enjoy classical music with good food and wine while they listen to and discuss the music with performers. (cameratapacifica.org)

February 12: Jazz guitar impresarios **BILL FRISELL AND JOHN SCOFIELD** perform innovative songs ranging from standards to fusion to soul at the Lobero Theatre in Santa Barbara. These artists rank among the top jazz musicians today. (lobero.com)

February 12: A high-energy mix of athleticism and intricate musical rhythms, **SCRAPARTSMUSIC** defies traditional performance art. Nearly 150 handmade instruments/works of art—made from such junkyard finds as artillery shells and accordion parts—are played by five musicians for a unique live experience. (arts.pepperdine.edu/performances)

February 28: **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT** comes to the Performing Arts Center San Luis Obispo. Based on the uproarious film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, this musical follows King Arthur and his knights of Camelot on their search for the Holy Grail. (calpolyarts.org)

MARCH

March 6: Now in its 54th year, **IT'S MAGIC** features six of the world's top magic and variety acts, which have performed in Europe and Las Vegas, as well as at the Magic Castle in Hollywood. (toaks.org/cap)

March 8: Few artists have shaped modern jazz like five-time Grammy Award-winner **McCOY TYNER**. From his days with the John Coltrane Quartet to his current groundbreaking piano compositions, Tyner continues to push musical boundaries. He performs at the Lobero Theatre with the Brubeck Institute Jazz Quintet. (lobero.com)

March 19: House of Floyd performs its nationally acclaimed show **PINK FLOYD LASER EXTRAVAGANZA** at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Pink Floyd classics played live

include "Dark Side of the Moon," "The Wall," and "Wish You Were Here" backed by a laser light show, video graphics, and special effects. (toaks.org/cap)

March 22-27: The Theater League, dedicated to bringing live Broadway shows to local theaters, presents one of the most endearing and successful plays in Broadway history, **FIDDLER ON THE ROOF**, at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center at the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Young and old alike will enjoy the music, dance, and humor of this classic. (toaks.org/cap)

Save the Date

MAKE YOUR RESERVATIONS AND SHOW YOUR SUPPORT FOR THESE CHARITIES.

DECEMBER

Through December 31: The Art Gallery at the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village is the site of a new art exhibit, **CANVAS TO A CURE**. Showcasing female artists and sculptors, these works are available for sale. Proceeds benefit The Wellness Community Valley/Ventura. (fourseasons.com/westlakevillage)

December 9: Senior Concerns hosts its **NUTCRACKER TEA** at University Village in Thousand Oaks and features a performance from the Pacific Festival Ballet. There will be themed tea tables and a wreath raffle; all proceeds benefit Senior Concerns' programs and services. (seniorconcerns.org)

December 19: The Miller Family YMCA, located in the Dos Vientos neighborhood of Newbury Park, hosts its **JINGLE BELL 5K RUN**. There will also be a 1K fun run/walk. Proceeds benefit the Miller Family YMCA 2010 Strong Kids Campaign. (sevymca.org)

JANUARY 2011

January 15: The Thousand Oaks High School Lancer Band Boosters host its **BAND ON A RUN** fundraiser at Los Cerritos Middle School in Thousand Oaks. The event begins with 5K run/walk, followed by a post-race vendor expo. (tohsband.org)

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Insider

January 19: The Los Angeles Art Show (laartshow.com) kicks off its five-day event with a **VERNISSAGE AND CHARITY BENEFIT** (pre-view showing) at the Los Angeles Convention Center. Proceeds benefit The Art of Elysium, a nonprofit group dedicated to bringing actors, artists, and musicians together with children who suffer from serious medical conditions. (theartofelysium.org)

January 28–30: The Child Abuse Listening and Mediation (C.A.L.M.) organization presents the **CALM ANTIQUES SHOW AND VINTAGE DECORATIVE ARTS SHOW AND SALE** at Santa Barbara's Earl Warren Showgrounds. Furniture, garden artifacts, decorative accessories, paintings, estate jewelry, and more will be available for purchase from 80 dealers. (calmantiqueshow.com)

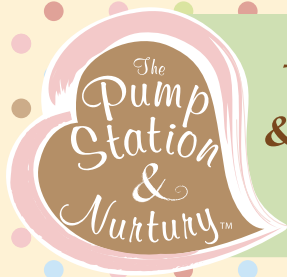
FEBRUARY

February 5: The Family School in Los Olivos hosts the **BLACK AND WHITE GALA** fundraiser at The Hotel Corque, which starts with wine tasting and includes dinner prepared by James Beard Award-winning chef Bradley Ogden of Solvang's Root 246. (syvfamilyschool.org)

February 13: The Sylvia White Gallery presents **BE A SAINT VALENTINE'S DAY BENEFIT**. Local Ventura juried artists will be the recipients of cash prizes raised at this event. (artadvice.com)

February 19: Community Conscience "Under One Roof" human services center holds its annual **MARDI GRAS BALL** at the Hyatt Westlake Plaza in Westlake Village. The event includes champagne and hors d'oeuvres, gourmet dinner with wine, silent and live auctions, live entertainment, and dancing. Community Conscience grants nonprofit groups in the greater Conejo Valley rent-free administrative offices. (communityconscience.org)

February 26: Casa Pacifica's **ANGELS BALL** takes place at Sherwood Country Club in Thousand Oaks with cocktails, dinner, dancing, and a live auction. Proceeds benefit programs supporting neglected and emotionally disturbed children in the tri-counties area. (casapacific.org)



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MARCH

March 4–5: FASHION WEEK VENTURA brings together local artists, entertainers, designers, and merchants in support of AIDS Project Ventura. Held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, the event is themed “Faerie Tales.” (fashionweekventura.com)

March 6: Help the hungry and disadvantaged around the world by taking a little stroll around the Conejo Valley. The 33rd **CONEJO VALLEY CROP WALK** raises funds to help with relief, development, and refugee assistance in 80 countries. Additionally, 25 percent of the money raised benefits MANNA Conejo Valley Food Bank, Meals on Wheels, and Lutheran Social Services. (Sherrill Hyink, 805-492-3674)

March 18: The Thousand Oaks Woman’s Club celebrates more than 45 years of service in the Conejo Valley with its fundraiser luncheon and fashion show, **MAKING MAGIC IN THE CONEJO VALLEY**, at Los Robles Greens in Thousand Oaks. The organization chooses one charity to donate to: This year’s recipient is Westminster Free Clinic that provides free and low-cost care to families in the Conejo Valley. (thousandoakswomansclub.org)

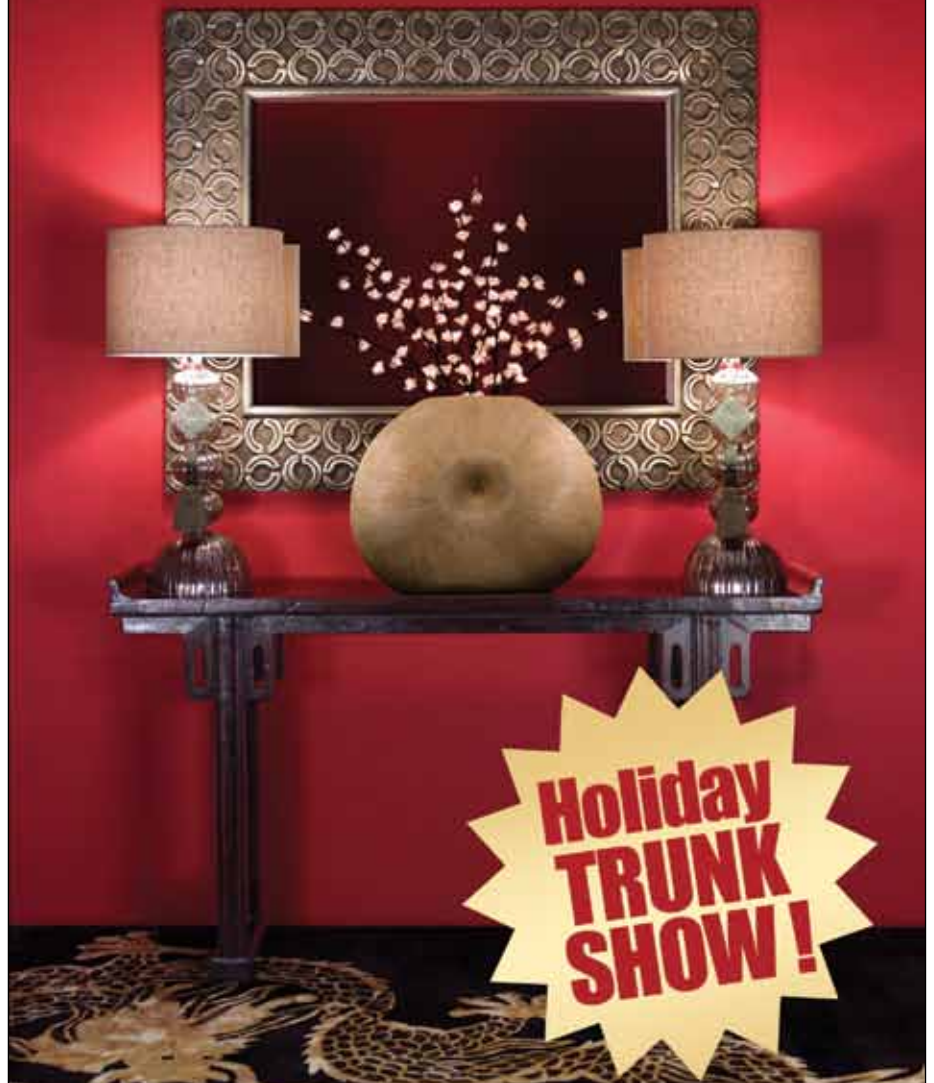
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If you would like to submit your event or organization for possible inclusion in Insider, please email the information and a contact number/email to insider@805living.com. Please submit your request no later than 14 weeks prior to the issue in which you’d like the information to appear.

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Mind/Body/Soul

By Maryann Hammers



LAVISH, LUXE, AND LOVELY

A health and beauty gift guide for wellness, pampering, and self-awareness.



FORE YOU: For the amateur or professional golfer on the gift list, Kinesis Fitness (kinesisfitnesscenter.com) in Westlake Village has put together a golf-performance personal-training program that works all the muscles used when swinging a club. Classes focus on engaging and stabilizing the core, correcting knee alignment along with shoulder and hip turns, and maximizing leverage.

"The golf swing is a dynamic, fluid movement that combines flexibility, strength, timing, leverage, and rotation," says David Cohen, co-owner of Kinesis Fitness. "The main goal is to create a consistent swing path that results in lower scores. You will not believe the consistency this training will bring to your shots, from the drive to the wedge, whether you are hitting an uphill or downhill shot."

Ten semi-private training sessions are \$299, which includes a gift box with golf items.

NO FRILLS, JUST FITNESS: Know someone who, year after year, resolves to get fit? Help that resolution stick with a three-month "Quick Start" membership at the new J Raw Fitness (jrawfitness.com) in Westlake Village. Be warned: This is no froufrou fitness center. Workouts are intense, fast-paced, and sweaty. The Quick Start package includes unlimited cardio, strength training, and yoga/stretch classes, plus six one-hour personal training sessions. The \$349 package also includes a weekly two-hour Extreme BootCamp that's so hard-core it's called "War."

SANTA BARBARA SPA-CATION: Float Luxury Spa (floatluxuryspa.com), one of the nicest day spas in Santa Barbara, partners with the Canary Hotel (a Leading Hotel of the World) to create the "Float Spa Day" gift package. The spa day includes three-and-a-half hours of pampering (an exfoliating body treatment, aromatherapy massage, and "The Works," Float's signature firming facial) plus relaxation time in the private garden with reflecting pool and fountains.

Then check into luxe accommodations at Canary (canarysantabarbara.com), a boutique hotel just off State Street. Make time to catch the sunset at The Perch, the rooftop with swimming pool, oversized hot tub, and cozy, open fireplace (weekend, \$725 nightly; weekday, \$665).

TWELVE MONTHS OF GIVING: If one gift is good, how much better is a gift every month? Remedy Skin + Body (remedyskinandbody.com), a cosmetic dermatology center and spa in Westlake Village, offers a customized skin rejuvenation program of monthly treatments and products.

"This package will spoil the recipient with a customized program, utilizing the latest in skin-care innovations," says medical director Talia Emery, M.D. "The recipient will not only feel pampered but will see the lasting results in the improved health of their skin."

The package begins with a thorough skin analysis with Dr. Emery, and, over the course of the year, includes skin-brightening peels, custom-makeup blending and application, skin-care products,

This page: The lounge at Remedy Skin + Body in Westlake Village sets a cozy stage for the latest in cutting-edge skin-care treatments. **Opposite page:** Seasonal signature soothers can be enjoyed at Float Luxury Spa in Santa Barbara where patrons can relax by the tranquil reflecting pool.

laser treatments (if necessary), and de-stressing aromatherapy massage. A computerized skin assessment prior to treatment and at the conclusion of the package is also included. The \$975 package includes a gift certificate wrapped along with a Kai candle to begin the de-stressing process (and to ensure the recipient has a gift to unwrap during the holidays).

THE WORKS: Decisions, decisions. Don't know which sort of experience to give? Well, just wrap up all of them (plus more) in one comprehensive, luxurious, life-altering package. The Transformation Membership Program at California Health & Longevity Institute at Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village (chli.com/packages) is a mind-boggling, 12-month program offering a year's worth of personal training and fitness classes; nutrition, fitness, and life balance workshops; dietary consultations; healthy cooking classes; one-on-one lifestyle consultations; and unlimited use of the spa facilities and pools, with continual monitoring, support, and accountability to encourage and sustain lifelong change.

But wait, there's more! The package also includes two treatments from the alternative medicine menu (such as acupuncture or hypnotherapy), body composition assessments, and even an overnight stay at the Four Seasons, along with discounts on the hotel's restaurants, spa treatments, and salon, and a slew of other perks; \$5,200. ■



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Social Savvy

By Laura Samuel Meyn

When it comes to sending holiday cards, I don't know who to keep on the list. If I haven't seen this person in 20 years, do they really want to keep getting cards from me?

A: They might—do you want to keep getting cards from them? Many of us have people in our lives we only touch base with around the holidays. There's some comfort in keeping up with old friends and distant relatives, even if only annually; you get the year's highlights (hopefully), and the reassurance that in some small way, you're still part of each other's lives. But as for long-lost friends who don't respond to your cards by sending their own, and who never check in during the year, it's fine to drop them from your list.

If you want to make a dramatic change to your list, try waiting for the cards to come in and just send one to anyone who sends one to you. While I've done that in especially busy years, I usually wind up sending cards to several people who don't send them to me—mainly young and old relatives and renegade friends whom I love enough to keep on my list in spite of their inability to pick up a pen (you know who you are).

Etiquette requires that when you do send cards, you select appropriate greetings for your recipients (like the neutral "Happy Holidays," as needed); add a personal message or at least sign your name by hand—even if it's preprinted on the cards, and include your return address on the envelope (especially if you'd like a card back).

Q: How much should one spend on gifts for teachers? What if your child has multiple teachers?

A: The most important thing is to express your heartfelt and specific thanks for the very important role the teacher plays in your child's life. As for adding a gift, every circle is a little different. For my own kids' preschool teachers (two per classroom),

I typically give them each a \$10 gift card to a bookstore or café, with a handwritten note about how much I appreciate what they do for my children. At the grade-school level, many classes have a tradition of parents chipping in \$10 to \$20 apiece for one large gift or gift card for the teacher from the entire class. If you're new to your school, call or email another class parent (or the school secretary) to find out the protocol. With such group gifts, it's appropriate to send a separate card to express your personal thanks, but there's no need to duplicate the gift.

While it's tempting to think that a more personal gift might be more meaningful, remember that your child's teacher has anywhere from 20 to 30 students—every year. Consider the net result if even one-third brought baked goods (goodbye, diet) or tchotchkes (hello, landfill). That's why I recommend enlisting your child's help in making the card personal, but keeping the gift practical.

Q: If you can't afford to buy gifts for all the people you want to (and you know they'll be buying you something), do you need to explain the situation to them, or just endure feeling sheepish?

A: Communication is key in these situations: With family or close friends, help them plan ahead by letting them in on your situation as early as possible. I've known families to institute "homemade gifts" years that tapped into personal talents and "gifts under \$5" years that challenged shoppers to get creative; larger families sometimes draw names so each person only purchases—and receives—one gift. With friends, it's appropriate to suggest that you go to "cards



only" for the holidays, which can be a relief on both sides. (With close friends who really enjoy giving and receiving, you can send a small gift when their birthday rolls around instead of exchanging holiday gifts, to better spread out the spending.)

If you've waited too long to implement a budget-friendly gift-giving plan within your circle, don't show up empty-handed. For less than \$10, you can:

- Print out a favorite recipe and attach it to a small pot of herbs
- Bake cookies or make spiced nuts and pack them in a pretty gift bag or tin
- Frame a favorite photo
- Tie a handwritten card to an inexpensive bottle of wine

Q: How do you share children with your ex-spouse during the holidays, so that neither the children nor the former partner feel left out or short-changed?

A: I turned to local parenting and behavior specialist Faith P. Golden of It's Aparent in Calabasas (itsaparentparenting.com), whose first word of advice was to think about the situation from the child's view. Oftentimes that means not being shuttled around from location to location on the same day, but rather, deciding where they will spend the holiday, and allowing them time to enjoy it. "Most divorced families

rotate holidays. One year, the child spends Thanksgiving and Christmas Eve with one parent, and then Christmas Day with the other parent. The following year, the calendar is the opposite," says Golden. "If the holiday being celebrated by the family is Hanukkah, the nights of Hanukkah can be alternated, or the first four spent with one parent and the second four spent with the other parent."

Of course, she adds, all of this changes if the parents live in different cities or states, when the logistics of travel might mean that the child regularly spends Thanksgiving with their custodial parent and winter vacation with their noncustodial parent.

Golden herself has tried yet another approach. "My ex and I happily spend Thanksgiving with our kids and families. It works out fine, and shows the kids that even though we aren't married anymore, we can still get along—an important concept for kids," she says. "Later in life when there are important occasions like weddings, your kids won't have to worry about the parents being in the same room together, which can be a huge burden to them."

If you find yourself off-duty come a holiday, Golden encourages you to spend time with friends, other family, or doing whatever makes you happy. "Although you will be missing your child's presence, this is not a time to feel sorry for yourself. Your child is happy, healthy, and loved—the most important things to you," says Golden. "So have fun yourself. You can share some great stories with your child when you are together again." ■

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Need advice on how to navigate awkward social situations—when you're torn between what you'd like to do and what you think you should do? Send us your quandaries (don't worry, we won't print your name) to edit@805Living.com and put "Social Savvy" in the subject line of the email.*



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Good Deeds

By Mark Langton Photographs by Amanda Peacock



The stars of the reality TV series *Pretty Wild*, Tess Taylor, Alexis Neiers, and Gabrielle Arlington



Rob Brayton, Rick Monti



Bill Faith, Andrea Arlington, Michael Neiers



Elly Schneider, Scott Halpern, Twyla Monti



Barbara Green, Vodie Travis, Hank Heister



Carlie Nething, Linda Senn

FASHION FOR A CAUSE

New business gives back on opening night.

THE EVENT: Thousand Oaks' newest fashion boutique, Twyla K (twylak.com), held a fundraising event on September 16 at Fiamme Restaurant to benefit two area charities. The fashion show featured designs from the store's fall collection.

THE CAUSE: The store's owner, Twyla Kendall Monti, traded in a successful East Coast career in property management to become an emerging West Coast artist and fashionista by producing several trunk shows that raised money for local charities, and that tradition continues with Twyla K. The fundraising party benefited two organizations close to Monti's heart: Hospice of the Conejo (hospiceoftheconejo.org), and OwieBowWowie and Friends (owiebowwowie.net), which donates plush dolls to patients at Childrens Hospital Los Angeles and other area hospitals. These toys are intended especially for young patients who have no family with them while receiving treatment. ■



Vicki Lymberopoulos, Stephanie Alatone, Linda Perry



Liz Beddow, Irene Brennick



Gina Woods, Ann Marie Williams

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Good Deeds

By Mark Langton



Michael Reagan, Bob Neill



Janeen and Bob Holmes



Janette Morra, Bob Lennon



Suzanne Carroll, Randy Strong



Marilyn Adam, Joel and Ann Remmenga

THE RIGHT STUFF

My Stuff Bags Foundation, based in Westlake Village, held its second annual fundraiser to provide children rescued from abuse, neglect, and abandonment with individual duffel bags containing belongings they usually do not have as they enter foster care. Thousands of children each year receive toys, books, stuffed animals, personal toiletries, warm blankets, and other basic childhood necessities. (mystuffbags.org)

—Photographs by Mark Langton



Verne Brizendine, Nicolette Worley Marselian, Anchulee Raongthum



Francine and Michael Markow



Jay and Dulce Hoffman, Lorraine and Tim Kelly



Dana and Mike Bennett



Michael and Janet Veta



MaryNell Wolff, Barry Petersen, Michelle Bourne



Jeff Adler, Juliet Funt, Phil Leddel

TAKING ON TOMORROW

Genworth Insurance Company of the Gold Coast hosted the "Tomorrow Without Alzheimer's" fundraiser on October 2 at The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum. ABC's host of *Dating in the Dark*, Rossi Morreale, CBS News correspondent Barry Petersen, and motivational speaker Juliet Funt, daughter of *Candid Camera* creator Allen Funt, were on hand. Proceeds benefited the Alzheimer's Association's Central Coast and Los Angeles chapters whose goal is to eliminate Alzheimer's disease through the advancement of research, to provide and enhance care and support for all affected, and to reduce the risk of dementia through the promotion of brain health. (alz.org)

—Photographs by Judi Bumstead



Kacey and Rossi Morreale



Gwen and Charles Browning



Lauren Rosen, Sue Lindemann



Susan Franklin, Serge Morales



Andy and Ellen Smith

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DECK THE WALLS

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Handmade square sheets of Wallteriors **DAMASK** wallpaper in Mimosa (\$72 per square yard) shown here in a classic installation can also be custom cut (free of charge) and randomly installed to create a more abstract design; Designs of the Interior, Westlake Village, interiordesignwestlake.com.

Tips From a Pro

“In the seventies we were wallpapering everything—every wall, every room,” says Karen Montoya, co-owner of Dandy Walls in Camarillo (dandywalls.com). But today’s designs—which sport exotic materials such as feathers, jewels, and beads; use eco-friendly papers, inks, and pastes; and are easier to remove than their decades-old cousins—are also “much more forward-thinking,” Montoya says, citing a wallpaper resurgence among young couples and families looking for something new. Wallpaper can be used only on a focal wall, or to create a bed “headboard,” or as framed panels or a mural. “You might wallpaper an entire powder room,” Montoya says, “but in large rooms it’s better to focus. [Panels are] like having a painting as opposed to a continual wall. The panel becomes a piece of artwork, whereas a whole wall creates a mood.” Panels can also defray costs. “[For papers with a] high price point, one full wall would be unaffordable. But you can do panels with much less wallpaper and get the same effect.”

Though many of Montoya’s customers are do-it-yourself types, she recommends hiring a professional installer for designer papers with “flocking, glass beads, sands, different substrates. They’re not easy for the average homeowner to hang.”

With 200 patterns in stock and an extensive library of custom-order papers, Dandy Walls offers an array of choices that can be overwhelming. “It is a process,” Montoya says. “I do have a few customers who come in and know what they want,” but she says for most people it’s a multi-day decision. Montoya recommends that people bring in items from their home that they want to match or complement. She’ll select some styles and patterns for the customer to review and will even go to people’s homes for a consultation, if needed. “Wallpaper is another medium to work with to bring color, texture, design, and balance into the home and into the room,” she says. “It really stands out and enhances the home.”

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» Upgrades



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1. The delicate swirls in York Wallcoverings' **CINNIBAR** in Pewter (\$65 per 27-foot roll) add whimsy while maintaining an upper-crust attitude. Dandy Walls, Camarillo, 805-482-9000; or Decor Color & Design, Thousand Oaks, 805-495-7097; or yorkwall.com.

2. York Wallcoverings uses sand to add dimension and texture on eco-friendly, non-woven papers. On wall, **BOXWOOD** in Off-White with sand (\$85 per 27-foot roll). Also shown: **BOXWOOD** in Gold, **CRACKED EARTH** in Gray (\$75 per 27-foot roll), and **COBBLE** in Champagne (\$140 per 27-foot roll). Dandy Walls, Camarillo, 805-482-9000; or Decor Color & Design, Thousand Oaks, 805-495-7097; or yorkwall.com.

3. Paintable wallpaper allows for custom colors on top of existing design, as in Graham & Brown's **JUDE** (\$30 per 32.8-foot roll); Astek Inc., Van Nuys, astekwallcovering.com; or grahambrown.com.

4. **BAMBOO FLOCK ON SILVER** (\$450 per 11-yard roll) from Cole & Son is a nod to papers of the past; Gail Claridge Interiors, Westlake Village, gailclaridge.com; or Astek Inc., Van Nuys, astekwallcovering.com.

5. The artisans at Belle Chasse Home hand-paint graceful Chinoiserie designs on silk to create the custom paneled look of high-end art: **GREEN SILVER-LEAF PANELS** (\$4,200); Cabana Home, Santa Barbara, cabanahome.com.

6. The ombre effect in Kreme Life's **ACORN GATE** in Ivory (\$195 per 16-foot roll) adds a new dimension to a geometric pattern; kremelife.com.

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Owl ornament (\$11); Botanik,
Summerland, botanikinc.com.

Red tin star ornaments (\$15 each);
Casa Mexicana Imports, Westlake
Village, casamexicanaimports.com.



Merry & Bright

Deck the halls with gifts that capture the many colors of the season.

Photographs by Gary Moss
Produced by Lynne Andujar



Seeing Red

1. "Acacia Red" crystal vase (\$1,195); Lalique at South Coast Plaza, Costa Mesa, lalique.com. 2. Handmade gift tags by Rosemary Olson (\$8 each); The Agoura Antique Mart, Agoura Hills, agouraantiquemart.com. 3. Anna Griffin "Darcey Red" wrap tote (\$30); The Agoura Antique Mart, Agoura Hills, agouraantiquemart.com. 4. Surftech Paddlesports "14-foot Surftech Bark Expedition" stand-up paddleboard (\$2,200) and "Ventana" paddle (\$200); A-Frame Surf Shop, Carpinteria, 805-684-8803. 5. Ugg Australia "Evara" wool sneakers (\$90); Jack's Shoes, Westlake Village, jacksshoesofwestlake.com. 6. Power Balance Performance Technology "Silicone Wristbands" (\$30 each); Val Surf, Thousand Oaks, 805-497-1166. 7. Porcelain piggy bank (\$14); Amelia Jane, Summerland, littleameliajane.com. 8. Barbara Bacigalupi "Umano Beautyrings" napkin rings (\$48 set of four or \$12 each); Pacific Rim Home, Westlake Village, pacificrimhome.com; linen napkin (\$5); Agoura Antique Mart, Agoura Hills, agouraantiquemart.com. 9. Jonathan Adler "Tomato Pill Carafe" (\$45); Kitson at Malibu Lumber Yard, Malibu, shopkitson.com. 10. JAQK Cellars "22 Black" 2007 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley (\$27); Wades Wines, Westlake Village, wadeswines.com. 11. The Light Garden plum tree indoor lights (\$49); Pacific Rim Home, Westlake Village, pacificrimhome.com.



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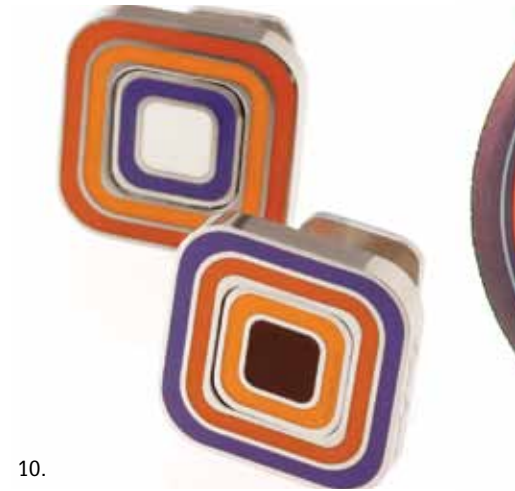
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Orange Crush + Classic Camel

1. "Scrabble" key rings (\$40 each); The Malibu Colony Company at Malibu Country Mart, Malibu, malibucolonyco.com.
2. "Snap Hat" (\$85); Tory Burch at Malibu Lumber Yard, Malibu, toryburch.com.
3. "Biere" glasses (\$8 each); À la Maison, Westlake Village, alamaisonwlv.com.
4. Dale Tiffany "Favrile Collection" handmade glass vase (\$89); Pacific Rim Home, Westlake Village, pacificrimhome.com.
5. Barton Perreira "Caine Tortuga" frames (\$350); 9026Eyes, Westlake Village, and Malibu Country Mart, Malibu, 9026eyes.com.
6. Pediped "Charlie" sheepskin baby shoe (\$32); The Pump Station & Nurtury, Westlake Village, pumpstation.com.
7. Zeffira buffalo horn bangles (large, \$134; set of five minis, \$185); Twyla K, Westlake Village, shoptwylak.com.
8. The "Ultimate Fishing Tool" (\$24); Restoration Hardware at The Promenade at Westlake, Westlake Village, and Santa Barbara; restorationhardware.com.
9. Zoda "Nakuru" box (\$95); Kitson at Malibu Lumber Yard, Malibu, shopkitson.com.
10. Sonia Spencer "Pantone" reversible square cufflinks (\$95); Kitson at Malibu Lumber Yard, Malibu, shopkitson.com.
11. Denise James Jewelry "Midnight Earrings" (starting at \$2,205 depending on carat weight) with black and white diamonds set in 18-karat gold; Malibu Colony Company at Malibu Country Mart, Malibu, malibucolonyco.com.
12. Vintage wool plaid picnic blanket (\$75); The Agoura Antique Mart, Agoura Hills, agouraantiquemart.com.
13. Trumpette "Surf Schlep" bag (\$78); Kitson at Malibu Lumber Yard, Malibu, shopkitson.com.
14. "Cashmere Hand Warmers" (\$20); Restoration Hardware at The Promenade at Westlake, Westlake Village, and Santa Barbara; restorationhardware.com.
15. "Electric Bike" (\$2,675); tommybahama.com.





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Bring on the Blues

1. Sliced blue-agate necklace (\$20); The Bead Lounge, Westlake Village, thebead-lounge.com.
 2. Karen Bezuidenhout *Night Sky With Horses* acrylic painting (\$650); Casa Mexicana Imports, Westlake Village, casamexicanainports.com.
 3. Moncler "Ghany" vest (\$435); Madison at The Promenade at Westlake, Westlake Village, madisonlosangeles.com.
 4. Rhinestone frame (\$150); Heather Fields Home & Garden, Westlake Village, 818-991-0441.
 5. Capri "Volcano" jar candle (\$25); Vintage Villa, Westlake Village, vintagevillahomecollection.com.
 6. II Sisters silver-leaf gilded-glass fish tray (\$14); Pure Life and Home, Ventura, purelifeandhome.com.
 7. 18-Karat baby alpaca throws (\$255 each); Pure Life and Home, (see previous).
 8. Fender "James Burton Telecaster" guitar (\$2,530); Instrumental Music, Thousand Oaks, Ventura, and Santa Barbara; instrumentalmusic.com.
 9. William Henry Studio limited-edition handcrafted "Merlot" pen with etched Damascus steel and sapphire accents (\$700); Kirk Jewelers, Westlake Village, jewelbase.com/kirk.
 10. Prada "Velvet Logo Tote" (\$1,020); Neiman Marcus at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park, neimanmarcus.com.
 11. "Time Will Tell" watch (\$64); Raffia, Westlake Village, 818-706-1191.
 12. Polaroid "Classic 300 Instant" camera (\$90); Target, Camarillo, Moorpark, Thousand Oaks, and Simi Valley; target.com.
 13. Brixton "Castor" straw fedora (\$40); Val Surf, Thousand Oaks, 805-497-1166.
 14. "Leather Inlay Money Clip" (\$48); Coach at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks; and Santa Barbara; and at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park; coach.com.



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Green (With Envy) Gifts

1. Handblown glass bottles (\$20–\$27); Cabana Home, Santa Barbara, cabanahome.com. 2. “Music Balloon Portable Amplified Speaker” (\$45); Design Within Reach, Santa Barbara, dwr.com. 3. Tivoli Audio “Frost White Collection Model One” radio (\$180); Brookstone at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, and South Coast Plaza, Costa Mesa, brookstone.com; or tivoliaudio.com. 4. Absinthe spoons (\$12 each); Imagine, Montecito, 805-899-3700, and Bonnescase & Cie “Absinthe Sucre” (\$5 per package); BevMo!, Thousand Oaks, bevmo.com. 5. Gama-Go “Buddha Butter Dish” (\$25); Kitson at Malibu Lumber Yard, Malibu, shopkitson.com. 6. Fred Matryoshkas nesting-doll measuring cups (\$14); Paper Source at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, paper-source.com. 7. Jonathan Adler “Greek Key” ballpoint pen (\$20); Paper Source at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, paper-source.com. 8. Porcelain “Strawberry Basket” (\$28) and “Raspberry Basket” (\$17); Cabana Home, Santa Barbara, cabanahome.com. 9. Native “Jefferson” shoes (\$45); Tradition, Westlake Village, shoptradition.com. 10. “FireLites Jubilee” tabletop fire pita (\$43); Meadow Gardens, Westlake Village, 818-879-9555. 11. “Skinny Cuff With Logo Studs” (\$95); Tory Burch at Malibu Lumber Yard, Malibu, toryburch.com. 12. Glass dachshund salt-and-pepper shakers (\$20); Fusion Home, Ventura, fusionhomestore.com. 13. Dwell Studio “Grey Elephant” picture frame (\$40); Drool, Thousand Oaks, shoptdrool.com. 14. Preserved boxwood ball in basket (\$60); Botanik, Summerland, botanikinc.com. 15. Bodum “Pavina” espresso cups (\$15 for a set of two); Sur La Table, at The Promenade at Westlake, Westlake Village, and Santa Barbara; surlatable.com.

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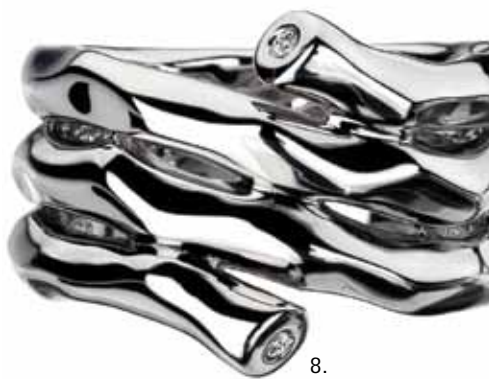
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Purple Passion

1. Knit throw (\$136); Pure Life and Home, Ventura, purelifeandhome.com; "Plaid Spectrum Scarf" (\$48); Anthropologie at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, and at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park; anthropologie.com; Tibetan handmade felted coin purse (\$12); Pure Life and Home, Ventura, purelifeandhome.com. 2. Ten-strand gold-and-silver bracelet (\$58); M. Fredric at The Promenade at Westlake, Westlake Village, mfredric.com; wide rhinestone-and-metal bracelet (\$45); Sogno, Westlake Village, 805-494-0999; Baroque Tahitian pearl necklace (\$2,000); Kirk Jewelers, Westlake Village, jewelbase.com/kirk. 3. Glass Buddha head (\$13); Cost Plus World Market at The Promenade at Westlake, Westlake Village, and Santa Barbara; worldmarket.com. 4. Staub "Mini Round Cocotte" enamel cookware (set of three, \$185); Williams-Sonoma at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, and at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park, and at The Commons at Calabasas, Calabasas; williams-sonoma.com. 5. "Stove-top Espresso Pot" (\$80); Sur La Table, at The Promenade Westlake, Westlake Village, and Santa Barbara; surlatable.com. 6. Vignoni reversible leggings (\$34); Papilio at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, papiliostores.com. 7. Minnetonka "Hi-Top Back-Zip Boot" (\$60); Jack's Shoes, Westlake Village, jacksshoesofwestlake.com. 8. Hot Diamonds sterling-silver and diamond "Ionia Wrap Ring" (\$190); Golden Image Jewelers, Camarillo, goldenimagejeweler.com. 9. "Days Gone By" candle (\$18); Anthropologie at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, and at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park; anthropologie.com. 10. Cheese knife set (\$26); Raffia, Westlake Village, 818-706-1191. 11. Silver-plated "Bulldog" coin bank (\$39); Pottery Barn at The Oaks, Thousand Oaks, and at Westfield Topanga, Canoga Park; potterybarn.com. 12. Chess set (\$975); Paul Smith, Los Angeles; paulsmith.co.uk. 13. B. Up "Lolita" robe (\$122); J Girl, Westlake Village, jgirlingerie.com.



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Winter Wonderland

AN ALL-WHITE DESSERT SPREAD MAKES FOR COOL HOLIDAY ENTERTAINING.

BY LAURA SAMUEL MEYN PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATT WALLA



When it comes to the sweet side of holiday entertaining, Merryl Brown, president of the Montecito-based Merryl

Brown Events (merrylbrownevents.com), has a beautiful idea: an all-white dessert table, which makes for an elegant desserts-only party, or serves as a delicious way to transition a dinner party from savories to sweets. "Dessert tables are always a fun option for dessert, and they get people up and mingling," Brown says. "I like to do them in one color or in a theme. Symmetry and balance are important."

Brown specializes in tasteful and sustainable events, ranging from smaller in-home parties to large weddings to corporate events. She's known for her inspired decor, great food and wine, detail-oriented creative approach, and decidedly green bent. "We always have a team at the back of the house sorting," she says. "We strive to create as little waste as possible while putting on amazing, memorable parties."

While Merryl Brown has done all-pink and all-chocolate dessert tables, an all-white theme is one of her favorites for this time of year. "It is just so lovely for the holidays; I think that it invokes a feeling of a winter wonderland," she says. "People love dessert tables. They are visually exciting, and they allow for a lot of creativity." Her all-white theme makes for a spectacular setting appropriate for any wintertime party—and it produces a particularly dramatic effect because, with white, you can extend the theme beyond the decor to the desserts, too. Here's how she creates a magical spread worthy of the season.

TO SET THE TABLE, Brown uses the supply of props that Merryl Brown Events stocks, plus a few favorite local resources. For china, she likes Classic Party Rentals in Santa Barbara (classicpartyrentals.com) and Small Masterpiece in Los Angeles (smallmasterpiece.com); for linens, she loves La Tavola (latavolalinen.com). With an all-white dessert table, Brown is careful to select linens and serving dishes in a uniformly bright white for the best impact. “I really don’t like different hues when it comes to white,” she says. “When I do tables in other colors, I don’t mind some variation as long as it is in the same color family.”

FOR THE COOKIES, Brown draws from a variety of sources, including homemade cookies, purchased varieties from Renaud’s Patisserie & Bistro in Santa Barbara (renaudsbakery.com), and gorgeous snowflake cookies (see recipe below) baked by the chefs of Sweet Moon Confections in Santa Barbara. “When you make or order custom cookies, be sure to have a hole made at the top so that you can hang them from branches or from a small tabletop tree,” says Brown. “Hanging the cookies creates verticality so that the tablescape doesn’t look so flat.”

FOR THE MARSHMALLOW LOLLIPOPS, Brown purchases regular grocery-store variety marshmallows, white lollipop sticks from Michael’s (michaels.com), and white sprinkles from Sur La Table (surlatable.com). She pierces each marshmallow with a white lollipop stick, paints each marshmallow with water (using a clean paint brush or pastry brush), and rolls each in a dish filled with white sprinkles to coat it on all sides. Brown’s finishing touch: “With a little double-stick tape, adhere a small flag to the top of the lollipop stick,” she says. “Place in even rows on a platter and serve.”

FOR DIY-CUSTOM CHOCOLATE-BAR WRAPPERS that make a great addition to a dessert table as well as a delicious take-home favor, you’ll need as many chocolate bars as guests. “I like anything they sell at Chocolate Maya [in Santa Barbara],” says Brown. “Theo Chocolate in Seattle is great.” You’ll also need enough recycled paper to wrap each bar. First, unwrap the outer wrapper of each chocolate bar, leaving the foil on. Cut enough recycled paper to fit around each bar. Cover the bar, leaving the short ends exposed, and seal with double-stick tape. Using a holiday-themed paper punch (such as those made by Martha Stewart, available at michaels.com), punch out a shape from additional paper and adhere it to the top of the wrapper.

MERRYL BROWN’S TIPS FOR Holiday Entertaining

1. Be prepared: Think through your party from start to finish and be sure that you have everything that you need. Making a detailed timeline really helps.
2. Use lots of candles. Nothing creates greater ambience than low lighting and lots of candlelight.
3. Use your good china, silver, and crystal. What are you saving it for?
4. Music is important at any event. I love surprising guests with carolers who enter the room halfway through the party, to the delight of everyone present.
5. Wrap small gifts for each guest. My favorite gifts are always edible: fair-trade dark chocolate from Chocolate Maya, local honey, a bundle of freshly baked cookies, or a tin of hot cocoa with a vintage silver spoon.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Candy: Candy Warehouse (candywarehouse.com), Robitaille’s in Carpinteria (robitaillescandies.com), and Oh, Nuts! (ohnuts.com)

Chocolate: Chocolate Maya in Santa Barbara (chocolatemaya.com) and Pierre Lafond in Santa Barbara (pierrelafond.com)

Container and white branches: S.R. Hogue & Co. in Santa Barbara (srhogue.com)

Paper punches and lollipop sticks: Michaels in Goleta (michaels.com)

Recycled paper (for wrapping chocolate bars): Twisted Limb Paperworks (twistedlimbpaper.com) ■

Snowflake Butter Cookies

The Snowflake Butter Cookies and Royal Icing recipes come from the chefs of Sweet Moon Confections in Santa Barbara; both were adapted for a smaller yield and can easily be doubled for a large party.

- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt

Using an electric mixer, cream butter and sugar. Add egg and vanilla. In large bowl, mix flour, baking powder, and salt, then add to butter mixture and mix well. Gather dough and knead for a minute. Divide dough into two pieces. Place one piece between two sheets of parchment paper. Roll it out to the desired thickness (from ⅛- to ¼-inch-thick) and then place the dough and paper on a cookie sheet and refrigerate. Repeat with other piece. Refrigerate dough for at least one hour. (Refrigerating the dough before cutting will help preserve the shape of the cookies after cutting.)

Preheat oven to 350°F. Cut refrigerated dough into desired shapes. Bake on ungreased baking sheet for 10 to 12 minutes or until just beginning to turn brown at the edges.

Makes about 3 dozen 3-inch cookies.

Royal Icing

Meringue powder is available at specialty foods stores and stores that stock cake supplies, such as Michael’s (michaels.com).

- 2 level tablespoons meringue powder
- 3 tablespoons lukewarm water
- 2 cups sifted confectioners’ sugar

Combine all ingredients. Beat 7 to 10 minutes at low-medium speed in a heavy-duty standard mixer (or 10 to 12 minutes if using a handheld mixer). To prevent drying, be sure to cover the bowl with a damp cloth while working with icing. (Store in grease-free airtight container for up to 2 weeks. To reuse, beat the icing to restore original texture. It gets hard when exposed to air.)

The icing will be very stiff after mixing. To thin down the icing to use for outlining cookies, add a couple of drops of water to about ½ cup of icing and stir slowly to incorporate the water. (Stirring quickly will create air pockets in the icing and will cause breakage when outlining.) The right consistency for outlining is achieved when the spatula is lifted from the icing and the peak formed bends slightly.

To thin down icing for filling (or flooding), add a very small amount (½ teaspoon at a time) of water to the icing. Stir slowly until water is incorporated into the icing. To test for consistency, lift the spatula and let the icing drip back into the bowl. Count to 10; if the dripped icing smooths back into the rest of the icing, then the consistency is ready for filling.



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"Rosemary Allison is well known for her hard work, concern, generosity, and dedication to her community."

Linda Parks, Supervisor, Second District, Board of Supervisors County of Ventura

"Rosemary Allison has been a tireless advocate for her community for many years."

Mark Burley, President, Santa Rosa Valley Trails Inc.

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SUGAR, SPICE, AND EVERYTHING NICE

Cinnamon rolls brighten winter mornings.

CHILLY WINTER MORNINGS are made for fresh-baked cinnamon rolls' warm, gooey, and cinnamon-y sweetness. With a straightforward combination of yeasted sweet dough wrapped around butter, sugar, cinnamon, and sometimes nuts or raisins, the rolls rouse cozy sleepyheads of all ages out of bed.

To keep things fresh, I still refer to recipes from a cinnamon-roll pastry workshop I took a few years ago at Let's Get Cookin' in Westlake Village (letsgetcookin.com). Chef William "Woo" O'Neill played with all the elements, from dough to icing. O'Neill made almond butter with slivered and blanched almonds, butter, lemon zest, and almond extract to spread on the dough. Another sans-cinnamon showstopper featured sweetened shredded coconut, macadamia nuts, white chocolate chips, a coconut milk-butter mixture, and lemon sugar.

"You could really add almost anything [as a topping]," explains Patti Wicks, owner of Pattibakes in Buellton (pattibakesco.com). Her list includes caramel, chocolate, apple chunks, raisins, and nuts.

Other ideas include spreading Nutella or raspberry jam over the dough; or use the standard butter and then scatter it with holiday-inspired crushed candy canes, cinnamon chips, or a combination of dried apricots, cherries, and strawberries. Bakers can spike basic dough with citrus zest, almond extract, cinnamon, or cardamom. Starting with an egg-based dough (like challah) or whole-wheat dough is an option, too. There are even gluten-free versions of cinnamon-roll dough.

Infuse traditional powdered-sugar icing with a hint of rosewater or extracts like strawberry, anise, or cinnamon for a twist. Go citrusy with the addition of orange zest, or tangerine or lemon oil. Experiment with white-chocolate frosting, like O'Neill did, or follow the lead of Old West Cinnamon Rolls in Pismo Beach (oldwestcinnamon.com) and slather the rolls with cream-cheese frosting.

In the unlikely event that there are any cinnamon rolls left the next morning, turn them into French toast or bread pudding.

Roll With It

Tasting the area's best.

Not all cinnamon rolls are created equal: The best ones have just the right dough-to-filling ratio so they're not too dry or too sweet. If the balance is off the roll wobbles instead of wows. The good news is that many bakeries in the area have mastered the fine art of cinnamon rolls.

Remember that primo cinnamon roll you tasted at the Ventura or Santa Barbara County Fair or the Mid-State Fair? It was likely from **Old West Cinnamon Rolls** (oldwestcinnamon.com). The Old West Cinnamon Rolls bakery in downtown Pismo Beach means enthusiasts can indulge year-round on rolls with almonds, pecans, raisins, crumb topping, walnuts, a walnut-raisin combo, and cream-cheese frosting. Old West's proprietary cinnamon roll mix (made at the Grover Beach factory) is available online and at the bakery, which sells frozen rolls to take home, too.

On *805 Living's* Facebook page, Monica Lynn Royer recommends the cinnamon rolls from **My Florist Café & Bakery** in Ventura (805-653-0003), calling them "the best!" My Florist has plain and pecan cinnamon rolls, both made with croissant dough. The pecan roll bursts with pecan pieces, cinnamon, and oozy brown sugar. The flavor is pecan pie meets cinnamon roll, and indulgent.

Pamela Adams also gives a Facebook shout-out to the plate-size rolls at **BG's Cafe** in Oxnard (805-487-0700). At the table, the warm rolls arrive topped with butter. "The butter makes them all soft and gooey," says Veronica Rodriguez, who owns BG's with her husband, José. The recipe for the rolls dates back to the previous owners, who handed it down to the couple when they purchased the restaurant in 2004.

Pattibakes in Buellton (pattibakesco.com) makes cinnamon rolls with all-natural ingredients and bakes them in extra-large muffin tins. The tall rolls are about four inches across and "are a little on the decadent side, kind of like your grandma or mom used to make," says Patti Wicks, who opened the bakery in 1996.

What better way to take the chill out of a brisk winter morning than freshly baked cinnamon rolls, just out of the oven? With a few savvy shortcuts, it's easier than you think.

A Holiday Treat

Fresh cinnamon rolls for breakfast without losing sleep.

Getting up before dawn so the family wakes up to homemade cinnamon rolls is asking a lot of any home baker. Thankfully, there's a solution courtesy of Patti Wicks, owner of Pattibakes in Buellton (pattibakesco.com): "Make the dough the day before, put it in a large bowl wrapped in plastic wrap, put it in the refrigerator, and let it rise overnight. It makes the dough better because it ages

and develops more flavor and makes them really easy to roll out and bake in the morning."

Allow the refrigerated dough to warm a little so it's easier to roll out, she advises. Sprinkle on the fillings, roll into a log, slice, and put into extra-large muffin tins, as Wicks does, or on a parchment paper-lined baking sheet; let rise for 20 minutes or so before baking.

Alternatively, the rolls can be formed before being refrigerated. (Be sure to cover the rolls lightly with plastic wrap before sticking them in the fridge.) Let the rolls sit on the counter for 20 to 30 minutes before baking, Wicks says.

"Finding a good recipe is the first thing [bakers need to do]," says Wicks, adding, "Making them from scratch makes all the difference."

For a harried baker, though, the next best thing is ready-to-bake Trader Joe's Jumbo Cinnamon Rolls with Vanilla Icing found in the refrigerated section (traderjoes.com). These rolls were better than some bakery versions I tried. They're not homemade but are ideal as a quick breakfast treat. And they make the kitchen smell great. >>



IN THE KITCHEN

SOFT AND SWEET CINNAMON ROLLS

This recipe from Simple Comforts: 50 Heartwarming Recipes by Sur La Table (Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2010) walks bakers through the process step-by-step, so there's no guesswork—just yummy cinnamon rolls.

Dough:

- 1/4 cups warm milk (no hotter than 120°F)
- 1 tablespoon active dry yeast, or
- 2 1/4 teaspoons quick-rise yeast
- 2 teaspoons granulated sugar
- 3 1/4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more for sprinkling
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, melted
- 1 large egg yolk
- 1 teaspoon water

Filling:

- 1 1/2 cups lightly packed light brown sugar
- 1 1/2 tablespoons ground cinnamon
- 1 large egg

Icing:

- 1 cup powdered sugar, or a little more if needed
- 1 1/2 tablespoons water

1. To make the dough, pour 1/4 cup of the warm milk in a small bowl. Add the yeast and granulated sugar and stir to dissolve. Set the bowl aside for 8 to 10 minutes, until the mixture looks foamy. If the yeast isn't foamy after 15 minutes, start [from the beginning] with a new package.

2. Put the flour and salt in a large bowl and whisk to blend. Make a well in the center, and pour the yeasted milk into the well. Then add the remaining 1 cup warm milk and melted butter. Stir together the ingredients until you get big, shaggy clumps of dough that start to stick together.

3. Sprinkle a little flour on your work surface. You can always add more later, so don't sprinkle too much. Dump the dough clumps out of the bowl onto your work surface. Dip your hands in flour and start kneading the dough. Using the heels of both hands, firmly push the top of the mound away from you. Fold the far side of the dough toward you, then rotate the mound of dough a quarter turn and push again. Keep kneading until you get a smooth, springy dough. It usually takes 8 to 10 minutes. To know if you have kneaded enough, press your hand into the dough and remove it quickly. Your handprint should bounce back and disappear quickly. If it doesn't, keep kneading.

4. Lightly flour your hands and the surface if the dough starts sticking. It should feel tacky, like tape, but not sticky and gooey. A bench scraper is handy for scraping up any bits of dough stuck to the table and to help you move the dough around.

5. Rub the inside of a large bowl with a thin layer of vegetable oil or coat with pan spray. Shape the dough into a ball and put it in the bowl. Lightly rub or spray the top of the dough with a little oil. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Set the bowl aside and let the dough rise for 45 to 60 minutes, until it is twice as big.

6. While the bread dough finishes rising, make the filling. Put the brown sugar and cinnamon in a medium bowl and whisk together until well blended. Smash any brown sugar lumps to break them up. Crack the egg into a small bowl and beat with a fork until blended.

7. To roll out the dough, sprinkle 3 tablespoons flour on the work surface. Turn the risen dough out of the bowl onto the floured surface and shape it into a rough rectangle. Sprinkle another tablespoon of flour on top. Starting from the edge closest to you, roll gently but firmly to the edge opposite you and then back again twice. Be careful not to roll the pin off the edge of the dough, or the dough will stick to the surface. Turn the dough a quarter turn and roll up and back again twice. When you turn the dough, it should move easily. If it doesn't, gently lift the area of stuck dough, loosening it with a small metal spatula, and sprinkle some more flour underneath. Repeat the rolling up and back and turning of the dough until you have a 15x12-inch rectangle.

8. Brush any excess flour from the top and bottom of the dough with a large brush, and clean up any extra flour from around the dough with the bench scraper. Position the rectangle so you are facing a long side. Mix the egg yolk with the water and then, using a small pastry brush, brush a thin coating of the egg mixture all over the top of the dough. (You won't need all of it.) Use your fingers to scrape the filling onto the dough and spread it evenly over the surface, leaving a 1-inch-wide border uncovered along the long side opposite you. Starting at the long side closest to you, roll up the dough into a log, keeping it fairly tight as you go. When you reach the opposite side, roll the dough right on top of the uncovered border. Roll the log backward, so the seam is on top, and pinch all along the seam to seal it.



9. Lightly butter a 10x2-inch cake pan or spray with pan spray. Using a serrated knife, cut the log crosswise into 10 rolls, each about 1 1/2 inches wide. Use a gentle sawing motion when you cut so you don't flatten the log. Arrange the rolls in the prepared cake pan evenly, spacing 8 rolls around the edge of the pan and putting 2 rolls in the center.

10. Cover the pan with plastic wrap and set in a warm place. Let the rolls rise for about 1 hour, or until they are nearly twice as big and fill almost all of the open spaces in the pan. After the rolls have risen for about 30 minutes, position an oven rack in the center of the oven and preheat the oven to 350°F. That way the oven will be ready when you are ready to bake.

11. Bake the rolls for 30 to 35 minutes, until they are golden and the sugar is bubbling around the edges. Using oven mitts, transfer the pan to a cooling rack. Let cool for 10 to 15 minutes.

12. To make the icing, put 1 cup powdered sugar in a small bowl. Add the water and whisk until well blended and completely smooth. The icing should be thick, because it thins out when it hits the warm rolls. If it is thin and runny, add a little more sugar. Using the spoon, drizzle the icing over the tops of the warm rolls in any pattern you like. Eat them while they are warm.

Makes 10 rolls. ■

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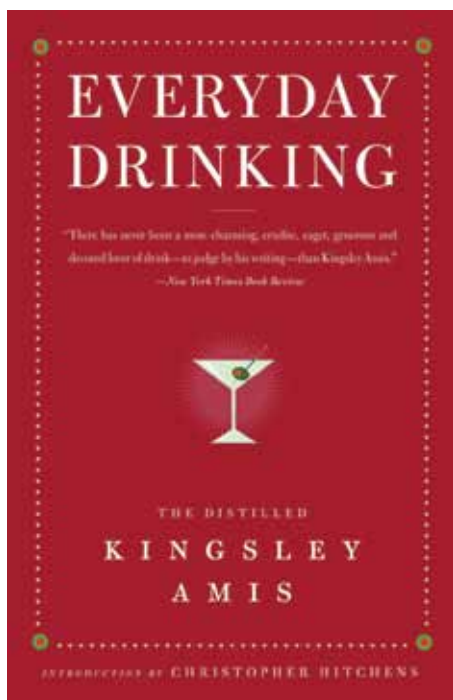
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BOOKS AND BOTTLES

Present-worthy companions that work just as well when given separately.



DRINKING was always a cherished topic for writers like Dorothy Parker, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and James Joyce—these writers chronicled the peculiar culture that springs up around alcohol while also unabashedly detailing their own intoxications. This intersection of booze and literature can often be eloquent and memorable, whether it's Malcolm Lowry's portrayal of a British diplomat's cruel surrender to depression through mezcal in *Under the Volcano* or Mark Twain's hapless town drunk, Muff Potter, whom Tom Sawyer risks his own life to save from the gallows.

Recently, there's been just as much fascination and adventure with alcohol in the non-fiction aisle, especially these five selections. (The stocking stuffers are meant to make reading even more pleasurable.)

Everyday Drinking: The Distilled Kingsley Amis

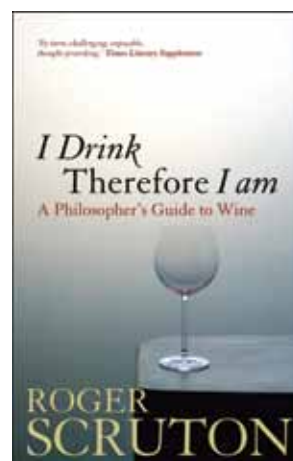
By Kingsley Amis

(Bloomsbury, 2010; paperback, \$10)

This reissue of Sir Kingsley Amis' witty columns and booklets from the 1970s and '80s contains cocktail recipes and alcohol quizzes, along with a sidecar of the equally erudite Christopher Hitchens (doing the honors of introducing his friend, "Kingers"). Amis' deft, writerly touch is best on display within his essays, which relate, among other subjects, a fondness for spirits above beer and wine.

My close personal involvement with drinks and drinking goes back all of forty years. In that time my experience has been varied and farflung. I have drunk cognac in Cognac, port in Oporto, rakı in Turkey, tequila in Mexico City, moonshine in Kentucky, not to mention poteen in Fleet Street, bitter and industrial alcohol in Oxford, Yugoslav whisky in Yugoslavia, Japanese whisky in Glasgow ... [a]lso gin in England. ... With spirits I feel I am on home ground. They are really my tittle. I have to face it.

Read this while drinking Oxley Classic English Dry Gin because it's got that kind of British intensity that'll really raise your Union Jack. (\$50, oxleygin.com)



I Drink Therefore I am: A Philosopher's Guide to Wine

By Roger Scruton

(Continuum, 2010; paperback, \$18)

Professor and scholar Roger Scruton presents a commendable philosophical argument for the gods of wine to be revered above all others for birthing the pantheon of society's civilities and achievement. There's also a lot of heady stuff about consciousness and being.

Beginning from claret, we venture out in search of strange fruit, exotic landscapes, curious lifestyles and countries with nothing to recommend them save their wines. And after punishing body and soul with Australian Shiraz, Argentine Tempranillo, Romanian



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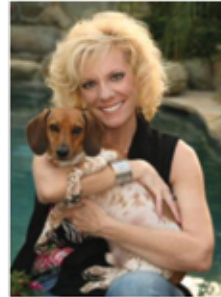
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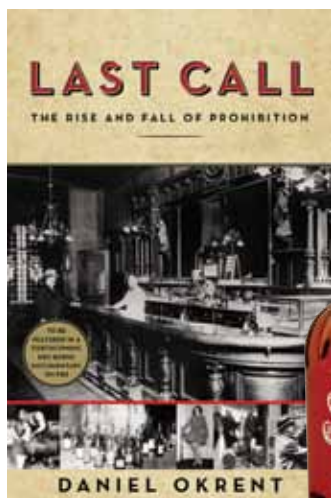
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Cabernet Sauvignon and Greek Retsina, we crawl home like the Prodigal Son and beg forgiveness for our folly. Claret extends a warm and indulgent embrace. ... This is the wine that made us and for which we were made, and it often astonishes me to discover that I drink anything else.

Read this while drinking Le Vigne 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles. The richness and minerality are reminiscent of Bordeaux, from where clarets come. (\$30, sylvesterwinery.com)



Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition

By Daniel Okrent (Scribner, 2010; \$30)
Daniel Okrent's fascinating account of the passage of the 18th amendment in 1919 and the 21st amendment, which repealed the 18th, in 1933, brings to life—with mind-numbing clarity—one of our country's most turbulent social and political eras.

How did it happen? *How did a freedom-loving people decide to give up a private right that had been freely exercised by millions upon millions since the first European colonists arrived in the New World? How did they condemn to extinction what was, at the very moment of its death, the fifth-largest industry in the nation? How did they append to their most sacred document 112 words that knew only one precedent in American history? With that single previous exception, the original Constitution and its first seventeen amendments limited the*

activities of government, not of citizens. Now there were two exceptions: you couldn't own slaves, and you couldn't buy alcohol.

Read this while drinking Sazerac Rye because not only has this whiskey perfected the concept of "lively," its 1800's recipe has outlived Prohibition by 77 years and counting. (\$25, sazerac.com)



Japanese Cocktails: Mixed Drinks With Sake, Shochu, Whisky, and More

By Yuri Kato (Chronicle, 2010; \$15)
I never understood people who read cookbooks as literature while never intending to cook from them. But I may have begun to see their point after flipping through this slender volume of Japanese cocktail culture. There are some recipe ingredients that you'll never find, but the photography is beautiful and the presentation of such an aesthetically rich heritage is undeniably lovely.

Mizuwari is perhaps the most well-known drink in Japan. Mizu means "water" and wari means "to cut." Diluting or cutting whisky with ice and water is the most common way to drink whisky in Japan. To order mizuwari, raise your hand and say, "mizuwari kudasai!" ("mizuwari please"). A good mizuwari appears easy to make, but according to many professional Japanese bartenders, the perfect mizuwari takes care and attention.

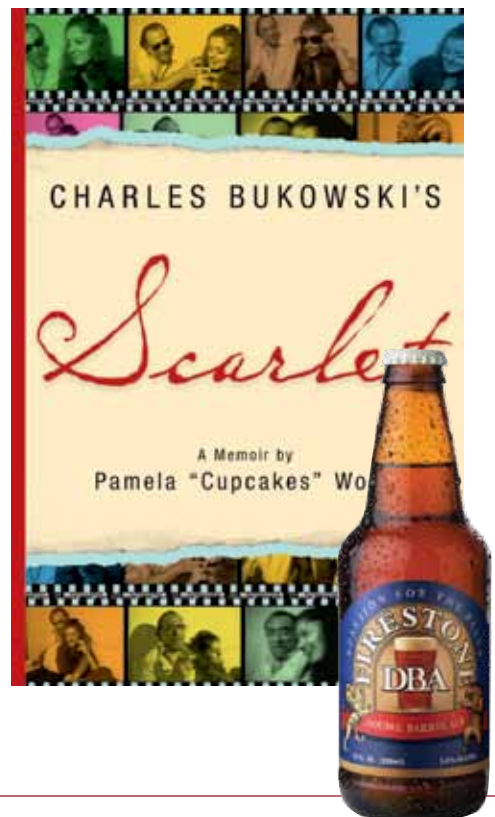
Read this while drinking Yamazaki Single Malt 12 Year Whisky because, when enjoyed as one part spirit, two parts water, and three large ice cubes, the result is slender and substantial. (\$45, theyamazaki.jp/en)

Charles Bukowski's Scarlet: A Memoir

By Pamela "Cupcakes" Wood (Sun Dog Press, 2010; \$16)
Quoting conversations from four decades ago, when everyone in the bungalow was admittedly blitzed on booze and drugs, is, to say the least, unreliable information; so Wood's memoir is a bit rough around the edges. But then again, so was Charles Bukowski, Los Angeles' most influential poet of downtrodden drinkers; and Scarlet is to be admired for recounting two free-floating and free-falling lives overlapping in 1975 to '76, when Buk was composing some of his fiercest poetry.

Bukowski shuffled out of the kitchen, wearing his usual outfit—plumber-style jeans and gut-hugging T-shirt. Classical music was playing on the radio. It was about three in the afternoon and his day was just getting started. He was probably on his third or fourth beer.

Read this while drinking Firestone Walker Double Barrel Ale because its clean, well-balanced style is a sign of great craftsmanship, just like Bukowski. (\$9, firestonewalker.com) ■



GARY HOVLAND



The Armchair Oenophile®

CENTRAL COAST WINES MADE EASY.

By Anthony Head



Sorry to be in a rush, but I have to catch a flight to Mexico and I don't have time for witty remembrances of holidays past. So let's make this quick, let's make this sweet, and let's make this quick.

Of course, let's be sure to make this right: Flying Goat Blanc de Blancs.

These "Goat Bubbles" are crisp and refreshing, effervescent and flavorful—just what to look for in a good sparkler. So, "Cheers!" to you all.

Better times are sure to be ahead.

Adios. I'm on vacation, which means that it'll soon be tequila time. ■

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flyinggoatcellars.com*

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Taste of the Town

By Angela Pettera Photographs by Gary Moss

SAY “HOLA” TO UPSCALE MEXICAN DINING

Sabor Cocina Mexicana in Thousand Oaks is both fancy and festive.



IN DECEMBER, I'M IN A FESTIVE MOOD.

Every night out feels like a holiday party. I'm drawn to restaurants with flashier decorations and lower lighting. I want the hum of a musical sound track and glasses clinking in the background. And I want to be able to dress up more than I usually do—no jeans for outings. Instead I break out the silks and sequins, and I can even get dressed up for Mexican food because **Sabor Cocina Mexicana** has come to The Lakes shopping center in Thousand Oaks (saborcocinamexicana.com).

Mark and Leticia Hansen brought Sabor Cocina Mexicana farther west after their original Santa Clarita Sabor saw success. Mark, who oversees the dining room, describes the decor as “Sabor One on steroids.” I'd call it classy Latin. Huge, fun chandeliers with red-glass hearts hail from Guadalajara and hang in the main dining room. Hacienda-style wooden booths and tall-backed chairs make diners feel almost royal. Star-shaped lanterns lend a party feel to the separate bar area. Colorful Mexican tiles are sprinkled throughout the rooms, including the bathrooms.

The food is also presented with style, thanks to Leticia, who meticulously checks every plate before it leaves the kitchen. She created all of the recipes herself, blending regional Mexican specialties with California ingredients and modern sensibilities. She goes easy on the salt so I found myself wanting to add a bit, but everything is fresh and lively and plated like a work of art. The



Sabor Cocina Mexicana's husband-and-wife team Leticia and Mark Hansen bring regional Mexican specialties with a Cali spin to Thousand Oaks (opposite page), along with (this page, from left) festive Margaritas, sophisticated hacienda-style decor, and traditional cuisine made from fresh, natural ingredients, including handmade tortillas.



guacamole appetizer (\$9 for four large scoops of barely mashed ripe avocado) comes with tiny, crispy tortilla rounds.

I'm a sucker for achiote, the little red seeds of the *Bixa orellana* shrub from whence comes annatto. Hispanic cultures boil the achiote seeds in water or oil and use the resulting liquid for braising meats and vegetables. So I had to order the Cochinita Pibil (\$18), a specialty from the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico, where Leticia's family is from. The *pibil's* tender chunks of pork and onions are flavored not only with achiote but also banana leaves and a hint of cinnamon. It's served with warm tortillas for wrapping and a flavorful, only slightly fiery habanero sauce for topping. On the side: white rice shaped into a round using a ring mold, black beans inside a crisp fluted tortilla, and plantains. (The Yucatán has a heavy Caribbean influence, hence the plantains and black beans.) Many of the other entrées come with a disc of seasoned rice, and mashed pinto beans in that pretty tortilla cup. The Enchiladas Suizas (\$15) are filled with tender chicken and very mild Oaxacan cheese, then topped with salsa verde. European influences affect dessert: The churros (\$8), fried on the spot, are filled with Nutella and served with ice cream. The Chile Chocolate Crème Brûlée (\$8) is made with Valrhona chocolate and spicy *guajillo* chiles. The dense, sweet custard makes sure your tastebuds are perfectly satisfied and slightly sad that the party is over. ■

DIALED IN

Foodie gifts for the holidays.

For more dining news, visit our blog, "Angie Eats," at blog.805living.com.

I love shopping for the holidays—especially when I'm looking for food gifts, because everything has to be tested and tasted before I decide whether it's present-worthy. Those selected here have passed with flying colors (and flavors). Now I just have to decide who gets what.

Dark chocolate is loaded with antioxidants, so it makes a caring gift (wink, wink). Chocolatier Jean-Michel Carré of **Chocolats du Calibressan** in Carpinteria (chocolatcalibressan.com) devotes a good portion of his line to dark chocolate, like the single-origin, organic, 85-percent dark-chocolate truffle from Ecuador with a touch of ginger. I love the **Geranium Bonbons** (\$2 each) made with milk- and dark-chocolate ganache infused with geranium flavoring and covered in dark chocolate. Each is in the shape of a fleur-de-lis; the flavor is subtle and floral. Six- and 12-piece boxes are available along with a lovely wooden box that holds 34 chocolates.

For even more antioxidant goodness, add wine and blueberries to chocolate. **Fess Parker Winery and Vineyards** in Los Olivos (fessparker.com) sells **Chocolate-Covered Cabernet Blueberries** (\$10 per 7.75-ounce bag) in the tasting room, just a few steps away from the Davy Crockett-style coonskin caps. The chocolate-covered blueberries are bright purple and carry hints of red wine with their fruity, chocolaty payload. The winery's grounds are picnic-friendly with expansive lawns and shady trees.

Linn's restaurant and bakery in Cambria (linnsfruitbin.com) is famous for its pies, muffins, and cakes made with olallieberries. (This blackberry-raspberry hybrid is grown on the Linn's farm.) Just behind the stylish Art Deco Main Street restaurant are Linn's Gourmet Goods, Easy as Pie Café, and the Home Style Loft. The Gourmet Goods store carries jars of **Olallieberry Dessert Filling & Topping** (\$11 for 32 ounces, \$8 for 16 ounces) as do many Central Coast supermarkets and Linn's online store. More versatile than the preserves (but not too sweet), this filling can be used to quickly whip up an olallieberry pie that's perfect for the holiday table; or it can be spread between the layers of a white cake for a festive hostess gift. For a simpler gift, wrap the jar with a bow and suggest that the recipient pour the filling over chocolate-chip ice cream or cheesecake for an amazing dessert.

A new shop in Agoura Hills called **The Olive Vineyard** (theolivevineyard.com) sells only olive oils and balsamic vinegars, and its **Sampler Pack** of six small 60 ml bottles for \$28 is a great food-lover's gift. The clear glass bottles can be filled with almost any oil or vinegar in the store, such as Blood Orange Olive Oil and Persian Lime Olive Oil, both made by crushing the olives together with the whole fruit and citrus skins to excellent effect. The naturally flavored Basil Olive Oil is perfect for making pesto; and the Picual Olive Oil from Australia is strong but without a peppery bite at the back end. The balsamic vinegars are just as lovely and unique, such as earthy Pomegranate Balsamic Vinegar and amazing Dark Chocolate Balsamic Vinegar. For more olive oil gift suggestions, check out my blog at blog.805living.com.

I like to give interesting bottles of wine as gifts, so I sought advice from the owner of **Morro Bay Wine Seller** (morrobaywineseller.com), a small shop and wine bar on the Embarcadero. Christopher Battles, who is also the wine director of Windows on the Water in Morro Bay, suggested the **Vina Robles Red**, a syrah-based blend with petite sirah, grenache, and mourvèdre from Paso Robles (\$16). "This is not a real aggressive style of wine. People across the board like it." Plus, the label is pretty—an important consideration when determining present-worthiness. ■

Have a tip for our restaurant news pages? Email our dining editor at angela@805living.com.

The *Dining Guide* includes restaurants from Santa Barbara to Malibu. Our aim is to inform you of restaurants with great food that you might not have experienced yet. The guide is arranged not by cuisine type, but by style of restaurant. "Fine Dining" choices have an elegant atmosphere and very professional service. Restaurants included under the "Foodie" heading are heralded for their wonderful chef-driven cuisine, regardless of atmosphere. "A Good Bet" listings are just that—solid, casual, and delicious. "The Chain Gang" highlights the best of the national restaurant chains, and the "Fun, Fun, Fun" category brings you spots geared toward a good time. The "Lunch Bunch" listings are casual spots ideally suited for lunch hour. Enjoy!

KEY TO SYMBOLS:

NEW Denotes restaurants new to the *805 Living Dining Guide*.

LOOK Indicates an update to an existing listing.

Restaurant information is subject to change without notice.

We will be adding new listings to the *Dining Guide* each month. Please send any comments and suggestions to angela@805living.com or write to us at 805 Living, 3717 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd., Westlake Village, CA 91362, attn: Taste of the Town.

FINE DINING

These restaurants have a skilled kitchen team, a lovely dining room, and great service. Some of the spots require elegant attire, but most allow for all styles of dress, from fancy to casual.

71 PALM FRENCH & AMERICAN BRASSERIE

71 N. Palm St.
Ventura, 805-653-7222
71palm.com
French-American
Entrées \$8–\$28
Romantic

More casual than it might seem at first, this brasserie-style eatery proves very friendly through and through. For instance, there are bowls of water on the porch of this Craftsman house to welcome pets; and the patios upstairs and down are great for kids. The bar area offers beer, wine, and cocktails with its own happy-hour specials. The French-American menu from chef Didier Poirier offers addicting nibbles, like french fries with garlic aioli, black tiger shrimp cocktail, Alsatian-style pizzas, and warm duck confit salad. Main courses include steaks, a double-cut pork chop, a Kobe burger, Atlantic salmon, and New Zealand rack of lamb. Poirier teaches cooking classes each month that culminate in a three-course meal paired with wines. He also hosts occasional winemaker dinners featuring wines from the Central Coast, Napa, and Sonoma. 71 Palm is open for lunch and dinner Monday through Saturday.

BOCCACCIO'S

32123 Lindero Canyon Road
Westlake Village, 818-889-8300
Continental
Entrées \$12–\$27

Saturday & Sunday Brunch, Great View

The floor-to-ceiling windows offer great views of the lake from inside the restaurant. The outdoor patio is the most popular spot for dining, however. Either way, it's a perennial favorite for ladies who lunch and the senior set. The seafood is always perfectly cooked in the Mediterranean manner (fried calamari, lobster ravioli, seafood risotto, Dover sole meunière). At lunch, a wide range of salads from Waldorf to Cobb to niçoise really satisfies. Brunch dishes up classics like French toast, omelettes, and eggs Benedict.

EVERYONE DESERVES A LITTLE FLEMING'S FOR THE HOLIDAYS

BOUCHON

9 W. Victoria St.
Santa Barbara, 805-730-1160
bouchonsantabarbara.com
Wine Country
Entrées \$24–\$35

Romantic

The name is French for “wine cork” and this theme carries throughout the restaurant. Wines from the Santa Barbara area (the Santa Ynez and Santa Maria valleys), especially chardonnay, pinot noir, and syrah, are the focus of the wine list. More than 40 varieties are available by the glass. The highly seasonal cuisine is created to pair well with the wines. (In other words, no strong vinegars or sauces that might fight with and kill the flavor of the wine.) Ingredients are mostly secured locally, especially produce and seafood. Some dishes you might see more regularly than others include baby beet and carrot salad with goat cheese; bourbon-and-maple-glazed duck; lightly smoked Pacific ahi tuna; venison loin in a blackberry demi-glace; and apple tarte tatin.

CA' DARIO

37 E. Victoria St.
Santa Barbara, 805-884-9419
cadario.net

Italian

Entrées \$15–\$28

Romantic

Chef and owner Dario Furlati features dishes from his native northern Italy at this popular trattoria that gets high marks for service from regulars. His menu features some unusual choices like fusilli pasta with artichokes, shitake mushrooms, and truffle oil; radicchio and ricotta-cheese crêpes; terra-cotta-baked chicken with a tomato and red-wine sauce; and a classic rib-eye steak with white beans and sage.

COAST RESTAURANT & BAR

31 W. Carillo St.
Santa Barbara, 805-879-9100
canarysantabarbara.com

California Bistro

Entrées \$13–\$28

Romantic, Sunday Brunch

This restaurant sits a bit below street level in the fun Canary Hotel. The main dining room is quiet and comfortable, but most people seem to take dinner in the bar area where it's much livelier. The entire menu is available in either venue. Go for the Santa Barbara mussels with chorizo, the tasty wild mushroom ravioli, the perfectly grilled and juicy pork chop, and the pudding-like chocolate lava cake. Chef Brian Parks keeps things interesting with his farmers' market dinners on Tuesday nights and a Sea Captain's dinner every Friday with fresh seafood from that day's fishing boats. Sunday brunch has live music from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Happy hour has great deals Monday through Friday from 4 to 7 p.m. Coast is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily.

ELEMENTS

129 E. Anapamu St.
Santa Barbara, 805-884-9218
clementsrestaurantandbar.com

Eclectic

Entrées \$19–\$36

Romantic, Great View

Soaring ceilings inside plus fresh air on the patio with great views of the Santa Barbara courthouse keep everyone happy. Dishes here are eclectic and imaginative. A panko-lemongrass-crust sea bass comes in a green coconut-curry sauce. Short ribs get the Szechuan treatment and a ginger-orange gremolata, while a veal burger benefits from caramelized onions and Gruyère cheese. Save room for desserts, like the mini cupcake sampler or the mint-chip ice cream sandwich. The bar scene is lively, especially during happy hour (4:30 to 6:30 p.m., Monday through Friday). Bottles from the wine list can be purchased from the Elements website.



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PRIME STEAKHOUSE & WINE BAR

6373 Topanga Canyon Boulevard
Reservations: 818-346-1005

*Excluding tax and gratuity. Also available for one guest at \$49.50.
Available through December 15th.

Cocktail hour at **Mi Piaci Italian Kitchen** in Calabasas lasts for hours (4–7 p.m. Tuesday–Sunday; 4 p.m.–close Monday) and features martinis like the Lemon Drop (\$5) and discounted menu items such as mac and cheese, fritto misto, and individual pizzas.

ENOTECA TOSCANA WINE BISTRO

2088 E. Ventura Blvd.
Camarillo, 805-445-1433
enotecatoscanawinebistro.com
Mediterranean
Small Plates \$8–\$18; Entrées \$22–\$39
Live Music

The emphasis is on the wine at this intimate space in Camarillo's downtown district. Owner/chef Antonio Anderson personally selects all the bottles to showcase wines from Spain, Italy, and California. Anderson puts together a different flight of wines every day. Every Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. there's a wine-tasting session that includes a cheese plate (\$14). The menu of small plates—like the wine list—skews to Spain and Italy, with dishes like shrimp in olive oil with lemon and garlic, or marinara meatballs. The large plates appear as nightly "Bodega specials." You might see braised short ribs or Tuscan chicken. At lunch-time, panini sandwiches are available. Enoteca Toscana is open for lunch and dinner Tuesday through Sunday.

FINS SEAFOOD GRILL

982 S. Westlake Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-494-6494
finsinc.com
Seafood
Entrées \$12–\$32
Live Music

The owner and chef also run Moz Buddha Lounge. The menu features interesting takes on seafood like macadamia-crusted halibut, oven-roasted seafood over *yakisoba* noodles, and a lazy-man's bouillabaisse in which the shellfish are removed from their homes for you. You can also choose your cut of steak and its preparation.

FLEMING'S PRIME STEAKHOUSE & WINE BAR

6373 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Woodland Hills, 818-346-1005
flemingssteakhouse.com
Steakhouse
Entrées \$24–\$40
Romantic

This snazzy steakhouse keeps the prices relatively low while maintaining high energy levels, especially in the bar, which has its own appetizer menu. Big salads, prime meats, and seafood dishes rule the dining room, though, and sides are meant to be shared (read: big), so order accordingly. Desserts are large and come with a huge bowl of freshly whipped cream. The wine list is encyclopedic and award-winning. Almost every style is represented, from sparkling whites to petite sirahs to deep cabernets. There are also 100 selections by the glass available nightly. Check the website for special-event wine dinners and seasonal prix-fixe menus. Fleming's is open for dinner nightly.

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL WESTLAKE VILLAGE

2 Dole Drive
Westlake Village, 818-575-3000
fourseasons.com/westlakevillage/dining.html
Californian & Asian
Entrées \$10–\$50; Buffet Meals \$39–\$62
Romantic, Great View, Sunday Brunch

Executive chef Mario Alcocer oversees the food for Hampton's and the Lobby Lounge at this Four Seasons while chef Masa Shimakawa tackles the menus for Onyx. Hampton's serves a seafood buffet on Friday nights, a Mediterranean à la carte menu on Saturday nights, and Sunday brunch in a posh room with views of the waterfall.

Onyx serves beautiful sushi and Japanese dishes for dinner Monday through Saturday nights. The more casual Lobby Lounge offers breakfast and lunch daily, with dinner Sunday through Thursday nights. Afternoon high tea service is available every Saturday, but reservations are required.

GEOFFREY'S MALIBU

27400 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, 310-457-1519
geoffreysmalibu.com
Cal-Eclectic
Entrées \$25–\$77
Great View, Saturday & Sunday Brunch

The alfresco dining and the panoramic ocean views from every table make this a spectacular dining venue. You can't help but feel like a Malibu socialite when sipping a glass of gewürztraminer with your lobster Cobb salad at lunch or brunch under the umbrellas. For dinner, there's ahi tuna, Chilean sea bass, seasonal oyster selections, and the Kobe New York steak. Service is always polished and polite, beginning and ending with the efficient valet parking.

GIANNFRANCO'S TRATTORIA

666 Linden Ave.
Carpinteria, 805-684-0720
Italian
Entrées \$13–\$28
Great Patio

The family of owners welcomes you here with open arms. In good weather, opt for a seat on the back patio with its garden setting. Some customers always start dinner with a glass of wine and the calamari appetizer, which comes with perfectly grilled baby squid and shrimp next to a crock of slightly spicy dipping sauce. It's a great idea. Salads are also quite nice and take advantage of the local growers. The pastas are lightly sauced and there's a daily fresh risotto. Meats include grass-fed free-range lamb chops and rib-eye steaks as well as farm-raised chicken. Giannfranco's is open for lunch and dinner Wednesday through Monday.

THE GRILL ON THE ALLEY

120 E. Promenade Way
Westlake Village, 805-418-1760
thegrill.com
American
Entrées \$19–\$42
Sunday Brunch

The glass-walled kitchen and the low partitions between booths keep the energy level of the room high while the dark wood floors against white walls and the marble-bedecked bar area add a bit of refinement to the mix. Expect to see some TV stars chowing down here, and for good reason. The chicken potpie is one of the best items on the menu. Steaks and lamb chops are popular, especially if you're indulging in an old-fashioned cocktail like a whiskey sour or sidecar martini. The Grill also offers lobster bisque and calf's liver with onion. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

HOLDREN'S STEAKS & SEAFOOD

1714 Newbury Road
Newbury Park, 805-498-1314
and 512 State St.
Santa Barbara, 805-965-3363
and 6920 Marketplace Drive
Goleta, 805-685-8900
holdrens.com
American
Entrées \$19–\$41 (more for surf-and-turf combos)
Romantic

The decor here is masculine enough for business, while the lighting is low enough for romance. The comfy seating and the friendly servers encourage lingering. The cheese-heavy menu is not for the faint of artery, but the food sure is good. Appetizers—like the cream-cheese-laden spicy crab-and-artichoke dip, and bacon-wrapped prawns stuffed with feta—are hearty enough to be main courses. The grilled Castroville artichoke has a nice smoky flavor to it. Steaks are well-marbled, tender, and seasoned right. The signature Cowboy Cut is huge and sits atop a pile of onion rings. All steaks come with a crock of sauce, a side dish, plus soup or salad. Check the website for dinner specials Monday through Wednesday. Holdren's is open for lunch Monday through Friday, and for dinner nightly. The original Santa Barbara location serves brunch on Sunday.

MASTRO'S STEAKHOUSE

2087 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-418-1811
mastrossteakhouse.com
American
Entrées \$26–\$76
Live Music

For an extravagant night out, try this expensive and posh steakhouse. The cocktails are huge and potent. The salads serve at least two (unless you ask for a half-portion) and the seafood tower starter is a showstopper. For your entrée, stick with the meats unless you want to eye your date's dinner with envy. The veal porterhouse is fantastic. All the cuts are thick and outsized. Sides are à la carte, and the list of potatoes and veggies is long but unremarkable. Resist ordering more than one so that you can indulge in a giant dessert, which will be ferried out with a bowl of freshly whipped cream. The wine list features local vintners as well as highly rated wines from France and Italy.

MEDITERRANEO

32037 Agoura Road
Westlake Village, 818-889-9105
med-rest.com
Mediterranean
Entrées \$14–\$33
Kid-Friendly, Great View, Sunday Brunch

A marble bar, wrought-iron screens with glowing candles, and jet-black crystal chandeliers lend a luxurious feel to this dining venue on the grounds of the beautiful Westlake Village Inn. Roomy booths and large tables inside and out make for a comfortable night. Chef Alberto Vazquez cooks with style. His dishes will change seasonally but look for a wonderful calamari salad with crispy fried squid tentacles and grilled rings over warm potatoes with a mustard vinaigrette. The shrimp Brindisi appetizer has sautéed shrimp on a square of grilled bread, which soaks up the white-wine-caper sauce. You can always count on fresh fish dishes in zesty sauces with interesting accompaniments. Amongst the pasta dishes, the orecchiette (little pig's ears) with sausage and Swiss chard is already a classic. Steaks, pork, lamb, and occasional game dishes round out the menu. Sunday brunch is served buffet-style with lots of wonderful pastries, salads, and egg dishes to choose from.

MOZ BUDDHA LOUNGE

30105 W. Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-735-0091
mozbar.com
Pan-Asian
Entrées \$17–\$36
Live Music

The crowds come for the cover-free live music in the lounge, but the large plates of pan-Asian cuisine hold their own in the dining room. Tiger prawns are tossed with *yakisoba* noodles and a ginger-garlic sauce; mahimahi comes with coconut rice and tropical fruits; chicken is stuffed with crab and asparagus. Though dishes can be ordered in individual portions, the menu suggests family-style servings for sharing, so bring some friends. If your friends are energetic and hip—all the better. In warm weather, the patio with expansive views is a nice place to be.

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NOBU

3835 Cross Creek Road
Malibu, 310-317-9140
nobumatsuhisa.com
Asian-Fusion

Entrées \$8-\$32 or Omakase menu \$80-\$120

The stars love to come to Nobu Matsuhisa's small sushi bar and Asian fusion restaurant for the *omakase* (chef's choice) menus, the yellowtail with jalapeño, the lobster salad with lemon dressing, and the black cod. The rest of us like to go to see the culinary stars, for the rock shrimp tempura, and for the bento box of desserts (you have to ask for that one), but be prepared to pay the price.

PADRI RESTAURANT & MARTINI BAR

29008 Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-865-3700
padrirestaurant.net
Italian
Entrées \$11-\$26

Live Music

The Martini Bar adjoining the restaurant has its own upbeat scene but the dining room and patio stay tranquil and relaxing all night. Before settling into a comfy cushioned booth, check the specials on the blackboard because they're usually wonderful and unusual. The bruschetta appetizer is quite hearty with three different toppings per order. A prosciutto and *burrata* plate comes with grilled veggies. The spaghetti with tiny veal meatballs (*polpettine*) is a classic. There are plenty of wines by the glass, beers, and (of course) martinis to drink.

ROY'S

6363 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Woodland Hills, 818-888-4801
roysrestaurant.com
Hawaiian Fusion
Entrées \$21-\$33

Romantic

Blazing tiki torches greet you as you enter this lovely homage to the islands created by Roy Yamaguchi, the father of Hawaiian-fusion cuisine. It's basically Pacific Rim cooking using products like macadamia nuts, Maui onions, and Kona coffee. The fish is always fresh and the menu is mostly seasonal, but some classics are always available like the Aloha Roll (spicy tuna topped with *hamachi*, salmon, avocado, and a ginger-ponzu sauce), lobster potstickers, Maui Wowie shrimp salad, macadamia-crusted mahimahi, and a hot chocolate soufflé cake. On special occasions, drummers and hula dancers perform in the restaurant.

SEAGRASS

30 E. Ortega St.
Santa Barbara, 805-963-1012
seagrassrestaurant.com
Seafood

Entrées \$25-\$36

Romantic

A charter member of the Sustainable Seafood Program through Santa Barbara's Ty Warner Sea Center, Seagrass serves local seafood without promoting overfishing or taxing the ocean. Owner Mitchell Sjerven and his wife, Amy, also own Bouchon in Santa Barbara, so the atmosphere is classy and the wine list deep. Chef John Pettitt does everything imaginable to fish and shellfish. On any given evening, his seasonal menu offers appetizers like chilled oysters, and fresh seafood as sashimi, carpaccio, or in a bisque. Scallops might be seared or suspended in a panna cotta. Santa Barbara halibut, salmon, and sea bass serve as main courses. There are also meat dishes, like the veal duo (rack and belly with sweet potato puree, turnips, pink lady apples, and caramelized shallot jus), a Kobe beef rib eye with a bordelaise sauce, or a rack of lamb with its braised shank in a rosemary sauce.



American Flags & Cutlery
301 E. Main St. 805.641.1941



Red Brick Gallery
315 E. Main St. 805.643.6400
RedBrickArt.com

For Your Home
443 E. Main St.
805.641.1919
ForYourHomeFurniture.com



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THE SIDECAR RESTAURANT

3029 E. Main St.
Ventura, 805-653-7433
thesidecarrestaurant.com
Continental

Entrées \$10–\$25

Sunday Brunch, Live Music

Set in a 1910 Pullman train car, this restaurant has been around since 1933. The current owners have a devotion to fresh, locally grown produce; artisanal cheeses; and farm-fresh eggs. Chef Tim Kilcoyne turns out beautiful steaks, creamy polenta, and a build-your-own salad with options like organic greens, niçoise olives, roasted butter-nut squash, English cucumber, Point Reyes blue cheese, smoked salmon, focaccia croutons, and spiced hazelnuts. At brunch, the hollandaise is tangy and the house-made lemon curd is irresistible. Tuesday night is grilled cheese and jazz night. Look for purveyor dinners and murder mystery theatre nights.

SPARK WOODFIRE GRILL

1555 Simi Town Center Way
Simi Valley, 805-823-4756
sparkredfish.com
Seafood

Entrées \$14–\$28

Live Music

Value is the unexpected pleasure at this good-looking grill in the Simi Town Center. The open floor plan lets you scan the whole room as well as the kitchen for interesting action. At lunch, one page of the menu is devoted to 10 items under \$10, and they're all high-quality. The pub burger is thick and flavorful; the fish-and-chips moist on the inside and crispy where it counts. At dinner the prime pepper-crusted sirloin steak is only \$14. The smashed new potatoes are creamy and laced with butter and chives. In the lounge (and sometimes on the patio) live music plays Wednesday through Saturday nights. You might hear classic rock, jazz, or blues while noshing on addictive fried artichoke hearts, crispy hot chicken wings, or zingy baby back ribs.

SUZANNE'S CUISINE

502 W. Ojai Ave.
Ojai, 805-640-1961
suzannescuisine.com
Cal-Med

Entrées \$15–\$28

Romantic

Travelers to Ojai make Suzanne's a part of their itinerary so they can explore what she's up to in any given season. Relying heavily on the produce around her, Suzanne Roll turns out lunch and dinner dishes that are interesting and handcrafted. Breads for the sandwiches are made by a local bakery; soups change daily. You might see a rainbow trout grilled with rosemary and lemon or a stuffed Cornish game hen with an apricot-marsala sauce. The atmosphere is casual with seats on the back patio next to the garden and a most pleasant gurgling fountain and outdoor fire-place. For cooler weather, there's also an enclosed patio. Note: The restaurant is closed on Tuesdays.

TIERRA SUR RESTAURANT AT HERZOG WINE CELLARS

3201 Camino Del Sol
Oxnard, 805-983-1560
herzogwinecellars.com
Kosher Californian

Entrées \$25–\$44

Kosher food is complex and flavorful here at this restaurant inside Herzog Winery. Chef Todd Aarons employs local ingredients for his seasonal dishes. You might see butternut squash soup with lemon oil, ahi tuna carpaccio with an avocado gelato, or a spicy venison and bison sausage with a potato croquette. Desserts include a flourless Mexican chocolate cake with caramel frozen custard and an orange-almond flan. Aarons puts together three-course menus paired with wines for easy ordering. Reservations are required on Sundays. On Fridays, only lunch is served. The restaurant is closed on Saturdays in observance of the Sabbath.

TRATTORIA FARFALLA

160 Promenade Way
Westlake Village, 805-497-2283
farfallawestlakevillage.com
Italian

Entrées \$10–\$20

Romantic

The warm and sexy environs here make this a superb spot for a date. The lighting is flattering at the high pub tables in the lounge, at the brown leather booths running the length of the restaurant along the open kitchen, and on the tented patio. The cooking from chef-owner Santino Coccia is good enough to swoon over. Any selection from the fresh Mozzarella Bar will be wonderful. Add some prosciutto to the cheese selection to create a light meal. The mushroom risotto is scooped out of a giant wheel of Parmesan onto your plate. Flavorful skirt steak comes as a main course or on the Piemontese salad. The popular dessert, Torta della Nonna (grandmother's cake), is a warm and sweet ricotta cake with lemon zest and pine nuts.

Magnavino Cellars Winery and
Tasting Room (magnavino.com) has
opened in Oxnard on Rice Avenue.

Stop by Saturday or Sunday from
11 a.m. to 6 p.m. to try the pinot
grigio, sauvignon blanc, petite syrah,
sangiovese, zinfandel, and more.

TUSCANY IL RISTORANTE

968 S. Westlake Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-495-2768
Italian

Entrées \$18–\$32

Romantic

Village dwellers pack this beautiful space for its warm, friendly service and top-notch food. The menu is small, but the nightly specials are worth investigating. High rollers and celebs consider this their neighborhood boîte. Others come just for special occasions. The lobster and shrimp martini salad has hearts of palm, avocado, and pink grapefruit segments; the baby greens salad has shaved fennel and toasted pine nuts; the whole Dover sole is topped with a lemon-chervil sauce; and the chicken breast comes under a sun-dried tomato pesto.

VINEYARD HOUSE

3631 Sagunto St.
Santa Ynez, 805-688-2886
thevineyardhouse.com
Eclectic

Entrées \$11–\$28

Sunday Brunch, Kid-Friendly

The large, wooden, wraparound deck allows diners to gaze upon the rolling hills of Santa Ynez Valley—whether enjoying the fruits of its vines or teetotaling with the Bleeding Heart spritzer (ginger ale, grape juice, and lime). A wide range of cuisine styles share the menu space. Sandwiches are filled with pesto chicken, Virginia pulled pork, or the catch of the day with wasabi mayonnaise. Burgers, pizzas, and pastas compete for your attention with the spicy venison chili verde with tomatillos and green chiles. The crispy chicken salad and the crab cake spinach salad are also crowd pleasers. At night, choose from a 12-ounce rib eye, rack of lamb, chicken "three ways," or butternut squash ravioli (among other things). Sweet endings include a warm, chewy, chocolate-walnut brownie topped with McConnell's vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce.

VIVOLI CAFÉ & TRATTORIA

3825 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-373-6060
vivolicafe.com

Italian

Entrées \$11–\$29

Romantic

The lighting is flattering and the booths are cozy at this romantic little trattoria. The bread and olive tapenade set on the table are delish, so is the shaved artichoke salad with Parmesan. The long list of pastas won't disappoint. Fish and seafood dishes tend to be light and flavorful. Meats include beautifully breaded chicken and veal, rack of lamb, pork tenderloin, and steaks. On Mondays, look for a three-course prix-fixe menu special for around \$15.

LOOK WATERMARK

598 Main St.
Ventura, 805-643-6800
watermarkonmain.com
New American

Entrées \$15–\$44

Romantic

Downstairs is posh and formal with stylish vintage decor and a large deco-style bar serving classic drinks. The menu at brunch and dinner is hearty sit-down fare from chef Peter Edwards. Top-notch musical acts play Tuesday through Saturday nights. Upstairs on the roof, accessed by elevator, the mood is lighter and the dress more casual. The ocean motif includes fish tanks and wavy glass; the menu is more about small plates and new drink concoctions. Wherever you sit, you won't be disappointed with the views.

ZIN BISTRO AMERICANA

32131 Lindero Canyon Road
Westlake Village, 818-865-0095
zinbistroamericana.com
American

Entrées \$15–\$35

Great View, Romantic

Right on the lake in Westlake Village, Zin takes advantage of the gorgeous view with floor-to-ceiling windows that double as doors; the small patio is cozy with a fire pit. The tables inside without a water view let you focus on your date in the romantic booths. Executive Chef Roberto Leyva (also of FINS and Moz Buddha Lounge) turns out comfort food like chicken-fried lobster, braised short ribs, an Angus beef hamburger, and the cioppino from FINS. Lots of little starters like fried oysters and cheese fondue make tasting different wines easy.

FOODIE

Restaurants whose cuisine shines—regardless of decor, service, ambiance, or even views—to make food lovers swoon time and time again.

NEW ARTISAN

1401 Park St.
Paso Robles, 805-237-8084
artisanpasoables.com
New American

Entrées \$21–\$28

Romantic, Sunday Brunch

Vegetables farmed on demand, sustainably raised meats, and an award-winning chef combine to form a temple of gastronomy in the heart of 805 wine country. Chris Kobayashi creates unforgettable, seasonal food, his brother Mike Kobayashi makes sure the service is impeccable, and Chris's wife Shandi Kobayashi matches excellent wines to her husband's cuisine. No visit to Paso is complete without a stop here.

BROOKS

545 E. Thompson Blvd.
Ventura, 805-652-7070
restaurantbrooks.com
New American

Entrées \$17–\$28

Part of the upscale dining scene in downtown Ventura, Brooks has a classy vibe without being too fancy. Chef-owner Andy Brooks gets lots of inspiration for his seasonal menu from local farmers. You can depend on seeing

Beautiful gifts that warm the heart...
...and legs of your loved one!

plenty of seafood including some form of oysters coated in cornmeal and fried just until crispy on the outside. There's usually a flavorful cut of steak or two. Desserts are fun, including parfaits, chocolate pound cake, crème brûlée, and cinnamon roll bread pudding. Bottles on the deep wine list go for half-price on Wednesdays. Every night Andy offers a three-course menu for a bargain price of around \$35, and his signature five-course menu (for the entire table) for around \$60 (\$90 with wine pairings).

Café 14

30315 Canwood St.
Agoura Hills, 818-991-9560
cafe-14.com

Eclectic

Entrées \$24–\$34

Chefs and co-owners Neil Kramer and Claudine Bernard turn out very nice eclectic cuisine in this small space, tucked in the corner of the Reyes Adobe Plaza. The patio feels a bit more expansive than the main dining room if you like a little elbow room around your table. The menu changes frequently but you'll always be treated to a mélange of flavors and styles from around the world. A steak au poivre might be listed next to short ribs in hoisin sauce with sticky rice; or seasonal fish might vie for your attention with a bouillabaisse or Parisian chicken fricassee. Desserts tend toward hearty American crumbles and dense flourless cakes with ice creams made daily. The full bar mixes cocktails with fresh fruits and herbs. Café 14 is open for dinner Wednesday through Sunday nights.

Downey's

1305 State St.
Santa Barbara, 805-966-5006
downeyssb.com

Cal-French

Entrées \$29–\$37

Romantic

Chef and owner John Downey sources ingredients like meat, seafood, and organic vegetables locally and prepares them in imaginative, but not overwrought, ways. His wife Liz runs the front of the house, which is dotted with her own paintings of local scenes. The menu, which changes daily, might include a porcini soup with crème fraîche and chives; squash salad with a garlic-mustard dressing; or a boneless veal chop with chanterelles, marjoram, and fettuccine with spinach.

LOOK! FEAST BISTRO

254 E. Ojai Ave.
Ojai, 805-640-9260
feastofojai.com

New American

Entrées \$15–\$20

Romantic

Multiple rooms provide completely different vibes at this magical bistro in downtown Ojai. The bar area is always bustling and fun; inner rooms are quieter. Chef and owner Susan Coulter lets the seasons dictate her small menu. She also relies heavily on local ingredients like Ojai olive oil. Coulter makes sure to offer vegetarian dishes, a catch of the day, and meats like pork, duck, chicken, and beef. Check the website to see the current monthly winemaker dinner schedule.

THE HUNGRY CAT

1134 Chapala St.
Santa Barbara, 805-884-4701
thehungrycat.com

Seafood

Entrées \$16–28

A tiny raw bar and seafood house that specializes in New England-style food and cocktails, this Santa Barbara twin of the Hollywood original celebrates the purity of oysters, clams, lobster, Santa Barbara spot prawns, and fresh vegetables. Preparations from chef and owner David Lentz are sometimes simple, sometimes complex, but always spot-on delicious. The Maine lobster roll is smeared with a Meyer-lemon aioli instead of standard mayo. Baltimore crab cakes sit on frisée with pancetta and a coddled quail egg. The space is small and reservations aren't taken, so some waiting may be involved, but an East Coast cocktail with muddled fruit ought to take the edge off. Open for dinner nightly.



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www.papiliostores.com

KANDA SUSHI

3637 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-230-0101
kandasushito.com

Japanese

Sushi \$5–\$18; Small plates \$4–\$14

Serene and beautiful with comfy white leather chairs, this Japanese restaurant is perfect for a date. The small plates and sushi rolls are high-quality and delicious. Service at the tables from kimono-clad girls is very sweet. Note: If you sit at the sushi bar, be prepared to follow proper sushi etiquette.

LEILA'S RESTAURANT & WINE BAR

752 Lindero Canyon Road
Oak Park, 818-707-6939

leilasrestaurant.com

Cal-Eclectic

Entrées \$15–\$30

An exhibition kitchen dominates this little but lovely space so diners can watch chef Richard De Mane turn out his Peking duck confit pancake, port-roasted pear salad, and Moroccan spiced salmon. There's also a communal table up front for more social dining. The adjoining wine bar and patio expand the space nicely for comfortable dining everywhere.

MARAVILLA

905 Country Club Road
Ojai, 805-646-1111

ojairesort.com

Mediterranean

Entrées \$19–\$39

Romantic & Great View

After being closed to the public for a year, the formal dining room of the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa is again serving dinner nightly. The views of the surrounding hillsides and mountains are stunning, especially at sunset. The Mediterranean menu from chef Jamie West is casual, with signature items like a half-chicken under a brick and a salmon dish with arugula pesto and fingerling potatoes. The wine list features bottles from Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy.

MARCELLO RISTORANTE

140 W. Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, 805-371-4367

marcelloristorante.com

Italian

Entrées \$13–\$29

Whether you're at a table inside or out on the front patio, the service here is snappy and professional. Owner and chef Tino Di Marcello doesn't speak much English (only Italian and Spanish) but what he lacks in words he gives to his customers in flavor. The specials are always interesting and he's not afraid to put salt cod or tripe on the regular menu. The olive oil is first-rate and many of the pasta shapes are handmade. The *cappellacci* sheets, folded around ricotta and spinach then splashed with a tomato-cream sauce, are wonderful. For dessert, don't miss the chocolate crème brûlée with a hint of lemon. The wine list is long with plenty of pinot noir, chianti, and a few barbaresco choices, not to mention a nice assortment of pinot grigio (and friends).

OLIO E LIMONE

17 W. Victoria St.
Santa Barbara, 805-899-2699

olioelimon.com

Sicilian

Entrées \$16–\$34

Romantic

Husband and wife Alberto and Elaine Morello treat this gem of a restaurant like a precious stone. No ingredient is too good to employ. The olive oil (from a family grove in Sicily) is so fantastic, people take home bottles of the stuff. Chef Alberto's salads are fresh, his pastas are handmade, and his sauces are excellent. If you do veer from the pasta or risotto (which is hard to do), you won't be disappointed with the fresh fish or tender veal. There's also fantastic roasted chicken or rib-eye steak at dinner. Lunch has a nice range of salads, pastas, and a couple of panini sandwiches. Cocktails and spirits now accompany the award-winning wine list, too.

In Calabasas, Saddle Peak Lodge (saddlepeaklodge.com) has a new happy hour (Wednesday through Friday from 4 to 6 p.m.). It features high-end bar food such as corn dogs made from wild game (yes, really), buffalo carpaccio (like beef only better), and fried mac-and-cheese spheres for \$7 to \$10 per not-so-small plate.

NEW PETROS

2860 Grand Ave.
Los Olivos, 805-686-5455

petroslosolivos.com

Greek

Entrées \$23–\$32

Romantic

Inside the Fess Parker Wine Country Inn & Spa, Petros basks in lovely simplicity. The decor celebrates textures in warm wood and white sculpture. Owner Petros Benekos' food pays homage to modern Greek cooking as opposed to old-school Americanized dishes. In the *Horiatiki* (or "peasant") Salad, he meticulously stacks cucumber spears, tomato wedges, Greek olives, avocado slices, and a square of perfect feta cheese. A dainty dip combo delivers plenty of flavor on pita triangles, especially the *kafteri* cheese blended with hot peppers. The Nikos Saganaki contains molten *kefalotiri* cheese wrapped in a skin of sesame seeds, and drizzled with honey to splendid effect. The daily fresh fish is either grilled or pan-seared, and dressed in olive oil, lemon juice, and Greek oregano. *Keftethes*, or meatballs, resemble tiny, tasty, very tender meat loaves doused in tomato sauce. For an unusual finish, try the *loukouma* (or *loukemathes*)—crispy, light, almost-hollow fried doughnuts sauced in cinnamon-walnut honey.

ROOT 246

420 Alisal Road
Solvang, 805-686-8681

root-246.com

New American

Entrées \$14–\$35

Romantic, Sunday Brunch

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians tapped celebrity chef Bradley Ogden to create this temple to New American dining in downtown Solvang. The decor is modern and whimsical with oversized armchairs in one of the bar areas, lounge furniture on the outdoor patio, flat-screen televisions in a subdued interior lounge, a mixture of sleek booths and tables in the main dining room, and a glass-walled chef's table adjoining the huge kitchen. Executive chef Jonny Hall collaborates with Ogden on the seasonal menu, which changes ever so slightly each day. Fresh vegetables are the stars of the show here, along with artisanal cheeses and sustainably raised meats. The New American creations aren't exotic, but they do bring together familiar tastes in new ways. For example, a Maytag blue cheese soufflé is paired with Bing cherries while ahi tuna gets a companion five-bean salad, olive tapenade, and a quail egg on the plate. Everything from the small collection of breads that hit the table at the start of the meal to the diminutive desserts is top-notch. The entire menu is available in all of the different seating areas. The collection of wines is impressive, with 90 percent coming from California. Every Wednesday night a different local vintner plays guest sommelier. Root 246 is open for dinner nightly, for lunch on Saturday, and for brunch on Sunday.

SADDLE PEAK LODGE

419 Cold Canyon Road

Calabasas, 818-222-3888

saddlepeaklodge.com

New American

Entrées \$16–\$54

Romantic, Sunday Brunch

An homage to game animals and the fine wines that pair well with them, this rustic suite of rooms never disappoints. Chef Adam Horton hits all the right notes with his accompaniments and never overcomplicates the meat preparations. Once-a-month wine dinners feature local vintners. Mixologist Chris Barragan makes a mean Mint Julep. Sunday brunch on the patio is splendid.

SAFIRE

4850 Verdugo Way
Camarillo, 805-389-1227

safirebistro.com

New American

Entrées \$12–\$41

Romantic

The prettiest dining room in Camarillo dishes up excellent New American fare from chef Chris Bryan. A wood-fired oven crisps up flatbreads and pizzas. Nice seafood dishes and steaks hold up the expensive end of the menu while special bistro dishes come in under \$20. Happy hour in the bar area from 4 to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday offers even more value-driven dining. Check the website for live musical performances and wine dinners.

SLY'S

686 Linden Ave.

Carpinteria, 805-684-6666

slysonline.com

American

Entrées \$12–\$55

Saturday & Sunday Brunch

Sort of casual, sort of stylish, this Carpinteria gem is a must-visit. With its Vespa hanging over the bar, glass-walled wine room, and polished wood accents, it's great for formal occasions. But the service is super-friendly and most of the patrons are comfortably dressed, so there's nothing stuffy about an evening here, either. Chef and owner James Sly has been cooking for more than 40 years, and his cuisine tastes like it. You really can't go wrong with anything on this American menu of steaks and seafood, but the abalone is a real treat. Unlike most chopouses, Sly's offers a list of pastas as well as sandwiches and small cuts of steak for those who don't have a huge appetite. Desserts are wonderful, too. Sly's is open for lunch Monday through Friday, dinner nightly, and lunch and brunch on Saturday and Sunday.

NEW THOMAS HILL ORGANICS MARKET BISTRO & WINE BAR

1305 Park St.

Paso Robles, 805-226-5888

thomashillorganics.com

New American

Entrées \$24–\$30

Sunday Brunch

A cute brick building houses this restaurant with a wine bar up front and a patio behind. Farmers Joe and Debbie Thomas opened this bistro to help showcase the wonderful ingredients sprouting up on their hillside farm and orchard. Chef Julie Simon even makes planting requests of farmer Joe, so the highly seasonal menu can change weekly. Items include grass-fed beef and free-range chicken; salads are unusual and flavorful, chock-full of grains like quinoa. There's always a grilled cheese panini and hamburger offered at lunchtime. At dinner a wood-burning oven on the patio crisps up small pizzas. Vegetarians will always find an entrée to call their own, as will steak lovers and fans of braised duck.

LOOK WINE CASK

813 Anacapa St.

Santa Barbara, 805-966-9463

winecask.com

American Riviera

Entrées \$17–\$29

Romantic

The Wine Cask is a virtual shrine to wine-country eating and drinking. Co-owner Mitchell Sjerven (of Bouchon and Seagrass restaurants) oversees the wine-friendly menu in the beautiful and historic main dining room. Plenty of fresh, local produce gets dressed in salads or roasted or

sautéed and plated next to steak, pan-seared fish, and roasted chicken. A cheese plate with honeycomb and dried fruit is a nice way to end dinner with yet another glass of wine from the well-chosen collection. The staff is always happy to suggest appropriate pairings.

A GOOD BET

Not too fancy, not too expensive, and a good experience all around—these are the qualities you'll find at the restaurants in this section.

BODEE'S

3304 Maricopa Highway
Ojai, 805-646-5300
bodees.net
Californian
Entrées \$18–\$34

This small indoor dining room with its dark wood and low-beamed ceiling has been around since the late 1940s; the sprawling patio area with its sculpted stream and waterfall was revamped in 2005. Tables are set up on terraces under trees and a large canopy. In the winter months, a huge stone fireplace keeps everyone warm. The peaceful environs go together with relaxed service, so meals can take a while. Chef Myk Aviles turns out seasonal Cal cuisine like lollipop lamb chops with cherry mint sauce in the spring or spinach salad with strawberries in the summer. Main dinner courses tend toward the exotic: Aviles stuffs chicken with spinach and sun-dried tomato pesto, then wraps it in prosciutto and serves it over a Gorgonzola-basil risotto. Filet mignon gets wrapped in pepper bacon and topped with a crab butter. Just off the main drag of Ojai, it's a quiet place to while away an evening or weekend.

BRENT'S DELI

2799 Townsgate Road
Westlake Village, 805-557-1882
brentsdeli.com
Deli
Entrées \$6–\$20
Kid-Friendly

For amazingly good Reuben sandwiches on rye bread piled high with pastrami or corned beef, sauerkraut, and Thousand Island dressing, you can't beat this slick deli. The booths are cushy and roomy, leaving space for your tummy to expand as you down a four-layer slice of chocolate cake or a plate full of stuffed cabbage rolls. A separate bar also offers the full menu. The patio out back allows for even more seating. A counter up front expedites take-out orders. Brent's Deli is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily.

C-STREET RESTAURANT

450 E. Harbor Blvd.
Ventura, 805-652-5151
cpventura.com/dining.html
Californian
Entrées \$15–\$45
Kid-Friendly

If you sit close to the windows of this dining room in the Crowne Plaza Ventura Beach hotel, you can just make out the surfers riding the waves here where the ocean meets California Street. Chef Nic Manocchione honors the sea and its bounty along with the local farmers in his seasonal cooking. The fish tacos taste as fresh as Baja. The lobster—in a club sandwich layered with flatbread and bacon at lunchtime or simply served with drawn butter and asparagus at dinner—is perfectly cooked. Entrée salads are ferried out in huge bowls, and any salad can also be made into a wrap using a spinach tortilla (a nice option) upon request. At dinner, salmon is planked on cedar wood and topped with a balsamic reduction. Lamb chops get a pistachio crust and cherry compote. Desserts are presented to you on a tray for optimum choosing conditions.

LOOK CAFÉ FIRENZE

563 W. Los Angeles Ave.
Moorpark, 805-532-0048
cafefirenze.net
Italian

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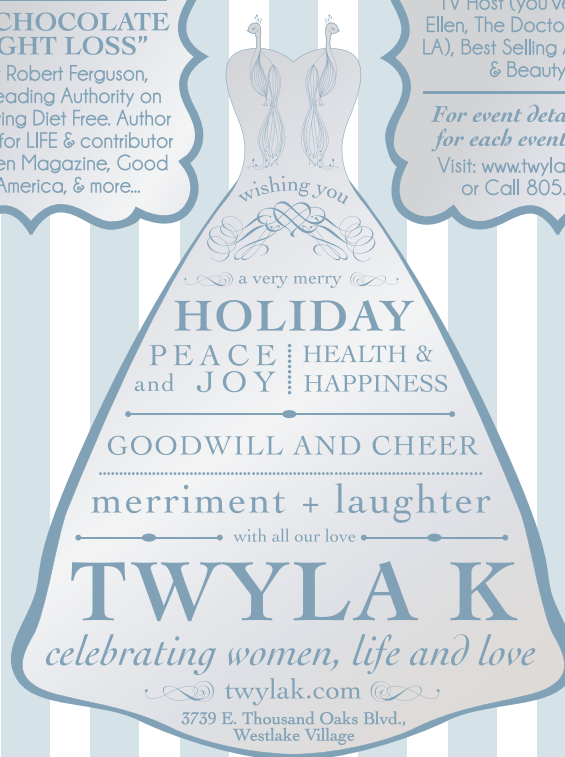
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1941 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd #102, Thousand Oaks, Ca 91362
805.496.0123 www.cupcakeryonline.com twitter.com/cupcakeryTO

Entrées \$13–\$40

Romantic

Pastas are handmade daily at this beautiful, sprawling Italian restaurant with bar stools along the open kitchen counter in the back. A full bar dominates the front room with a long list of specialty martinis. Chef and owner Fabio Viviani turns out classic Italian dishes like ravioli, osso buco, and chicken scaloppine. The cannoli, rolled in pistachios and chocolate chips, are sublime.

CHOLADA THAI CUISINE

1282 Newbury Road
Newbury Park, 805-498-7801
choladataicuisine.com

Thai

Entrées \$9–\$17

Kid-Friendly

The Malibu location has been a well-kept secret for years. The second location, in Newbury Park, is equally unassuming; the attention goes into the food. Thick juicy chicken strips are grilled on skewers and served with very tasty peanut sauce and cucumber relish as the satay appetizer. The fried spring rolls are sliced and given a fancy presentation. You can find curries and steamed fish dishes here alongside unusual offerings like roasted duck salad and fried rice with pumpkin and Chinese broccoli. Most entrée prices are around \$10. Beer, wine, and soju cocktails are available.

Santa Barbara's new **Olio Pizzeria** (oliopizzeria.com) is from the same team that created **Olio e Limone trattoria**. (And this stylish wine bar is right behind that landmark Italian restaurant.)

CIGALE CAFÉ

702 Lindero Canyon Road
Oak Park, 818-991-2442

cigalecafe.com

Cal-French

Entrées \$14–\$32

Chef and owner Denis Rion named his café after a cicada, the symbol of hospitality in southern France. He creates some classic French dishes like onion soup, steamed mussels, frog legs, and *boeuf bourguignon* for dinner, but he also offers some Mediterranean and Californian fare. At lunch a wide range of salads is on offer including one with the grain quinoa and some grilled veggies. There's also paella, pasta dishes, and a bouillabaisse for both lunch and dinner. The surroundings are great for a business meeting.

COSMOS GRILL

23663 Calabasas Road
Calabasas, 818-591-2211

cosmosgrill.com

Eclectic

Entrées \$9–\$20

Whether you sit on the sunny patio or inside the small dining room, service is friendly at this casual Calabasas eatery across from the Commons. The menu has a little of everything, from salad to pasta to fish to burgers to panini. The flavors are all over the map, from American (yam chips) to Latin (spicy adobo chicken salad with a cilantro-lime dressing) to Asian ("tilapia Bangkok" in spicy Thai peanut sauce) to Italian (cheese ravioli).

THE COUNTER

30990 Russell Ranch Road
Westlake Village, 818-889-0080

thecounterburger.com

American

Entrées \$7–\$14

Kid-Friendly

It's mod and hip at this burger bar, where you can build your own creation for lunch or dinner. Start with a menu on a clipboard and begin checking off preferences for your patty, cheese, toppings, sauce, and bun. It's a control freak's dream. Those who want a little less decision-making in their life can simply opt for one of the signature burgers (the Old School is quite good). The fried pickle chips are way too tasty, as are the thick milkshakes.

DARBAND GRILL

868 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-449-1323
and 19337 Ventura Blvd.
Tarzana, 818-654-9918

Middle Eastern

Entrées \$10–\$19

Live Music

Both locations of this Persian eatery have a slightly lush look thanks to nice fabrics. The service is quick and the patrons are usually large families or groups of friends having a nice time together. If you like crispy rice, the *tadig* won't disappoint. Plenty of delicious soups and stews are made daily, sounding more exotic than they taste—don't be afraid to try them. The kabobs are more straightforward, threaded with fish, chicken, beef, or lamb and set on a bed of basmati rice. Turkish coffee and baklava make a nice finish to a large meal. Look for guitarists and singers on weekends and belly dancers on Friday nights.

ELADIO'S

1 State St.

Santa Barbara, 805-963-4466

harborviewinnsb.com

Italian

Entrées \$10–\$20

Great View, Sunday Brunch

The outdoor patio here is wonderful for people-watching since the restaurant is at the beginning of State Street near the beach. Since it's on the ground floor of the Harbor View Inn, a lot of tourists congregate here, but locals love it, especially for breakfast. Sunday brunch offers bricche French toast filled with mascarpone cheese; eggs Florentine over English muffins; and smoked salmon and red onion scrambled with eggs and crème fraîche.

LOOK ERIC'S RESTAURANT & BAR

495 N. Ventu Park Road
Thousand Oaks, 805-716-4100

palmgardenhotel.com

Mexican and American

Entrées \$8–\$17

Live Music

Casual food like burgers, pasta, New York steak, salmon, fajitas, and tacos anchor the menu at this dining venue of the Palm Garden Hotel. Televisions throughout the dining room and bar stay tuned to sports. A large patio offers plenty of shaded seating. The daily three-hour happy hour (from 4 to 7 p.m.) makes the already low prices even more appealing. Live music is featured on Friday nights.

EXOTIC THAI CAFÉ

29045 W. Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-991-8147
and at 1145 Lindero Canyon Road
Westlake Village, 818-575-3248
and at 2705 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-373-9231
and at 1930 Newbury Road
Newbury Park, 805-375-0272

and at 1145 S. Victoria Ave.
Ventura, 805-658-4861

and at 22776 Ventura Blvd.
Woodland Hills, 818-225-0789

and at 1555 Simi Town Center Way
Simi Valley, 805-306-1255

and at 849 E. Ojai Ave.
Ojai, 805-646-6618

Thai

Entrées \$10–\$16

Curries are the standout dishes at this small, casual Thai chain. You can't go wrong with Thai basil and coconut

milk, so the curries are all fragrant and full of flavor. They can each be spiced to diners' heat tolerance. The "exotic" in the name can apply to the wide range of seafood items available all over the menu (scallops, squid, mussels) or even to the dishes made with duck. The shrimp rolls on the appetizer list are a fun way to start a culinary journey.

GINO'S BISTRO

1620 Newbury Road
Newbury Park, 805-498-3188

ginosbistro.net

Italian

Entrées \$13–\$29

Kid-Friendly

Gino DeFelice and his family run this friendly *cucina*. No salt is added to any dish and many options are quite heart-healthy. The pastas are plated in large portions, enough to serve as main courses. The lasagna Bolognese is rich, meaty, and filling. Meat dishes are made from high quality veal, lamb, beef, and chicken. The veal à la Gino is pounded, breaded, pan-fried, and layered with eggplant, tomato, and cheese. (A nice twist on the usual veal Milanese or Parmigiano, which he also serves). For dessert, the cannoli gets a dash of banana liqueur for that extra zing. Gino's bistro is open for lunch Monday through Friday and for dinner nightly. Happy hour runs from 4:30 to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday.

KING'S FISH HOUSE

4798 Commons Way
Calabasas, 818-225-1979

Seafood

Entrées \$10–\$39

(and up to \$72 for a 3-pound lobster)

Kid-Friendly

Huge dining room, large menu, well-executed. Part of the King's Seafood Company (Water Grill, I Cugini), so the fish is always fresh. The menu is printed daily; expect the best picks to be sold out by the end of the evening. The fried oysters and the clam chowder are reliable favorites. This place is big enough to handle energetic kids and good enough to satisfy adult tastes.

KUMO SUSHI

860 Hampshire Road
Westlake Village, 805-494-5250

Japanese

Entrées \$13–\$26; Sushi \$3–\$13 per roll

Kid-Friendly

Set downstairs in the Water Court office building, this somewhat secluded sushi bar has a loyal following. Most diners just eye the specials board hoping for live scallop, Japanese snapper, or mackerel, but plenty of options can be found on the printed menu. The owners like to emphasize healthful eating, so any dish with rice can be served with brown rice. Alternately, rolls can be made riceless and wrapped in thin sheets of cucumber for a carb-free experience. Tofu salad and grilled sea bass will also satisfy health-conscious eaters. Full bar with Japanese beer and sake. Open for lunch Tuesday through Friday, dinner Tuesday through Sunday.

THE LANDING GRILL AND SUSHI BAR

32123 W. Lindero Canyon Road
Westlake Village, 818-706-8887

thelandinggrill.com

Californian/Sushi

Entrées \$8–\$21; Sushi \$3–\$11 per roll

Great View, Kid-Friendly

The buzzword for The Landing is "flexibility." There's a sushi bar, tables inside for those who prefer milder temperatures, tables outside with great views of the lake, grassy areas for kids to run around on, and a menu so diverse that no one can complain. Choose from sushi, sashimi, Japanese bento boxes, seafood chowder, seared albacore, Greek salad, a burger with bacon and avocado, pasta dishes, or stir-fries. It's all there and all well-executed.

NEW LOS ARROYOS MEXICAN AND TAKE OUT

1280 Coast Village Road
Montecito, 805-969-9059

also at 14 W. Figueroa St.

Santa Barbara, 805-962-5541

and in the Camarillo Premium Outlets
 630 Ventura Blvd.
 Camarillo, 805-987-4000
 losarroyos.net
 Mexican
 Entrées \$9–\$14
 Kid-Friendly

The fanciest of the three Los Arroyos restaurants run by the Arroyos family is in Montecito right on Coast Village Road. This location has full table service both inside the small dining room and out on the patio. The bar mixes up margaritas all day long. The other two locations serve beer and wine only with the same fresh, moderately priced burritos and tacos. Here food is ordered at the counter and brought out to the tables. Don't miss the tasty salsa bar. The daily specials are worth trying.

MANDARIN EXPRESS

5015 Kanan Road
 Agoura Hills, 818-991-9831
 mandarinexpressagourahills.com
 Chinese Fusion
 Entrées \$10–\$27

It's not much to look at (think Formica tables and mirrored walls) but the owners of this tiny storefront are dedicated to keeping Chinese food interesting, fresh, and as organic as possible. Chef Dan Chang creates fusion dishes like filet mignon in a bourbon, basil, and black bean sauce and shrimp with nuts and balsamic vinegar over rice. The food isn't cheap by any stretch, but you've never had Chinese takeout like this before. The choices are almost endless considering the chef will pair just about any sauce you like with any meat, fish, vegetable, or mock meat (made of tofu or seitan) you want. He'll also adjust the heat (as in spice) level to your liking. When you want something different and delicious and delivered, this is definitely the place to get it.

LOOK MI PIACE ITALIAN KITCHEN

4799 Commons Way
 Calabasas, 818-591-8822
 Italian
 Entrées \$11–\$20

Sunday Brunch, Kid-Friendly

The open spaces inside and out create a pleasant spot to sit at lunch or dinner. Waiters wearing long, black bistro aprons ferry big bowls of pasta—like shrimp scampi with angel hair and freshly made ravioli—from the open kitchen. The pizza chef constantly pulls pies like Margherita or Classica and calzones from the display oven. Seafood linguine in a red or white sauce is a favorite of many. The *Pollo al Sesamo* is a pounded breast, crusted with bread crumbs and sesame seeds and then lightly sauced. Apple pie comes with ice cream or whipped cream.

PIERRE LAFOND WINE BISTRO

516 State St.
 Santa Barbara, 805-962-1455
 pierrelafond.com
 Californian
 Entrées \$13–\$21

A modernist setting in downtown Santa Barbara with plate-glass windows and exposed ductwork displays bottles from the Lafond Winery in refrigerated cases and on racks. Tourists and locals pop in with their kids for breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily. The bistro menu from chef Nathan Heil offers classics like French onion soup, a Kobe beef burger, a half-roasted chicken with crispy fingerling potatoes, and a hanger steak with spoon bread. An artisan cheese plate is available all day with selections changing regularly.

POOKIE'S THAI CUISINE

900 Hampshire Road
 Westlake Village, 805-381-0094
 Thai
 Entrées \$7–\$13
 Kid-Friendly

Downstairs in the Water Court Plaza office complex, owner Pookie creates delicious Thai dishes for lunch and dinner daily. Lunch specials are a steal at \$7 to \$8 each. She also has a wide selection of interesting salads like the Outrageous Beef Salad with a spicy lime dressing and the

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protein-rich Yam Yai salad with shrimp, chicken, egg, and peanuts in a sweet-and-sour dressing. Noodle dishes are generously sized and include the classic pad thai and the interesting Hi Yo Silver with fried noodles, shrimp, and bean sprouts. Curries, vegetarian options, and fish dishes (such as the crispy sole with tamarind and chili sauce) give diners lots of great choices not found elsewhere.

STELLA'S RESTAURANT

2385 Michael Drive
Newbury Park, 805-498-0989
American
Entrées \$10–\$21
Kid-Friendly

Stella Scholle has been charming her customers for more than 25 years with eggs with creamed spinach and artichokes over an English muffin, stacks of pancakes, and omelettes. Since breakfast is her most popular meal, she offers it seven days a week, from opening to closing. At lunch, the burgers are named after stars, the sandwich selections are extensive, and the salads move fast. Try stopping in for dinner—served Tuesday through Saturday—when it's less crowded. Look for specials like clam chowder, reasonably priced steaks, chicken with chardonnay-cream sauce, and the amazing apple pie.

STONEFIRE GRILL

3635 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-413-0300
stonefiregrill.com
American
Entrées \$7–\$15
Kid-Friendly

Entrées come in varying sizes, from single to family, so feeding a crowd here is easy. The lemon-garlic chicken is unbelievably juicy and tender. Salads are big winners, too, from the Caesar to the "BBQ Chopped" with chicken or tri-tip. Don't miss the garlicky breadsticks. The quick-serve format requires ordering at the front and then fetching drinks before sitting down in the Craftsman-style environs. Take-out orders get their own entrance and counter, making it super-easy to pick up dinner on the way home from work.

THE SUNSET RESTAURANT

6800 Westward Beach Road
Malibu, 310-589-1007
thesunsetrestaurant.com
New American
Entrées \$12–\$30

Great View, Saturday & Sunday Brunch

A lounge-like setting keeps things relaxed at this beachside eatery in the north end of Malibu. Brunch on Saturday and Sunday offers French toast, salmon Benedict, seafood, and salads. Dinner Tuesday through Sunday nights keeps things casual with crispy whitefish sandwiches, burgers, mussels and fries, and flatbread pizzas. A full bar pours cocktails and plenty of wines.

TERRI'S CAFÉ

30135 Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-707-1934
American-Italian
Entrées \$8–\$15

Huge café lattes, addictive lemon-ricotta pancakes, and delicious eggs Benedict over crab cakes draw fans of breakfast (served until 3 p.m.) to this charming spot. Tables on the patio outside or inside the cheery dining room have equally friendly service. Lunch, also served daily, offers plenty of salads (like tuna), sandwiches (turkey), and wraps (chopped barbecued chicken). Chili, tortilla soup, and a soup of the day can stand on their own or come alongside sandwiches and salads. Dinner, with entrées like meatloaf and grilled vegetable pasta, is served Thursday through Saturday nights.

TRA DI NOI

3835 Cross Creek Road
Malibu, 310-456-0169
tradinoimalibu.com
Italian
Entrées \$14–\$34

In the Malibu Country Mart, just a stone's throw from Nobu Malibu, this laid-back Italian spot draws all the same celebs. Chef Francesco Velasco has solid control of his menu of Italian salads, pastas, pizzas, chicken in a lemon-caper sauce, veal marsala and a whole branzino. Specials are market-driven, so Velasco always uses truffles when he can get his hands on them. The take-out window has its own menu of quick-serve salads, pizzas, and pastas, which can be eaten in the Mart's park.

TUTTI'S OFF MAIN

34 N. Palm St.
Ventura, 805-643-0880
tuttisoffmain.com
Mediterranean
Entrées \$13–\$33

Kid-Friendly, Saturday & Sunday Brunch

About a half-block off of Main Street in downtown Ventura, this bustling restaurant has a courtyard covered with a vine-laced pergola. The eats are solid, if a bit on the mild side. Pizzas are blistered in a wood-burning oven, which makes for a chewy crust. The mushroom pizza is topped by cremini, shiitake, and portobello 'shrooms plus Gorgonzola cheese, then drizzled with balsamic vinegar. At lunch, salads and sandwiches (open-faced or deli-style) both get plated with crunchy house-made potato chips. At dinner, large plates offer seafood choices (cioppino, grilled ahi tuna), pasta (penne with mushrooms and asparagus, capellini with shrimp and tomatoes), and meat (pork chop with whipped sweet potatoes, grilled rib-eye steak, braised lamb shank). A full bar offers plenty of local wines.

Paciugo Gelato at The Oaks Shopping Center (paciugo.com) has seasonal gelato flavors like peppermint, gingerbread, eggnog, and chocolate eggnog for the holidays. Take home a square cooler of three flavors for \$12, or—if you want to share—the four- or five-flavor pack for \$17 or \$22.

WILLY'S SMOKEHOUSE

28434 Roadside Drive
Agoura Hills, 818-991-7227
Barbecue
Entrées \$9–\$24
Kid-Friendly

The meat is smoked for hours and hours over hardwoods using a formula from a former USO chef named Willy, who served this authentic 'cue to Bob Hope, among others. The pulled pork is very popular, but the tri-tip is great, too, as are the baby back ribs. If you want to venture outside the world of barbecue, you could opt for the prime rib, Atlantic salmon fillet, ahi-tuna-topped salad, shrimp scampi, or New York strip steak.

WOLFGANG PUCK L.A. BISTRO

30990 Russell Ranch Road West
Westlake Village, 818-597-1902
wolfgangpuck.com/bistro
Californian
Entrées \$9–\$15

Kid-Friendly, Sunday Brunch

This hot restaurant has delicious pizzas, focaccia sandwiches, and fresh salads that hit yourtable less than 10 minutes after ordering. Heartier dishes include meatloaf, rotisserie chicken, and teriyaki salmon. Some menu items change seasonally (with Puck himself vetting every dish). The look is smart and sleek with indoor dining

plus two outdoor patios. Wine bottles hanging on the wall suggest good drinking options; by day there are GuS sparkling sodas. Brunch gets the addition of egg dishes and waffles. It's tasty; it's fast; it's crowded; so go at off-peak hours if possible. Curbside pickup is a handy alternative to dining in.

THE CHAIN GANG

Chain restaurants run the gamut from casual to very elegant, but the main component of any chain is consistency. You know what you're getting when you walk into a chain. There are no star chefs, but if you find the listing here, you will get good food, good service, and clean environs. We've left out those places with interminable waits and mediocre fare.

CALIFORNIA PIZZA KITCHEN

2200 Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-777-1778
and in Westfield Topanga
6606 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Canoga Park, 818-884-8858
cpk.com
Cal-Italian
Entrées \$9–\$15

CPK has so much more than pizza these days. Take the sautéed salmon, for instance, which comes with asparagus and pasta in a lemon-caper sauce. Or the Thai Linguini with a spicy peanut-ginger sauce to which you can add shrimp or chicken. Even the surroundings have changed dramatically since this chain's beginnings. The Lakes location features a large dining room decorated nicely with stone walls and wine displays plus a separate bar and lounge area. You can still get huge salads like the original chopped version that helped propel this restaurant to fame. And there are definitely pizzas—more than 30 of them with interesting toppings like pear and Gorgonzola, BBQ chicken, steak and chiles, and goat cheese and roasted red peppers. A call-ahead seating list plus curbside service makes the Westfield Topanga location a bit more user-friendly.

THE CHEESECAKE FACTORY

442 W. Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, 805-371-9705
thecheesecakefactory.com
American
Entrées \$9–\$32

Kid-Friendly, Sunday Brunch

Still going strong after all these years, The Cheesecake Factory excels in offering generous portions of stylish food in a casual setting. This branch of the chain that began in 1978, set in The Oaks, has a slightly Egyptian-movie-set look. On the encyclopedic menu you'll find everything from a Kobe hamburger to Cajun Jambalaya Pasta to orange chicken to chicken marsala. Really, there's a bit of every cuisine imaginable. Most folks come here with one dish in mind: cheesecake. Look for flavors like Godiva chocolate, Kahlua-cocoa-coffee, chocolate-chip cookie dough, lemon-raspberry cream, key lime, Oreo, low-carb cheesecake made with Splenda, or The Original cheesecake topped with fresh strawberries.

CLAIM JUMPER

2150 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-494-9656
claimjumper.com
American
Entrées \$10–\$31
Kid-Friendly

You would never know this casual dining spot with Craftsman-inspired architecture (stone walls, fireplaces) began life as a gold-miner-themed chain restaurant. There are still huge portions of ribs, steaks, and rotisserie chicken, but there are also daintier dishes like cedar plank grilled salmon, personal pizzas, and a veggie burger. The adjoining saloon celebrates happy hour (Monday to Friday, 3 to 7 p.m.) with small bites of food and deals on cocktails, craft beers, and wine. Open for lunch and dinner daily.

JOHNNY ROCKETS

322 W. Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, 805-778-0780
and 5015 Cornell Road
Agoura Hills, 818-879-9933
and at The Commons at Calabasas
4799 Commons Way
Calabasas, 818-222-3460
and at The Promenade at Camarillo
640 E. Ventura Blvd.
Camarillo, 805-383-1888
johnnyrockets.com

American
Entrées \$7-\$10

Kid-Friendly

The ultimate 1950s diner with tiny jukeboxes on the tables, lots of chrome, and darling uniforms on the servers. There are 10 different hamburgers on the menu in addition to a great Nathan's hot dog, killer milkshakes, and flavored sodas. We don't know who will love it more, the kids or Grandpa.

LOOK P.F. CHANG'S CHINA BISTRO

2250 Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-277-5915
and 21821 Oxnard St.
Woodland Hills, 818-340-0491
pfchangs.com

Chinese
Entrées \$8-\$24

Kid-Friendly

A chain like this is always great for bringing large groups of people together. Dishes are served family-style for easy sharing. The pan-Asian menu has influences from China (half duck in plum sauce), Thailand (lemongrass prawns with garlic noodles), and Japan (green tea noodles), not to mention Americanized desserts (cheesecake, banana spring rolls). Dishes are spicy, salty, and never dull.

WOOD RANCH BBQ & GRILL

5050 Cornell Road
Agoura Hills, 818-597-8900
and 540 New Los Angeles Ave.
Moorpark, 805-523-7253
and 1101 E. Daily Drive
Camarillo, 805-482-1202
and 3449 E. Main St.
Ventura, 805-620-4500
woodranch.com

Barbecue
Entrées \$11-\$27

Kid-Friendly

Many find it worth waiting in line for the slowly roasted meats and grilled steaks at this beloved local chain. The barbecue-sauced ribs, chicken, and tri-tip are tender and flavorful. The Original BBQ Chopped Salad with black beans, crunchy tortilla strips, and ranch dressing is perfect when topped with tri-tip. The turkey sliders on the appetizer menu make a satisfying meal for a low price, especially at happy hour when the full bar offers drink specials (except in the Ventura location, which offers half-priced appetizers). They will soon add Illy coffee to the dessert menu to make the end of your meal even more satisfying.

FUN, FUN, FUN

Whether they have crazy food, a festive atmosphere, or high-energy servers, these are the places to go if you're looking for a good time.

ADOBE CANTINA

29100 W. Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-991-3474

Mexican
Entrées \$9-\$17

Kid-Friendly

This wide-open cantina has all-outdoor seating for a festive atmosphere. Don't worry, there are heaters on the many patios for the winter months. Choose from 40 premium tequilas to wash down achote pork fajitas, crab enchiladas, shrimp in a tequila-cream sauce, fish tacos, or even baby back ribs or a pulled-pork plate.

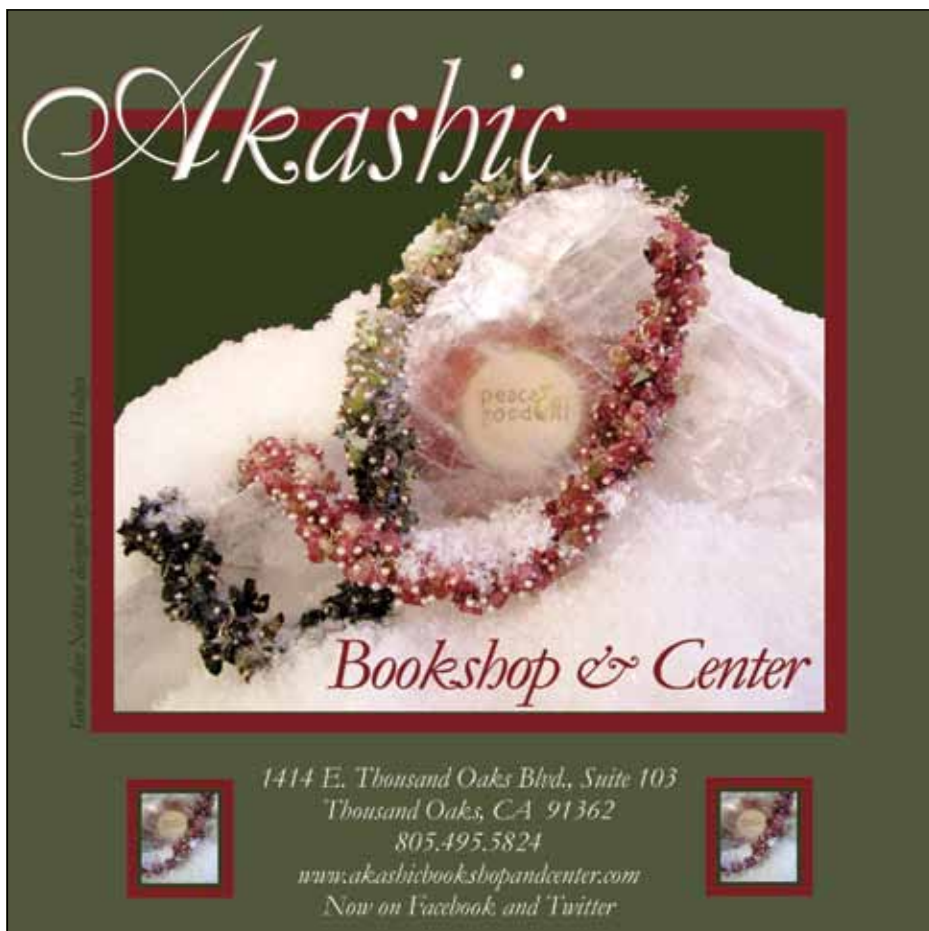


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5800 Santa Rosa Road
Camarillo, 805-484-1422
and at 364 S. California St.
Ventura, 805-652-1799
alohasteakhouse.com
Steakhouse
Entrées \$20–\$50

Ten different cuts of steak are available at these two Hawaiian-themed steakhouses with laid-back servers. All the entrées come with soup or salad and a side of potatoes, rice, or veggies at dinnertime. The house salad with hearts of palm and a good vinaigrette is nice. The tables are large to accommodate the big portions. If you don't want meat, the salads can be topped with shrimp, salmon, or ahi tuna. There are plenty of fresh fish dishes, too. Early-bird specials from 4 to 5:30 p.m. will save a bundle, as will the lunch specials, some from \$10. Desserts are great fun, from bananas Foster flambéed tableside to volcanic soufflé.

AZU

457 E. Ojai Ave.
Ojai, 805-640-7987
azuojai.com
Mediterranean
Tapas \$6–\$17; Entrées \$24–\$31

A long, dark-wooden bar is the focal point of this popular lunch, dinner, and tapas spot. Happy hour stretches from 4 to 7 p.m. nightly. A long list of cold and hot tapas are offered, like olives, a cheese plate, stuffed dates, lamb kebabs, and fried calamari. Larger entrées cast a wider Mediterranean net and might include Moroccan chicken cooked in a tagine, veggie paella, or filet mignon with a cabernet reduction sauce. Eat in the lounge area or at one of the many tables inside or on the sidewalk out front. Cocktails and homemade gelato help keep everyone happy.

BANDITS' GRILL & BAR

589 N. Moorpark Road
Thousand Oaks, 805-497-7427
and 1980 Ventura Blvd.
Camarillo, 805-445-4742
banditsbbq.com
American
Entrées \$10–\$20

Kid-Friendly

Barbecue goes high-tech here, where the meat is slow-cooked in gleaming stainless steel smokers and slow cookers kept at the perfect temperature for 24 hours at a time. The decor is Frank Lloyd Wright meets the Old West and it works. The bar is hopping and so is lunch, so come early if you have limited time. The potato skins topped with ranch-style beans and cheese are a meal in themselves. Jalapeños stuffed with crab and cream cheese are a unique touch. But the real draw is the barbecue, of course. The tri-tip sandwich and the beef ribs move fast. On Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights go for the prime rib. The burgers and salads are satisfying lunch options.

THE BEACHCOMBER MALIBU PIER

23000 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, 310-456-9800
thebeachcombercafe.com
American
Entrées \$19–\$45

Great View, Kid-Friendly

The fantastic decor here celebrates seaside life in the 1940s when tiki bars were first trendy. Waiters deliver old-fashioned wide-mouthed bottles of purified water to set the tone. Wooden tables keep things casual. Jazz and swing music on the sound system is low enough to hear the waves crashing below. Food here, like in the forties, is decadent—rich with flavor and calories but new in style and ingredients. Clam chowder is creamy. The velvety mac and cheese has flecks of black truffle along with a touch of white truffle oil. The lobster potpie has chunks of tender seafood in a fantastic brandy sauce with a slice of crust sticking out. The s'mores dessert is brilliant: scoops of vanilla ice cream pierced with graham crackers and drenched in hardening chocolate and a torched marshmallow. It's hard not to have fun here, and a walk on the pier or the beach after a meal makes it even better.

The Grill on the Alley in Westlake Village (thegrill.com) exalts grilled cheese sandwiches every Thursday by stuffing them with fontina or cheddar and then pairing them with tomato soup (\$13.50).

BOGART'S BAR & GRILL

166 W. Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, 805-494-4702
muvico.com/bogartsmenuoaks.asp
American
Small plates \$8–\$13; Entrées \$10–\$22
Kid-Friendly

Ordering at the walk-up counter at Bogart's and then taking your meal into the Muvico theaters is great fun. Obviously, finger foods work best while enjoying a meal in the dark, but fork-friendly dishes like chopped salad or the spicy mac and cheese are good, too. Bacon-wrapped dates are a refreshing upgrade from nachos. Marinated steak skewers are accompanied by a *chimichurri* sauce. The sliders come in three different varieties: steak, battered cod, and ground chuck. Instead of candy, there are desserts like a bag of cookies for sweet movie-snacking.

BOGIES NIGHTCLUB AND LOUNGE

32001 Agoura Road
Westlake Village, 818-889-2394
bogies-bar.com
American
Small plates \$8–\$15
Live Music

This mostly outdoor bar is a beautiful place to relax—with all the surrounding greenery and water. Grab a cabana or a spot on one of the couches near the outside fireplace. Entertainment in the form of bands or DJs happens Thursday through Saturday nights. On Friday and Saturday nights there is a cover charge. Nibble on small bites of food like chicken lettuce cups, flatbread pizzas, Southern fried chicken, or a cheese plate.

BROPHY BROS. CLAM BAR & RESTAURANT

119 Harbor Way
Santa Barbara, 805-966-4418
and 1559 Spinnaker Drive
Ventura, 805-693-0865
brophybros.com
Seafood
Entrées \$10–\$21
Great View

Both locations are strategically located on harbors with wonderful views of water and sailboats. The outdoor tables are the most sought-after, but the indoor seating near the bar can be just as fun. Lacquered wood tables hold bottles of Heinz malt vinegar (a must for fish). The seafood is always fresh and simply prepared. Main courses include classics like shrimp scampi, blackened mahimahi, and seafood pasta. Daily specials might include local thresher shark marinated in olive oil and citrus juices, or local wordfish with a mango-papaya salsa. All meals come with coleslaw, clam chowder, and fries or rice. A clam bar menu has seafood nibbles that go well with beer and cocktails.

CAFÉ FIORE RESTAURANT & MARTINI LOUNGE

66 S. California St.
Ventura, 805-653-1266
fiorerestaurant.net
Italian
Entrées \$14–\$28
Romantic, Live Music

Lively and loud, this martini bar and restaurant is beautifully decorated. A tall, dark-wood bar dominates the room in which it stands and showcases the bartenders mixing up cucumber martinis and blueberry cosmos. Booths and tables are usually crowded with friends enjoying themselves either indoors or out on the patio. The kitchen turns out many flavorful Italian dishes like pizza with pesto sauce, grilled chicken, mozzarella, and sun-dried

tomatoes; or ravioli filled with lobster and braised leeks then doused in a tomato-cream sauce. A classic osso buco is served over saffron risotto, as it should be. Whole-wheat pasta makes an appearance on the spa menu, which is geared towards lighter fare. The dessert list offers plenty to smile about including a chocolate trio with molten-chocolate cake, bittersweet chocolate pot de crème, and a frozen custard with pistachios and white chocolate. Live music plays in the lounge area Tuesday through Saturday nights.

NEW CAFÉ HABANA

3939 Cross Creek Road
Malibu, 310-317-0300
cafehabana.com
Pan-Latin
Entrées \$9–\$25
Sunday Brunch

Café Habana isn't limited to Cuban food or cocktails. Dishes represent all of Latin culture, from South American ceviches to Mexican grilled corn and huevos rancheros to Cuban pulled-pork sandwiches. Owner Sean Meenan is an eco-warrior while partner Rande Gerber brings in the celebs and keeps the nightlife hopping. The food is good, the cocktails are great, and the coconut flan is out of this world.

DON CUCO MEXICAN RESTAURANT

254 W. Los Angeles Ave.
Moorpark, 805-523-2261
doncucorestaurants.com
Mexican
Entrées \$8–\$19
Kid-Friendly, Sunday Brunch

The Yucatan style of cooking prevails in this appealing Mexican restaurant with stained-glass depictions of what look like Aztec pyramids. Inside, booths are styled in tan-and-green striped fabric while lanterns and an iron candle-labra hang from the ceiling. On the covered patio, wooden tables and chairs are comfortably spaced. The food enlivens your palate with zesty flavors, starting with the spicy salsa. An intense mole sauce blankets a chicken enchilada. The long bar pours plenty of tequilas and mixes large margaritas.

DUKE'S MALIBU

21150 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, 310-317-0777
dukesmalibu.com
Hawaiian/Seafood
Entrées \$17–\$30
Great View

The gorgeous ocean views are maximized in the dining rooms and bars of this large Hawaiian-themed seafood and steak house. Every staff member sports a laid-back smile and friendly demeanor. Skip the starters and go straight for the main courses. The seasonal fish choices are prepared six different ways—the Parmesan-crusted version with macadamia nuts and a lemon-caper sauce rules. For dessert, the Mile-High Hula Pie is stuffed with macadamia-nut ice cream and topped with fudge. Check the website for happy-hour specials and hula dance performances on the patio.

EL REY CANTINA

2302 Ventura Blvd.
Camarillo, 805-484-4433
and 294 E. Main St.
Ventura, 805-653-1111
elreycantina.com
Mexican
Entrées \$3–\$13

This pair of tequila bars in Old Town Camarillo and downtown Ventura pays homage to The King ("El Rey" in Spanish) of rock 'n' roll: Elvis. Fun decor, complete with

velvet Elvis paintings, sets the mood at these cantinas with happy bartenders and servers. The food is reasonably priced and unbelievably good. Super-fresh guacamole and chips, beer-can chicken, and baby back ribs in tomatillo sauce are some of the delights that await.

LOOK FIAMME

3731 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-497-9444
fiammerestaurant.com

Italian/American
Entrées \$13-\$29

Live Entertainment

Weekends are always interesting at this upscale restaurant serving Italian specialties alongside classic American dishes. The large menu includes an Italian chopped salad, chicken marsala, and rack of lamb with apple reduction sauce. The small stage set in the midst of the dining room hosts top-drawer comedians and musicians regularly. Check the website for event listings. The full bar pours cocktails, wine, and draft beer, which makes the entertainment even better.

FOX SPORTS GRILL

30970 Russell Ranch Road
Westlake Village, 818-338-7080
foxsportsgrill.com/westlake

American
Entrées \$6-\$27

Sports on 20 screens

Say hello to the modern sports bar: a sophisticated environment with more than 20 plasma and projection televisions, which all broadcast different channels. A full bar mixes up martinis, frozen drinks, margaritas, beer, and wine—even beer cocktails. The most fun way to eat is to grub on all the appetizers while your eyes are glued to the tennis match or football game. The spinach-artichoke dip comes with toasty crostini for dipping; the blue cheese-covered potato chips are absolutely addictive. Jumbo lump crab cakes have a bit of a Cajun kick; the build-your-own pizzas have a nice chewy crust.

GALLETTO BAR & GRILL

982 S. Westlake Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-449-4300
gallettoбарandgrill.com

Italian/Brazilian
Entrées \$15-\$26

Live Music

The Brazilian dishes are nice and full of flavor: Marinated chicken and mesquite-grilled meats come with black beans and rice and plantains; skirt steak is topped with chimichurri sauce, (parsley, lemon, and olive oil); chimichurri sauce also tops a breaded, pounded chicken breast in a dish called Milanese do Borghetti. Italian dishes here are also solid, from chicken piccata to mushroom risotto in a Parmesan wheel. Live music comes from a Spanish guitarist (Monday through Wednesday) and bands of various genres (Thursday through Saturday), which provide the appropriate ambience, as does the long bar in the front.

GINO'S TRATTORIA

720 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-494-7743

Italian
Entrées \$10-\$17

Kid-Friendly

Owner Gino Setola likes to be very personal with his patrons. Instead of writing menu specials on a board, he prefers to give them out to the whole room verbally. It's casual, it's friendly, and the menu has classic Italian dishes like veal picatta, fettuccine Bolognese, pizza, and Caprese salad. Don't miss the gelato truffles for dessert.

NEW THE HIDEAWAY@LINDERO

5719 Lake Lindero Drive
Agoura Hills, 818-735-3530
hideawayrestaurant.net

American
Entrées \$11-\$24

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You'll find The Hideaway tucked away on the grounds of Lindero Country Club. This restaurant has plenty of dining areas including a bar area, main dining room, back patio and front patio paved with flagstone and sporting an ivy-covered pergola. String lights above a fountain add to the festive mood out front where Chef Robert Grenner pulls crispy, thin-crust individual pizzas out of the wood-burning pizza oven. He also creates lovely salads, hearty steaks, and nice seafood including crispy crab cakes with a pickled green tomato relish. Desserts are fun and worth the calories.

KABUKI JAPANESE RESTAURANT

20940 Ventura Blvd.
Woodland Hills, 818-704-8700
kabukirestaurants.com

Japanese
Entrées \$10-\$18

Kid-Friendly

Groups of coworkers and friends gather here for reasonably priced sushi and cocktails, delivered with a smile in a boisterous room. Some of the special rolls are a bit unusual but tasty, like the Ana-Kyu Garlic Roll with sea eel tempura and cucumber with garlic chips on top. Most of the rolls and cooked dishes are more traditional. There's tempura, teriyaki, ramen, and miso-marinated black cod. The hot appetizers are fun to explore and share, especially the ginger shrimp on crispy rice, the fried soft-shell crab with ponzu, and the garlicky but mild grilled *shisito* peppers. Non-alcoholic drinks—like the green-tea smoothie and the “Karate Punch” with cranberry, peach nectar, and cherry syrup—should satisfy any designated driver. Open for lunch and dinner daily; happy hour 3 to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

LADYFACE ALEHOUSE & BRASSERIE

29281 Agoura Road
Agoura Hills, 818-477-4566
ladyfaceale.com
French-American
Entrées \$9-\$15

With the feel of a French Brasserie, this alehouse provides a one-of-a-kind dining experience. The communal table allows camaraderie to develop, while the proprietary wheat beers and ale lend local flavor to the upscale pub. The food is better than it has to be, given the fun atmosphere and the top-notch pours from brewer David Griffiths. Chef Ray Luna knows his way around Belgian fries, artisanal sausages, and salad *niçoise*. But he can also turn out some serious fish-and-chips and *moules frites*.

LAZY DOG CAFÉ

172 W. Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, 805-449-5206
lazydogcafe.com
American
Entrées \$8-\$24

Saturday & Sunday Brunch

Who loves puppies? Everyone, right? So a café decorated with fire hydrants, puppy photos, paw-print fabrics, and bone-shaped door handles has to be fun. The inexpensive eats represent what Americans love, from pizza and pasta to burgers and grilled cheese. Salads are topped with items like roasted veggies, the fish of the day, or even chicken tenders. Bigger meals include meatloaf, flatiron steak, chicken potpie with a cap of puff pastry, and Idaho trout baked in a cast-iron skillet. For dessert, a hot fudge sundae comes to the table in a porcelain dog bowl. Lazy Dog Cafe, located at The Oaks mall, is open for lunch and dinner daily.

NEW LOS OLIVOS WINE MERCHANT CAFÉ

2879 Grand Ave.
Los Olivos, 805-688-7265
losolivoscafe.com
Cal-Med
Entrées \$12-\$29

This retail wine shop adjoins an all-day café with seating indoors by the stone fireplace and outside on the wisteria-covered patio. Cheese plates and olives are small bites perfect for pairing with wines at the bar. Salads,

sandwiches, burgers, pasta, and pizza comprise the lunch menu. At night choices get a little fancier with pot roast, lamb shank, pasta, chicken, steak, and fresh fish. The wine selection from the shop (available to diners) has more than 400 labels and specializes in picks from California's Central Coast. Now that's fun.

THE MELTING POT

3685 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-370-8802
meltingpot.com

Fondue
Entrées \$18-\$23 individually or \$59 for two

Kid-Friendly
Swirl, swish, and dip your way through cheese fondue, hot broth fondue, and chocolate fondue for an interactive meal that will keep even your kids interested. For the adults, a full bar and a large wine list make the night fun. The sauces, salads, and sides round out the meal nicely.

Chef Todd Aarons of Tierra Sur in Oxnard has teamed up with Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village (fourseasons.com/westlakevillage/dining.html) for all of the hotel's *glatt* kosher catering celebrations—*l'chaim!*

OLD PLACE RESTAURANT

29983 Mulholland Hwy.
Agoura Hills, 818-706-9001
oldplacecornell.com
American
Entrées \$11-\$34

Typically, the gals get the one fish dish on the menu (whatever it happens to be that night) and dudes get the sirloin grilled over oak at this Old-West-style saloon that serves a few microbrews on tap and local wines by the glass or bottle. Swing open the spring-loaded wooden door and squeeze through the crowd to the bench at the bar. Or rustle up a group of four or six or eight and call ahead to reserve a narrow wooden booth. It's a one-of-a-kind experience. Cornell Winery & Tasting Room sits right next door. The Old Place is open for dinner Thursday through Sunday nights and for breakfast on the weekends.

SHEILA'S PLACE WINE BAR & RESTAURANT

330 N. Lantana St.
Camarillo, 805-987-9800
sheilaswinebar.com
Californian
Entrées \$10-\$24

Live Music

It's a long wine bar with quite a few cozy tables available next to the wine racks lining the walls. The lighting is low and romantic, the music is mostly acoustic and jazzy. Plenty of small plates are on offer, the better to snack on with a bottle or two of wine. The Boursin cheese ravioli comes with a scattering of sweet-vermouth-soaked mushrooms. The combination is delightful. The Mediterranean olive pizza utilizes both green and black olives to nice effect. The angel hair pasta with tomatoes and basil could be a primer on how to make this ubiquitous Italian dish.

TAVERNA TONY

23410 Civic Center Way
Malibu, 310-317-9667
tavernatony.com
Greek
Entrées \$11-\$29

Live Music

Owner Tony Koursaris is a solicitous host, overseeing your good time either inside by the fireplace or outside on the

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TUPELO JUNCTION CAFE

1218 State St.
Santa Barbara, 805-899-3100
tupelojunction.com
Southern

Entrées \$14–\$33

Kid-Friendly, Live Music

It's always crowded at this friendly brick-walled café where the cute waitresses don white T-shirts and jeans and the drinks arrive in mason jars. Chef Amy Scott lets loose with bacon in her Southern-inflected dishes. It's in the spinach and Gouda scramble on the breakfast menu (served until 2 p.m. every day); cooked in with the collard greens accompanying the rich mac and cheese; and scattered on top of the slightly sweet coleslaw that sits next to two pan-fried crab cakes made from fresh Dungeness. The fried green tomatoes will remind any Southerner of home, although they're elevated by a dill-and-lemon dipping sauce that mom (probably) never made (at lunch) or stacked between rounds of goat cheese (at dinner). Even the seafood sticks to your ribs here. The shrimp and scallops come with cheddar jalapeño grits and Creole lobster butter. On Thursday nights, stop in for live music and happy hour specials from 5 to 7 p.m.

LUNCH BUNCH

Perfect for a midday meal, these listings are casual spots and fabulous cafés (which might not be open for dinner) that are ideal for meet-ups.

BELLA TERRAZA RESTAURANT AT THE HYATT WESTLAKE PLAZA

880 S. Westlake Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-557-4710
hyattwestlakeplaza.com

Californian

Entrées \$10–\$28

Kid-Friendly

Open for breakfast and lunch daily, this airy, classy space is great for meeting friends or conducting a business conversation. Try to get a table near the windows or on the patio for a view of the green lawn and waterfall. Breakfast items include smoothies, steel-cut oatmeal with roasted fruits, and the California Benedict with artichokes, avocado, and roasted red pepper. At lunch, a roasted tomato soup comes with crème fraîche and croutons. The Cobb salad gets a light lemon-Dijon dressing. The pressed turkey panini is topped with smoked Gouda and pepperoncini. The half-sandwich, half-salad lunch deal is a steal at \$10.

BELLA VICTORIAN VINEYARD WINERY & BISTRO

2135 Ventura Blvd.
Camarillo, 805-383-8800
bellavictorianvineyard.com

California

Entrées \$9–\$12; Specials \$17–\$35

Part tasting room for the Bella Victorian Winery, part lingerie boutique (tastefully done), and part bistro. Chef Gâel Lecolley works the tiny open kitchen to create small plates like sushi and thin-crust pizzas to go with flights of wine. If you stop by at lunchtime, there are a few tables on the sidewalk out front to settle into for dishes like Chinese chicken salad and roasted leg of lamb sandwich topped with caramelized onions and feta cheese. The bistro is open Wednesday through Saturday from 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Tuesday and Sunday from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

NEW BLUE TABLE

28912 Roadside Drive
Agoura Hills, 818-597-2583
bluetable.net

Italian

Entrées \$8–\$11

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Make reservations online: www.TheGrill.com

➤➤ 805 DINING GUIDE

A few blue tables provide seating for those dining inside this charming little deli with high-quality Italian eats. Different salads rotate through the deli case and the list of sandwiches is written on a blackboard. The prosciutto and burrata panini is not to be missed. Pizzas, soups, cookies, and everything else are made fresh daily. A small freezer carries pastas and sauces for home use, but anything on the menu can be packed and taken to go.

CHAMPAGNE FRENCH BAKERY CAFÉ

180 Promenade Way
Westlake Village, 805-379-5911
champagnebakery.com
French
Entrées \$7–\$9

A quaint bakery that harks back to France with chalkboard menus and large mirrors, this outpost of the chain is a welcoming place. Nice sandwiches, quiches, crêpes, and salads vie for your attention with an array of delicious baked goods including croissants, madeleines, custard brioche, and crispy *palmier* cookies.

NEW CHIPOTLE

5754 Lindero Canyon Road
Westlake Village, 818-597-1603
chipotle.com
Mexican
Entrées \$6–\$7
Kid-Friendly

Building your own burrito is fun and satisfying at this chain devoted to environmental health (it uses local and organic produce and naturally raised meat when possible). The food is prepared quickly, the quality is high, and the flavors are good. The lime-and-cilantro-laced rice is addictive. I'm partial to the fajita burrito, which has sautéed peppers and onions in place of beans. I load it up with steak, sour cream, and the Roasted Chili-Corn Salsa.

CHOCOLATINE

2955 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-557-0561
chocolatine.net
Bakery
Entrées \$7–\$10

A chocolate café with a Parisian accent, Chocolatine offers tiny treats of chocolate, cookies, pastries, coffee, tea, and hot chocolate made from scratch by baker and owner Sabrina Barthe. The *macarons* are perfection. Check the blackboard for daily specials of salads, sandwiches, quiches, and crêpes. The service is friendly but very laid-back. Don't expect to be in and out in a hurry. Once a month Chocolatine opens its doors in the evening for a special dinner; check the website for details.

DAMON & PYTHIAS

4719 Commons Way
Calabasas, 818-224-1555
damonandpythias.com
American
Entrées \$8–\$13

Create your own salad or sandwich using their gourmet ingredients or choose from the regular menu, which features items like Cuban black bean soup and smoked turkey and chicken habañero sausage. A long list of salads includes Southwest Steak Salad and a spinach and bacon salad. Sandwiches can be healthy like the California Garden Sandwich. Dinners include teriyaki salmon or turkey with all the trimmings. Beer and wine help make this an upscale quick-food experience.

NEW FIVE GUYS BURGERS AND FRIES

487 N. Moorpark Road
Thousand Oaks, 805-496-0173
fiveguys.com
American
Entrées \$3–\$7
Kid-Friendly

Bulk peanuts in the shell are man-pleasers at this burger joint with self-serve fountain drinks. Little burgers have one patty while the regular burgers sport two—all are cooked

P.F. Chang's (Thousand Oaks; pfchangs.com) offers a \$40 lunch or dinner (dine-in only) daily for two people. This deal includes soup, appetizer, entrée, and mini dessert.

well done. All toppings—including grilled onions, jalapeños, tomatoes, pickles, and grilled mushrooms—are free. Fries, dunked in peanut oil, are thick-cut with skins on; the Cajun-style are dusted with heat.

NEW FRESH & FABULOUS CAFE

401 S. A St.
Oxnard, 805-486-4547
myfreshandfabulous.com
American
Entrées \$5–\$11
Kid-Friendly

The sandwiches here are served on house-made bread. Four different quiches are baked daily. Owner Magda Weydt is a registered dietitian so the salads and sandwich fillings have a healthful bent. There are also coffee drinks, cookies, and pastries to be enjoyed in this retro coffee shop in downtown Oxnard.

ITALIA DELI & BAKERY

5657 Kanan Road
Agoura Hills, 818-991-4838
italiadelicom
Italian
Entrées \$7–\$11

An Italian market and deli that makes its bread fresh every day is a good concept. Add to that a menu of fresh sub sandwiches, salads, and baked pastas and it becomes irresistible. A few tables are scattered outside for dining, but frozen pasta dinners (like eggplant Parmesan and vegetable lasagna) are crazy good when taken home and warmed in the oven. They come with fresh, house-made garlic bread—what a concept!

MARMALADE CAFE

4783 Commons Way
Calabasas, 818-225-9092
and 3894 Cross Creek Road
Malibu, 310-317-4242
and 3825 State St.
Santa Barbara, 805-682-5246
and 140 Promenade Way
Westlake Village, 805-370-1331
marmaladecafe.com
American
Entrées \$8–\$24

If you like Country French decor, this is a cozy lunch spot and a perfect wedding- or baby-shower location. Breakfast and lunch are more popular than dinner due to the great sandwiches like the Reuben, turkey with cranberry sauce, and New York steak on garlic bread. Portions are big enough for two, so don't be afraid to doggy bag it or order the half-portion of the many pasta dishes.

MY FLORIST CAFÉ & BAKERY

76 S. Oak St.
Ventura, 805-653-0003
myfloristcafe.com
American
Entrées \$7–\$18
Live Music

My favorite part of this restaurant is the bakery in the back with its own separate entrance; I drop in to pick up pastries and breads fresh from the oven. A table in the café is the perfect spot to enjoy a sandwich made with that freshly baked bread. Tall windows lend a nice, bright ambience during the day. A large lunch menu offers plenty of salads,

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sandwiches, wraps, bruschetta, and a couple of hot dishes. Breakfast is served until 2 p.m. on weekends. The dinner menu looks a lot like the lunch menu with the addition of cheese selections and desserts. Wednesday through Saturday nights, there are live performances on the baby grand piano in the dining room.

THE NATURAL CAFE

508 State St.
Santa Barbara, 805-962-9494
and 361 Hitchcock Way
Santa Barbara, 805-563-1163
and 968-12 Westlake Blvd.
Westlake Village, 805-449-0099
and 840 New Los Angeles Ave.
Moorpark, 805-523-2016
and 1714 Newbury Road
Newbury Park, 805-498-0493
thenaturalcafe.com
Healthy
Entrées \$5-\$9
Kid-Friendly

The Santa Barbara State Street location launched all the others. Lots of vegetarian and vegan options make this a magnet for the health-conscious. The same casual menu is available for lunch or dinner with extremely reasonable prices. At night there are soup, pasta, and fish specials. Fresh vegetables abound in the Buddha Burrito wrapped in a whole-wheat chapati. The Zen Burger is a Gardenburger done right. The Ranch Salad is a favorite with grilled chicken breast over baby greens with carrot, jicama, and feta cheese.

NEW THE NEON CARROT

3536 S. Higuera St.
San Luis Obispo, 805-545-0000
theneoncarrot.com
American
Entrées \$6-\$9
Kid-Friendly

With nothing on the menu over \$10, this is the best lunch for the price within 100 miles. Caterer and co-owner Maegen Loring dishes up fresh, delicious, and interesting salads, sandwiches, and baked goods Monday through Friday in a communal space with counter service. The restaurant shuns corn syrup (even making its own ketchup and lemonade) in everything except the pecan pie. It seems like the entire neighborhood shows up regularly for lunch.

NM CAFÉ INSIDE NEIMAN MARCUS

6550 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Canoga Park, 818-316-7040
American
Entrées \$13-\$27
A quiet oasis in the midst of the Westfield Topanga Mall, this pretty café has stone floors and walls, and lively seats covered in a green-and-brown-print fabric with orange dots. The service is polished, the complimentary popovers are delicious, and the salads are huge. Sandwiches include a BLT and a lobster club.

NEW PANERA BREAD

205 N. Moorpark Road
Thousand Oaks, 805-496-2253
and 740 E. Ventura Blvd.
Camarillo, 805-484-1414
panerabread.com
American
Entrées \$6-\$9
Kid-Friendly

Freshly baked pastries and coffee are perfect in the a.m. At lunchtime a delicious sandwich on house-made bread is a must, whether it's a hot tomato-mozzarella panini or a cool Napa almond chicken salad on sesame semolina. Salads, soups, and seasonal items keep the menu fresh and interesting.

PIZZA NOSH

30313 Canwood St.
Agoura Hills, 818-991-3000
pizzanosh.com
Pizza
Entrées \$5-\$11
Kid-Friendly

This certified-kosher restaurant eschews meat to keep things simple. Different cheeses provide the main protein in the pasta dishes; sandwiches are stuffed with eggplant, falafel, tuna, or veggie chicken; and for the pizza toppings, there's a long list of veggies like tomatoes, spinach, zucchini, and capers. The veggie pepperoni is dense—a good replacement for its meaty cousin. Check the specials board for fresh fish dishes like salmon or fish-and-chips.

PIZZASALAD

1655 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Thousand Oaks, 805-371-7878
pizzasalad.com
Pizza
Entrées \$6-\$12
Kid-Friendly

USDA Certified Organic is the name of the game at this unusual pizza place, which follows strict organic regulations. Vegetarians, vegans, and the gluten-intolerant will find something delicious to eat here. The tasty pies can be topped with spicy tomato sauce, arugula, crimini mushrooms, kalamata olives, feta cheese, and Italian sausage (along with many more traditional ingredients). Salads can be custom designed with veggies, meats, cheeses, and flavorful dressings (all organic). For value dining, check out the lunch specials.

THE RANCH CATERING

30843 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd.
Westlake Village, 818-575-9033
theranchwestlake.com
American
Entrées \$4-\$10
Kid-Friendly

Getting in and out quickly is easy at this small, counter-service lunch and dinner spot. The house-made brioche-style buns for the sandwiches and burgers are light and fluffy. The Philly cheesesteak sandwich is cheesy goodness. The burgers, like the Duimo with two kinds of cheese and The Ranch's special sauce, have a cult following. Salads are substantial and sweets are made daily. Service from the owners is always friendly and helpful.

SILVERGREENS

791 Chapala St.
Santa Barbara, 805-962-8500
silvergreens.com
Californian
Entrées \$5-\$9

This health-focused spot offers tons of nutritional information (like calorie counts printed on each receipt) so diners can make informed decisions. There are plenty of healthy options, like salads, pastas, and smoothies, but there are also indulgent choices like burgers and shakes. Bamboo-topped tables and aluminum chairs are tucked into different sections of the modern green-hued space and on the patio out front. ■

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www.TheOliveVineyard.com 20145 Canwood Street, Unit A-4, Agoura Hills

Feast Bistro in Ojai (feastofjai.com) makes organic beef burgers for dinner on Tuesday nights. On Wednesday nights, bottles and half-carafes of wine are half off; wines by the glass are a dollar less.

SCROOGE'S HOLIDAY LEXICON

The secret language of the Bah-Humbuggers among us.

Holiday season

The time of year that coincides with property tax payments; it also heralds the arrival of January's quarterly income-tax remittance.

Presents

What the electric companies are given each year when the calendar indicates it's time to "string up the outside lights."

Re-gifting

The only sensible act of a thrifty man.

The "Spirit" of Christmas

Bourbon (always bourbon).

Three Wise Men

Tommy Johnson, who took his family to Mexico until New Year's; Steve Mayolack, who suddenly became "too sick" to travel to his in-laws' house; and Jeff Green, who shrewdly invested in the company that produces blue latex gloves for airport screenings.

Nutcracker

Aunt Bessie, before she's had a glass of eggnog.

Candy cane

A reminder of waking up as a child on Christmas morning—and not having my hips creak.

Mistletoe

A deliberate attempt to manipulate emotions. Also, it's where you'll find Aunt Bessie when she's under the influence of the secretly spiked eggnog.

Grinch

A seasonal condition that develops naturally during heavy weekend traffic. The first symptoms typically occur within two weeks of "Black Friday" or just after the car's bumper gets dinged a second time (whichever comes first).

Peace on Earth

Something you'll never get if you don't *swoon* over the boss's gift for you at the office party.

Silent night

No such thing until mid-January. ■



Wine & Waves

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