

# Modern Luxury

SAN DIEGO



A TOUR DE FORK  
OF AMERICA'S  
BEST NEW  
EATERIES

*The feast issue*

50 REASONS TO FINE DINE IN SAN DIEGO NOW

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# FOOD *FIGHT!*

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*My parents' dueling food sensibilities* are the basis of my most hilarious childhood memories. My father's wanderlust is only rivaled by things like his encyclopedic recollection of where to find the best bouillabaisse in Marseille. No offense if he doesn't remember he ate with you or what you talked about, but you can bet he remembers the cannoli. Whereas he would take us on summer boating trips sans Mom so that we could have our yearly Cheetos and Fanta fix, my mother spent our childhood years protecting us from the evils of food. Not one of us remembers much more about the night she gave birth to my youngest brother than that we were all free to dine on ribs and Coke while she was safely ensconced in the hospital with no opportunity for reprisal. We found out only after he retired that for decades, Dad would eat a big plate of lasagna in the hospital cafeteria each night in preparation for the abstemious meal that awaited him at home. ("Oh Marcia, this is delicious!" he would gush over cottage cheese and cucumbers.)

We were the carob and aspartame generation. And as any enterprising kids would do, we turned to our neighbors in our time of need: There were the Ritz cracker and Kool-Aid neighbors, the ice cream sandwich neighbors, the potato chip neighbors. We made regular rounds. About 10 years ago, my parents retired to the dream house they built, complete with a massive show kitchen that gleams today because no one has ever prepared food in it.

By some strange twist of fate, I gave birth to a tiny female version of my father. My now 9-year-old daughter, Emily, will Hoover down oysters as fast as you can shuck them. A couple of years ago, I took her to Mitch's Seafood in Point Loma, where we gulped down the fisherman's stew and went back the next night for more. We've battled over abalone at Cloak & Petal, spicy grilled octopus at Lionfish and short ribs at Market Del Mar. A feast for me isn't complete unless I'm watching that kid's eyes light up over a giant bowl of mussels. Because for me, the most memorable feasts involve the food, for sure—but more than that, the people with whom I'm enjoying it.

This is my last issue of *Modern Luxury San Diego*: I've accepted a fellowship to write a book I've always wanted to write. So I'm saying goodbye to the people I like sharing a San Diego feast with almost as much as I do with my little bivalve fanatic: officemates Jessica Cline, Dina Grant, Kelly Cole, Corrine Wilcox, Jaimy Martinez, Joanna Maloney, Drew Rice and Weeda Lutfi. But it's not goodbye, it's see you later—hopefully over something delicious.

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ANDREA BENNETT PHOTO BY JERINIA LIGON/ELLEEMAG.COM; GROUP PHOTO BY TIM HARDY

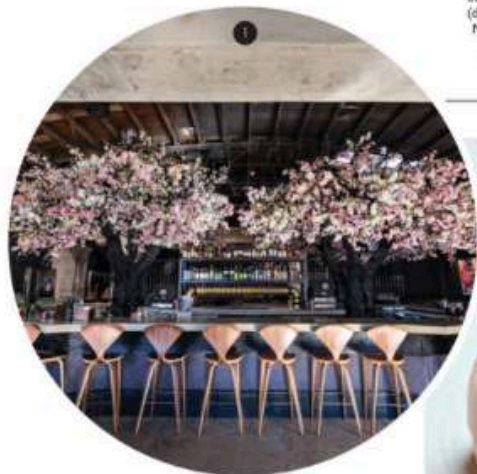
Le Salon in the summer at Addison means one thing (or four): smoked salmon tartlets filled with egg, mousse, salmon rillettes, salmon roe and gold!

# taste level

PULL UP A CHAIR! FROM DAZZLING DISHES TO CLASSICS WE'LL LOVE FOREVER, HERE ARE 40 REASONS SAN DIEGO'S DINING SCENE IS HOTTER THAN EVER.

*By Andrea Bennett, Casey Hatfield-Chiotti, Darlene Horn and Ann Wycoff*

PHOTO BY JACOB LUYKMAN



1. Dramatic flowering cherry trees anchor the bar at Cloak & Petal 2. Jewel-like nigiri at Himitsu 3. A delectable crabcake at Giardino is topped with honey mustard aioli 4. Polpo Ubriaco (drunken octopus) at Maestoso 5. The art deco grandeur of the dining room at Born & Raised.



CLOAK & PETAL PHOTO COURTESY OF ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES; MAESTOSO PHOTO BY DAVIDA DECOLAN; BORN & RAISED PHOTO BY TIM PELICCO

## 5 most exciting new restaurants

**1. CLOAK & PETAL** Picture yourself in the industrial setting of a Tokyo subway, where two glorious flowering cherry trees have broken through the cement. Don't miss out on a silky elk sashimi; abalone poaching over a fire in its own shell; and faultless hamachi with jalapeno. Reserve the back room sushi bar and order omakase, a nightly menu that features four carefully curated courses. *1953 India St., San Diego, 619.501.5505, cloakandpetal.com*

**2. GIARDINO**  
NEIGHBORHOOD CUCINA  
Since opening last November, San Diegans have been making

the trek to East County for fine Italian cuisine by husband-and-wife hospitality veterans Marcos Provino and Karina Kravalis. Look not only for a variety of classic and modern pizzas (a favorite is mascarpone, pancetta and fig jam) but also for rare items like a deeply satisfying penne salsiccia with peppery wild boar. On Mondays, Provino finishes pasta tableside in a massive, slightly hollowed wheel of Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. *8131 Broadway, Lemon Grove, 619.825.7112, giardinoid.com*

**3. MAESTOSO** Chef-owner Marco Maestoso found global success cooking for former Italian President Giorgio Napolitano. He opened Casa Maestoso in 2015, which spent five months at the top of Trip Advisor's list of more than 10,000 restaurants in that city.

At Maestoso in S.D., chefs take turns delivering specialties such as the *pinsa*, a fluffy, ancient Roman forerunner of pizza, and Italian-style poutine made with butternut squash fries. Reservations go quickly, but the 20-seat chef's counter is first come, first served. *1040 University Ave., San Diego, 619.642.0777, maestoso.com*

**4. HIMITSU** You'll feel like you've stepped into a Japanese speakeasy: The 600-square-foot space manages to cram in 30 diners. Helming the kitchen is chef Mitsu Aihara, a Sushi Ota protege who got the master's blessing to go solo. Request one of the eight coveted spots at the sushi bar and choose from a parade of winners, such as a corn tostada topped with hamachi, cilantro, radish, serrano and lime; and the signature Himitsu roll, a silky blend of salmon, crab and

scallop. *1030 Torrey Pines Road, La Jolla, 858.263.4463, himitsuusd.com*

**5. BORN & RAISED** San Diego's dining scene was set on its ear when restaurant provocateur Arsalun Tafazoli opened this opulent, \$6.5 million steakhouse along with executive chef Jason McLeod and designer Paul Basile. Born & Raised is pure throwback elegance, having transformed the 1930s-era former Nelson Photo Supplies building into a dazzling showcase for classic dishes like tourmedos Rossini, topped with foie gras, truffle and glazed in Madeira. A new Dinner for Two menu pulls out all the stops with lobster thermidor, côte de boeuf and beef Wellington served a deux. *1909 India St., San Diego, 619.202.4577, bornandraisedsteak.com*



# 5 chefs of the moment

**1. CLAUDETTE ZEPEDA-WILKINS, EXECUTIVE CHEF, EL JARDIN** The *Top Chef Mexico 2* and *Top Chef* season 15 contestant opened modern Mexican restaurant El Jardin ([eljardinrestaurantbar.com](http://eljardinrestaurantbar.com)) in Liberty Station this spring. Her goal is to show diners the diversity and depth of Mexican cuisine. **DEFINING DISH** Her elegant pozole includes pork shoulder, corn, lime and dried oregano, plus crisp pork skin for texture.

**2. JC COLÓN, EXECUTIVE CHEF, HOTEL REPUBLIC** Colón has

worked with chefs Michael Fiore and Brian Malarkey, plus Blue Bridge Hospitality and Cucina Urbana. In 2018, he joined Hotel Republic ([hotelrepublicsd.com](http://hotelrepublicsd.com)) as executive chef of its restaurants. **DEFINING DISH** "Anything with fresh seafood," says the chef, who loves picking up live fish to work into his menus. Standouts include ahi tuna crudo with yuzu and avocado puree, local citrus, icicle radish and Persian cucumber; and day boat scallops with Tahitian squash, eggplant caponata and currants.

**3. ALEX EMERY, EXECUTIVE CHEF, THE MED** It's a new era in La Jolla's iconic La Valencia ([lavalencia.com](http://lavalencia.com)) thanks to Alex Emery, who has revived its fine dining restaurant with a vibrant new menu. Emery utilizes modern

techniques and presentations in dishes such as a cauliflower panna cotta with butterfly sorrel. **DEFINING DISH** Emery's version of surf and turf surprises guests with decadent wagyu beef and lobster thermidor, crab leg and caviar.

**4. DOMINIC VALENZUELA, EXECUTIVE CHEF, CLOAK & PETAL** Despite an eclectic background that includes fine Mexican cuisine and owning a taco truck, Valenzuela was drawn to sushi. After moving to San Diego in 2013, he worked at Sushi on the Rock and Cafe Japengo, and recently moved to Cloak & Petal ([cloakandpetal.com](http://cloakandpetal.com)). **DEFINING DISH** His hamachi jalapeno features local yellowtail, showcasing his prowess with Mexican and Japanese flavors.

**5. DAVIN WAITE, CHEF-OWNER, WRENCH & RODENT SEABASSTROPUB** At The Fish Joint in Oceanside (now shuttered), Waite gained a loyal following with his innovative sushi rolls featuring unique ingredients like truffle oil. Now, he's establishing a mini North County restaurant empire with Wrench & Rodent Seabasstropub ([seabasstropub.com](http://seabasstropub.com)), The Whet Noodle ramen bar, Pickled Ginger Catering and, soon, The Plot, a plant-based restaurant. **DEFINING DISH** His seared wild cauliflower mushroom with Wilshire spinach, served at Wrench & Rodent, includes cauliflower bay-leaf dashi made by boiling cauliflower to create a flavorful broth.