

the la jolla renaissance

SD'S "JEWEL" COMMUNITY IS CULTIVATING ITS OWN SIZZLING DINING SCENE

BY CYNTHIA LEWIS

With more than 7,500 restaurants in San Diego, dining options have never been more plentiful. But ask any of the chefs in La Jolla and they'll say the best cuisine in the county is located in "The Jewel," with a big thumbs up to their toughest competitors — each other. The La Jolla dining scene is on fire, equipped with eclectic restaurants with fusion dishes from around the world designed by top-notch chefs, an emerging nightlife scene and a relaxed atmosphere — many with the same spectacular view of the postcard-perfect La Jolla Cove and Shores.



EXCELSIOR

the power of the young professional

One factor spearheading this renaissance of sorts is the younger clientele. More 20- and 30-somethings are waiting longer to get married, have children and buy a home, which means more time and disposable income to partake in the good life. In La Jolla, the good life means the full wine and dine experience — whether it be taking in newbies like **Delirios** and **Cendio Restaurant**, or revisiting established favorites like **Azul** and the **Marine Room** (recently named "Best Restaurant" and "Best Surfside Dining" by AOL CityGuide for the second year in a row). "There is a rebirth of chefs that is bringing a lot of energy to the dining scene," says Executive Chef Bernard Guillas of the Marine Room. "La Jolla is the most beautiful place that has a most beautiful cuisine."

"We also have this up-and-coming demographic of young professionals that we are geared more toward now," says Michael McGeath, co-owner of **Trattoria Aqua**. "They are looking for more than just a nightclub scene." Trattoria Aqua



EXCELSIOR

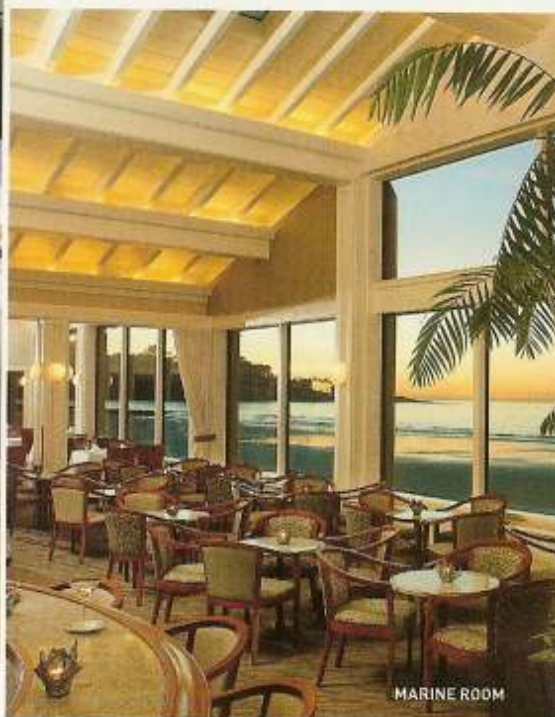
features upscale, coastal Italian cuisine that incorporates fish flown in daily from Italy and vegetarian options. When the restaurant opened its oceanfront doors more than 12 years ago, the menu was full of heavy carbs like pizza and pasta; it has since transformed to a protein-rich, organic produce-based menu for the younger, modern guest. McGeath (who co-owns Trattoria Aqua with wife Victoria) also gave the beverage manager position to his son, Josh Salik, 23, so that he could create a drink menu appealing to a younger demographic. In that selection is a list of flavored martinis and more than 500 wines, earning Trattoria Aqua an "Award of Excellence" from *Wine Spectator*.

Clay Bordan of **Clay's** on the 11th floor of The Hotel La Jolla has also created an atmosphere with a younger audience in mind. His restaurant specializes in California artisan cuisine using all natural and organic ingredients on the menu that accompanies a sushi bar with a happy hour and a dance floor that pumps house music. The rest of The Hotel La Jolla is undergoing an overhaul to modernize the rooms and property to attract a young professional crowd.

the chef marks the spot

The chefs of the La Jolla dining scene are also getting younger. "The city is attracting a greater scale of chefs," says Judd Canepari, 37, executive chef of the **Sky Room** at La Valencia hotel. "San Diego and even California as a whole is attracting younger, more aggressive, more upbeat chefs."

Bill Berkley says the one thing he was advised to do when he opened **Jack's La Jolla** was to make sure he invested in a great chef. After looking at more than 1,000 résumés, he knew Chef Tony DiSalvo of New York's Jean Georges was the one. Now at the ripe age of 32, DiSalvo runs the kitchens of The Dining Room, Jack's Grill and The Ocean Room and owns part of the restaurant. Berkley originally bought the property because he saw the physical space had potential to be a great restaurant. "In the process we brought La Jolla something it didn't have, something more



MARINE ROOM



NINE-TEN



AZUL

contemporary. La Jolla was losing a lot of business to downtown.”

NINE-TEN Executive Chef Jason Knibb is also in his 30s, but has a menu that speaks many more years of culinary experience. Located on the first floor of The Grande Colonial Hotel, it is a hotspot for both hipsters and foodies. NINE-TEN's California cuisine menu offers the freshest ingredients, which change with the season. Guests can enjoy "Mercy of the Chef," a mystery five-course meal planned by Knibb and paired with five complimentary wines. The atmosphere is more formal, but the staff is young, personable and very knowledgeable of the menu.

nightlife la jolla-style

What was once a sleepy beach village is now a favorite hotspot for the younger generation. La Jolla's nightlife has awakened with the sound of dance music. "While La Jolla is no downtown, people can now go for dinner and stay into the morning hours," says James Brennan, owner of Side Bar and Stingaree. Brennan recently purchased the **Top of the Cove** and plans to convert it into a new restaurant and bar set to open in two years.

Pasquale Angelotti, owner of **Pasquale on Prospect**, offers live pop, jazz and flamenco music Thursday thru Saturday at his Italiano-Euro bistro that serves up spaghetti and veal meatballs and lobster ravioli. One claim to fame is the credit of the song "Thursday Nights at Pasquale's" on the *Sideways* soundtrack. Angelotti says people really started to notice his restaurant when they heard music coming up from the underground restaurant.

Excelsior began the La Jolla nightlife and music trend over three years ago. The Belgium-fusion restaurant began as a popular spot for beer and bowls of mussels and has transformed into a social dining experience with a late night happy hour, DJs and a dance floor.

Jack's has also contributed to the nightlife scene as a place for the young and young-at-heart to dance the night away. With seven bars, live music every night and doors that stay open until 2 a.m., Jack's is a great place to let loose. The restaurant also holds special events such as monthly wine tastings and guest DJs.

restaurant renovations

Several La Jolla restaurants are shaping up with forward-thinking renovations to complement their fine cuisine. Here's what to look for in the near future:

GEORGE'S

Just reopened as "George's California Modern," the famous seaside restaurant has modernized its décor with the help of architect Jennifer Luce. The concept complements the restaurant's "refined fine dining" concept and reflects how people in Southern California live and dine today. The new menu still features California cuisine with fresh and organic ingredients but has expanded to incorporate more influences from different cultures.

SKY ROOM

The famous and formal Sky Room at the La Valencia Hotel is scheduled to reopen this month with modern touches to its elegant ambience and a full-scale kitchen headed by Executive Chef Judd Canepari. With only 12 tables and a capacity of 40, the Sky Room offers exclusive V.I.P. dining with a 180-degree view of the ocean.

THE FORMER TOP OF THE COVE

Not much detail has been released about what will become of this prime spot on Prospect Street — not even a name. But with James Brennan heading the project, expect it to be big. "[It's] a property that deserves a world class venue to go along with the amazing view," says Brennan, who plans to reconstruct the building from the ground up.