

## Dining Out

by Nanette Wiser

You can feel your heartbeat slow as you wind through the eucalyptus-shrouded road leading from Lomas Santa Fe's strip malls and the hustle-bustle of I-5. Suddenly, you're in Gatsby gables, circling past elegant estates and chi chi golf courses into Rancho Santa Fe, San Diego's most exclusive community.

### The Inn At Rancho Santa Fe

5951 Linea del Cielo, Rancho Santa Fe

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Step back in time to The Inn at Rancho Santa Fe's rose gardens and elegant cottages, all getting a Ralph Lauren-like facelift to preserve its tiled, terra cotta Spanish heritage and art. Thanks to designer Christine Smith, even the clubby restaurant and library dining room have been spruced up with floral frescoes, pale yellow walls, wrought iron sconces, pastoral paintings, lush carpets, elegant mustard and white table linens and sterling silver salt and pepper mills.

Graceful vintage décor sets the stage for some traditional favorites (smoked salmon, oysters) and a wonderful new menu that showcases the bounty of the ocean and the county's produce, from Temecula's Winchester gouda and Fallbrook macadamias to Chino Farms' greens thanks to Executive Chef Earl Schryver and new Chef de Cuisine Calvin Francis, fresh from Antigua's posh Jumby Bay and the luxurious Ojai Valley Inn and Spa.

Francis fell in love with cooking as the youngest of ten kids who was responsible for making lunch for all. After attending culinary school in Antigua, he went from line cook to sous chef in a month at Jumby Bay, where the fine dining menus change nightly. His passion for fresh began in the Caribbean and translates well to San Diego. "Every day we would go to the farmers and fisherman who would come to the dock. In Ojai, I went to the Santa Barbara Farmers' Market on Wednesday and Saturday. Now, I can cook California coastal harvest cuisine by combing the Escondido Farmers' Market, Chino's, Carlsbad mussels and local herbs, although I hope to plant a garden outside soon where I can grow my own basil, thyme and lavender," says Francis with his trademark lilt and smiling cackle.

Serving breakfast, lunch and dinner daily as well as an affordable and delicious bar menu, Francis offers a different harvest cuisine menu with California wine matches weekly (oyster flavored fish tea with soy-marinated monkfish and ginger cracker) as well as a vegetarian prix-fixe showcasing dishes such as spinach potato ravioli and mixed

greens with shaved fennel. Francis wants his dishes to please longtime loyal diners as well as attract a younger and sophisticated crowd. "I want to please their tastebuds and eye," he says. "As I write the menu, I visualize it in my head."

Some of his favorite dishes? The chicken salad with macadamia nuts, the creamy seafood pot pie, the salmon, foie gras with ginger glaze, lamb shank cooked like osso bucco and for dessert, homemade cappuccino pie. His sauces are light and low on fat, separate from the meat and vegetables and artistically painted; carrot-colored and lime mango flavors reminiscent of his Caribbean heritage, but with French technique.

Brunch delights, from the poached egg benedict with Canadian bacon to the grilled lamb loin chops with roasted golden potato or the chilled seafood and salad buffet. Outstanding appetizers and entrees include the pan-roasted flat iron steak with wild mushroom sauce, pan-seared veal medallions with herb risotto, warm corn griddle cake with smoked salmon, muscovy duck and white bean quesadilla, Royce salad with avocado and shaved parmesan, the savory roasted lamb stew and Inn cobb salad.

Dessert is a toss up between the homemade ice cream, chocolate ganache, apple-almond shortcake or my favorite, the warm chocolate bread pudding with caramelized dried fruits. An exquisite wine list, hand-selected by the charming Dane Sodersberg, adds to the exquisite pleasure of a meal plucked from a Fitzgerald novel.