



BAYSIDE

BEAT

DOWNTOWN SANTA MONICA &
THIRD STREET PROMENADE

A Taste of Downtown

Some are known for cooking up variations on old dishes, others for concocting new dishes of their own. One even claimed his place on the culinary map by not cooking at all.

Yet, whether their cuisine is traditional or nouveau, whether their reputations have grown locally or spread far and wide, one thing is certain – some of the best, most original chefs in the country are right here in Downtown Santa Monica.

The Beat visited five of the growing number of chefs who have made Santa Monica a dining destination to learn what makes them tick and why they've chosen Bayside as the place to exercise their art.

MARY SUE MILLIKEN AND SUSAN FENIGER

You can work up an appetite just talking to Susan Feniger, who, along with Mary Sue Milliken, owns the Border Grill on 4th Street in the heart of Downtown Santa Monica. Feniger is the dark-haired half of the nationally recognizable "Border Girls."

"We talked a lot about doing Thai, Indian, Vietnamese, even a Japanese noodle shop," Feniger says. Luckily for Santa Monicans, America's most prolific purveyors of "modern Mexican" settled on Border Grill. That "taco stand," as Feniger wryly describes it, has been packing in locals and tourists alike since 1990.

After working together at Chicago's Le Perroquet 20 years ago, Milliken and Feniger left on separate pilgrimages to France, vowing they would some day work together at their real love, rustic Third World street food. That's about

as far away from foie gras and consommé as these classically trained French chefs could get.

After much international travel, and a turn by Feniger at Wolfgang Puck's LA-based Ma Maison, it felt natural for the duo to set up shop in the multi-ethnic Santa Monica area to explore their love of exotic, bold flavors. Their first hit, City Café in Venice, served everything from curry to Cuban sandwiches. After outgrowing that space, and then another, they finally landed at their current 4th Street digs to focus solely on modern Mexican cuisine.

"Santa Monica was a perfect fit," Feniger says. "It was exactly what we were going for. It has the laid back feel of the beach while still being in the city."

When not running their Border Grill restaurants (including one in Las Vegas) and Ciudad, their downtown LA homage to Latin cuisine; churning out a dizzying array of cookbooks and appearing on radio (including occasionally, KCRW), the "Border Girls" may be found at Santa Monica's farmers markets shopping for inspiration or providing samples of their favorite recipes such as pomegranate lemonade. They even regularly travel to Mexico to gain further insight into their favorite food.

"Latin culture really speaks to us," Feniger says. Luckily for Santa Monica, it speaks volumes.



SOME OF BORDER GRILL'S CLASSICS – GREEN CORN TAMALES, PLANTAIN EMPANADAS & CHICKEN PANUCHOS



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Promising Summer for Tourism



Santa Monica's visitor industry was strong and steady entering the peak summer tourist season, with prospects for more of the same with a little boost from a video game industry business event.

Local hotels had been expected to show moderate revenue growth after a strong 2006 and that's what they are getting.

"Tourism in Santa Monica has been very healthy this year," said Misti Kerns, president/CEO of the Santa Monica Convention & Visitors Bureau.

She expects the same for the summer.

"As a beachside community summer has historically been our peak season," Kerns said in mid June. "This year's outlook is strong as well. Many of our hotels are already booked for July and August."

Santa Monica hotels entered summer on solid ground. For the first four months of 2007, the occupancy rate was 82 percent, well above the Los Angeles County rate of 77.2 percent and the highest for any submarket within the county tracked by PKF Consulting. Santa Monica's occupancy rate was even with a year earlier.

Meanwhile, the average room rate in the city jumped 9 percent to \$264.98, indicating that demand is strong enough to command solid rate increases.

Revenue at the Best Western Ocean View Hotel on Ocean Avenue is up about 10 percent this year and "it looks like it is going to be a hot summer," said General Manager Robert Farzam.

The E3 Media and Business Summit this month (July 11-13) should help.

The event, presented by the Entertainment Software Association, is expected to bring approximately 3,000 people to Santa Monica, with an estimated economic impact of about \$7 million, Kerns said.

"E3 is helping rates and occupancy," Farzam said.

Meanwhile, Downtown Santa Monica hotels are acting to keep themselves strong.

The Hotel Shangri-La on Ocean Avenue, for example, closed its doors in December for a major renovation and plans to reopen in spring of 2008, said General Manager Dino Nanni.

The Farzam family, who owns the Best Western Ocean View, is also moving forward with its plans to replace the Pacific Sands and Travelodge motels on Ocean Avenue with a larger, moderately priced motel.

Such investments seem likely to pay off.

"Our hotels are so healthy now," Kerns said.

But while the overall outlook is solid, a potential trouble spot may be developing. A declining percentage of Santa Monica's visitors are international travelers.

Santa Monica is "seeing a slight downturn in the percentage of international arrivals," Kerns said. That's of concern because "this customer tends to stay longer, use public transportation and walk," which creates less traffic impact, she said.

Trends in international markets are especially important to Santa Monica because "we are far more dependent on foreign travelers than many other destinations," Kerns said.

The possible shift in the market showed up in quarterly reports for summer and fall of 2006 that will form part of the basis for the triennial Santa Monica visitor industry economic impact report expected to be released by the bureau this fall. The new quarterly reports will help the bureau assess seasonal patterns.

Lauren Schlaw, whose firm is doing the research for the bureau, expects the trend of a lesser percentage of international visitors to carry through for the remaining two quarters of the study.

"This is a whole Los Angeles problem," Schlaw said. "This has long-term implications." For one thing, she said, more international flights are bypassing Los Angeles International Airport.

On the plus side, the weak dollar makes travel to the United States attractive. On the down side, issues such as visa problems, insufficient marketing, customer service and language are barriers.

"The U.S. reputation is not as positive as it has been in the past," Kerns noted.

For Santa Monica to maintain a favorable balance of international visitors "a larger investment in our top producing markets as well as the emerging international markets will be needed," Kerns said.

For budget reasons, Santa Monica CVB has been targeting English speaking countries and is expanding its marketing to Ireland this year.

Fortunately, the declining percentage of foreign visitors doesn't necessarily mean that tourism is down.


"Visitorship has grown," Kerns said. "It has grown more on the domestic side."

It will take more analysis to determine what impact shifting markets will have on Santa Monica.

With summer looking good, the visitors bureau now is focusing on encouraging more fall/winter visitation.

The survey by Schlaw indicated that a fall visitor actually spends more time and money than a summer visitor while in Santa Monica, offers more of a business focus vs. leisure, and entertains more, Kerns said. There is also a much higher repeat visitation than among summer travelers.

Reflecting the importance of keeping visitors happy so they will return, the bureau will launch a customer service and diversity training program at Santa Monica College in partnership with the City, Chamber of Commerce and SMC.

Pilot classes are expected in the fall. 

Spreading the Word



The Bayside District has a new director of marketing and communications, and she hopes to bring what is literally a world of experience plugging Santa Monica across the planet.

Debbie Lee, the former vice president for business development with the Santa Monica Convention & Visitors Bureau, is now responsible for general marketing, promotions and public relations for Downtown.

Lee plans to use her ten years of experience in marketing and community relations to help continue to build an image of Downtown Santa Monica that is encompassing, while capitalizing on the widespread popularity of the Promenade as an international venue.

“Having an umbrella brand, a strong branding recognition that is cohesive, is very important,” Lee said. “Especially since we have such a limited budget, the focus is on programs that lend a strong return on investment for our time and resources.”

“Third Street Promenade is such an asset to our community and Downtown Santa Monica is thriving, so drawing attention to it all will only enhance a visitor's experience,” Lee said.

Spreading the word will require encouraging the media to focus more on events that help promote the area, she said.

“Most of the coverage we receive in the local papers focus on issues of district improvements,” said Lee, who also oversees publications and other key communication vehicles to promote and inform the public on issues related to Downtown.

“I'd like to also put a spotlight on the marketing achievements and programs we offer, as well as the unique special events that come to the Promenade,” she said.

Lee looks forward to building “strong synergistic partnerships with companies that put a priority on community.” To further that goal, the Bayside has partnered with Starbucks to produce a summer and winter concert series on the Promenade. A performance by rising recording artist Rocco Deluca kicked-off the summer series and drew large crowds last month, Lee said.

“Special events take a great deal of coordination and the revenues they generate enhance our budget, enabling Bayside to produce proactive marketing campaigns and capital improvements,” Lee said.

Nicole Nez, the Bayside's new events and marketing coordinator, plans to maintain the focus on “events that put a positive impact on the Promenade.”



“We receive so many special event and filming requests. Many of them truly enhance the experience to the Promenade and make this area unique.” Nez said.

Yet if the Bayside's marketing campaigns are to succeed, Lee said, more merchants need to get involved

“We're creating an awareness campaign so new merchants know we're here and we offer marketing support,” Lee said. “The more information they provide to us, the better we can promote the area. Bayside is dedicated to this and to strengthening our relationships with downtown merchants.”

Ten Years of Excellence

Last month, Linn Wile celebrated 10 years as the executive assistant for the Bayside District Corporation. During her tenure, she has kept the Bayside office running smoothly, helping property owners and businesses navigate the system and pointing visitors in the right direction. “Linn is the oil that keeps this machine running,” said Kathleen Rawson, Bayside's executive director. “Her special touch helps make this place work and our board and staff can't thank her enough for the past ten years.”




The Beat asked Linn to share some of the highlights of her job.

“I like seeing the real world at 7:30 in the morning. The maintenance crews shining up the Promenade after a wonderfully busy night. Deliveries being made, replenishing the shops and restaurants. Even the street people getting their lives started for the day.

“I'm happy I know the shopkeepers, business owners, property owners, maintenance crew, City staff and street performers. It's a delightfully diverse group with which to work – one that probably exists in very few places.

“I'm proud to tell my family and friends I work for the Promenade and the City of Santa Monica. No day is the same, no month is the same – that's what makes the environment exciting and creates the enthusiasm needed to be happy.

“The staff over the years has become family. It's hard to believe it has been ten years.” 

PHOTOS: DEBBIE LEE (TOP LEFT)
NICOLE NEZ (BOTTOM LEFT)
LINN WILE (ABOVE RIGHT)

Bracing for Construction

If you live, work or play Downtown, get ready to pull out your earplugs and chart out alternate routes, there's plenty of construction coming down the planning pipeline.

Starting with the proposed remodel of Santa Monica Place next Spring and wrapping up with the replacement of the California incline and the retrofit and widening of the pier bridge, both of them scheduled to take place in 2009, there will be plenty of hardhats in the Downtown area.

Merchants, residents and Bayside officials are worried about the impacts all the work will have on traffic and parking and the noise it will bring. "We're in tune with all three of these projects and will work with city officials to manage the impacts to the downtown district," said Kathleen Rawson, executive director of Bayside District Corporation.

Perhaps the biggest impact on the Downtown will come from the \$9 million California Incline Replacement Project that will shut down the bridge that leads down to Pacific Coast Highway and one of the main arteries into the Downtown area. The work, scheduled to start in spring 2009 is expected to take ten months.

"Certainly it's a route used to enter and exit the city," said Mark Cuneo, the City's principal civic engineer.

At a public meeting June 20, residents of the Wilmont neighborhood, which abuts the northern edge of Downtown, worried that construction will snarl traffic in the area. They also worried that work crews will eat up street parking that already is in high demand.

In addition, residents are concerned about construction noise and potential contamination. The demolition of the old bridge could release asbestos-related materials and lead paint and contaminate storm water runoff, according to the EIR issued May 23.

Built in 1930, the bridge, which is mainly concrete, has developed cracks and breaks and is not up to current seismic standards, according to the report. Inspection reports in 1989 and 1994 found that the bridge needed to be replaced.

When the incline closes, motorists wishing to access PCH will need to use either the Ocean Avenue ramp next to the pier or the 10 Freeway at Lincoln Boulevard, according to the EIR. Motorists also can head up Channel or Entrada at the north end of Santa Monica. City officials said they plan to work with Caltrans to discourage motorists from cutting through residential neighborhoods.

**"WE'RE IN TUNE WITH ALL
THREE OF THESE PROJECTS..."**

KATHLEEN RAWSON

The Bayside also could feel the impacts of a proposed project to seismically strengthen and widen the nearly 70-year-old pier bridge, as well as provide a link between the pier parking and the adjacent surface parking lot north of the pier.

Although it is currently scheduled to start in 2009, pier officials said they do not expect the project to take place at the same time as the California incline. "The schedule for both projects has not been set," said Ben Franz-Knight, executive director of the Pier Restoration Corporation. "Having them take place at the same time would not be a good idea."

With the EIR expected to go to the City Council this fall, it is too early to tell what specific impacts the project will have on the Downtown, Franz-Knight said. Much of that will depend on which of the five options the council chooses. (To view the full EIR, visit the Planning and Community Development Department section on the City's website www.smgov.net.)

"At this point it's really hard to say what impacts the construction will have," he said. "It will depend on which option is selected, and what the construction plans are."

So far, most of the comments to the draft EIR, which were due last September, have focused on access from the beach bicycle path and the potential historic status of the bridge, planning officials said.


"We're in the process of preparing the comments," said City Planner Paul Foley. The comments will be presented to the City Council with the EIR.

Meanwhile, Macerich's plans to remodel Santa Monica Place are sailing along. On June 20, the Planning Commission enthusiastically embraced the proposed design that tears the roof and doors off the indoor mall and connects it to the Third Street Promenade. The proposed remodel also features an open-air center court and a third-floor food court overlooking the Pacific.

The commission, which will not officially weigh in on the project, gave the modest remodel unusually exuberant praise.

"I like the overall configuration," said Planning Commissioner Darrell Clarke. "I like how it opens up. I like the curves. I think it's gorgeous . . . I think you've done something special."

Under the new proposal, Macy's department store, as well as the two public parking structures totaling nearly 2,000 spaces, will stay open during construction, which is slated to start next spring and completed by fall 2009, mall officials said.

"We are anxious for Santa Monica Place to successfully complete their renovations," Rawson said. "Bayside will also work closely with Macerich and the city to help mitigate the impacts of the construction." 

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DANIEL SNUKAL



An avid guitarist, Daniel Snukal likes to compare cooking to playing music. Every player has the same notes to hit, but it's the choices, the combinations, the nuances that distinguishes one guitarist from another.

"You play around and you get different chemical reactions, you see what you get right," says Snukal, who opened 3 on Fourth in Downtown Santa Monica ten months ago. "Sometimes it's the idea, sometimes it's the technique. Kitchens look the same. You have the same notes to work with."

Snukal's daily choice of culinary notes is dictated by the buyer who scours farmers markets for the freshest, and often most unique, ingredients. Snukal then uses them to whip up dishes he's jotted down on scraps of paper when the muse strikes. As a result, 3 on Fourth's menu changes every day.

The menu dated June 20, for instance, included a smoked salmon, ikura, vegetable pancake with a dill crème fraiche, as well as scrambled eggs with sea urchin, black truffle and crème fraiche.

"Sea urchin is one of my favorite things to eat," says Snukal, whose father always liked to experiment with food. "I have a kind of weird taste. I like liver and sea urchin. Santa Barbara uni is absolutely fantastic."

A native of Canada, Snukal was prodded to open his restaurant in Santa Monica, by his brother, a big booster of the city, he has long called home.

"My brother tells everyone who moves to LA, 'You have to live in Santa Monica,'" he says. "Every space we looked at he said, 'Do you know how far it is from Santa Monica?' I think that people really care about the city."

3 on Fourth has become a popular dining spot for folks who visit or work Downtown. Those who live in Brentwood or the Palisades sometimes drop in after work, preferring to sit in front of a side of sweet potato fries, schichimi togarashi, nori and aioli than behind the wheel in rush-hour traffic.

"I always hope that they enjoy themselves and enjoy the food," Snukal says. "We really focus on if each customer has a good time. You always want more (customers). The fun is cooking, and the more cooking you do, the happier you are."

"I THINK THAT PEOPLE REALLY CARE ABOUT THE CITY."

DANIEL SNUKAL

JULIANO

Juliano is probably the only famous chef who doesn't cook. He's likely also the only chef who puts some of his customers on fasts.

Not only is the cuisine at Juliano's Raw on the corner of 6th and Broadway vegan, and nearly all of it organic, none of it is prepared at temperatures of more than 120 degrees, the highest temperature before your hand blisters on metal.

"I follow the traditional recipes. We make the best Indian food, the best Thai food, Mexican, Japanese, American, only we don't cook, and we use different ingredients," says Juliano, who only goes by his first name.

In the mood for lamb? Juliano's executive chef, Ariel Michaels, will whip up the dish using baby coconut flesh. A burger? Try one made from scratch by blending mushrooms, almonds and sunflower seeds, putting them through a grinder, then dehydrating the patty in a refrigerator-looking oven at no more than 120 degrees.

"I make the mayo from pine nuts, the ketchup from marinara," says Juliano, the son of a Sicilian gourmet who had restaurants in Chicago, Las Vegas and Palm Springs. "For the pasta, we use zucchini."

Juliano gets 90 percent of his ingredients from the local farmers market to insure it's all certified California organic. "We talk to the farmers and ask what kinds of pests and fertilizers they use," Juliano says. The nuts he buys in bulk at the local co-op.

Since moving his restaurant from San Francisco "to get out of the clouds and get to the sun," Juliano's Raw has drawn "every celebrity in town," he says.

Author of "The Uncook Book," Juliano has built an international following, personally preparing dishes for the King of Thailand and the royal family in Saudi Arabia. "Because the food is so unique and rare, I get flown all over the world to make people well," he says.

Juliano hopes to build an international brand of Raw and plans to open restaurants in Hollywood, Paris, Milan and Tokyo. But he likes it just fine on the corner of a Downtown street lined with new apartment buildings.

"I really like Santa Monica," Juliano says. "They're very environmental. It's a very international city. It's really fantastic that we can bring the new food to the world from Santa Monica."



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**“I RELY ON A SOPHISTICATED
CLIENTELE WHICH REALLY GETS
WHAT WE’RE DOING HERE.”**

RAPHAEL LUNETTA

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RAPHAEL LUNETTA



“If there’s surf, I don’t work,” chuckles Raphael Lunetta, the chef at JiRaffe Restaurant. Creator and owner of the upscale bistro located at the corner of 5th and Santa Monica, he’s as much a fixture on our local waves as he is one of the city’s most recognized chefs.

Earning numerous awards, including being named one of Food & Wine’s Top Ten Best Chefs of 1997, Lunetta could have chosen to open his restaurant in New York, Chicago or other big dining venues. It just felt natural, though, for the 40-year-old Santa Monica native to do business in his old stomping grounds.

“It’s the relationships and a loyal clientele” Lunetta credits for his success. JiRaffe, opened with original co-owner Josiah Citrin (now at Santa Monica’s Melisse), has attracted rave reviews and a following of serious gourmands since it opened in 1996, making Lunetta an internationally sought-after cooking teacher.

After graduating from SaMoHi in 1985, putting on the chef’s toque was, for him, as normal as pulling on a wetsuit. With such influences as a French born mother (“a terrific cook”), childhood summers spent around Provence, and a Sicilian grandfather who owned a deli in East Boston, “I was always around great food growing up.

“I rely on a sophisticated clientele which really gets what we’re doing here.” The “it” he explains, is his application of classic French technique to every dish no matter how eclectic the ingredients may be.

“Every dish is uniquely designed and thought out. I could get away with putting potatoes or pasta on every plate, but my regulars wouldn’t be so loyal.”

“Summer is definitely a good time,” says Lunetta. In addition to his regulars, the summer months bring the patronage of many tourists who make a beeline to JiRaffe. “I consider it a great compliment when vacationing Europeans come for dinner two nights in a row.”

What else does Santa Monica’s “surfing chef” like about the summer? “I love the beach, of course.”

LUIGI FINEO

When Luigi Fineo was growing up in Italy, his mother kept the youngest of her five children out of trouble by having him help around the kitchen. He grew up watching her make pasta by hand, especially on Sundays, and bake her own bread. They were lessons Fineo never forgot.

“Sometimes I call her,” says Fineo, the Chef at La Botte Ristorante at the corner of 6th and Santa Monica. “I ask her, ‘How did you used to do this?’”

After five years in culinary school in Puglia, Italy, Fineo moved to Florence, where he honed his skills at a “very nice restaurant,” then to Alto Adige, where he worked at a “top-rated” eatery.

Along the way, Fineo started putting together dishes from the different regions of Italy. He also started to experiment, modifying traditional recipes, varying the techniques he learned in his mother’s kitchen.

“I like to create,” Fineo says. “I used to do traditional dishes. I used to have the old-style soup, green peas and squid. My mother used to cook all together. I cook them separate and mix.”

Like all fine chefs, Fineo cooks “by taste and eye.” He makes a dish and separates it into two or three portions, each one a different variation, then serves the one he deems the best.

Three steps down from street level, La Botte – Italian for “Wine Barrel” – is literally fashioned from wine barrels – from the floor to the walls to the wine racks.



**"I LIKE TO EAT. IT'S
MY MOST FAVORITE
THING TO DO."**

LUIGI FINEO



DINING ROOM AT LA BOTTE, ITALIAN FOR
"WINE BARREL"

Owner Stefano De Lorenzo opened the restaurant two years ago after his Piccolo Ristorante Italiano on Venice Beach "got really busy," he says. "The owner of the building became a friend of ours. It was convenient for us to come here.

"It really is beautiful right here," De Lorenzo says. "We get business people, tourists from the hotels, people living around here."

De Lorenzo and Fineo regularly visit the farmers market down the street, where "you find really good things," says De Lorenzo, adding that the menu is adjusted to the seasons.

"In the winter we have food from Northern Italy with heavier sauces," he says. "We use lighter sauces and more fish during the summer."

"I like to eat," Fineo says. "It's my most favorite thing to do." 🌊

For more news...

surfsantamonica.com

CHECK IT OUT

Tasty Choices

Following is just a small sample of some of the top restaurants that have made Bayside a culinary destination.

Border Grill

1445 Fourth Street Santa Monica, CA 90401
310.451.1655
www.bordergrill.com

3 on Fourth

1432A 4th Street Santa Monica, CA 90401
310.395.6765
www.3onfourth.com

Juliano's Raw

609 Broadway Santa Monica, CA 90401
310.587.1552
www.julianoalive.com

JiRaffe

501 Santa Monica Blvd. Santa Monica, CA 90401
310.917.6671
www.jirafferestaurant.com

La Botte

620 Santa Monica Blvd. Santa Monica, CA 90401
310.576.3072
www.LaBotteSantaMonica.com



BAYSIDE BEAT

1351 Third Street Promenade, Suite 201
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JULY
2007

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MISSION STATEMENT

On behalf of the City of Santa Monica, to promote economic stability, growth and community life within the Bayside District through responsible planning, development, management, and coordination of programs, projects and services designed to benefit the community as a whole; which includes the District's businesses, property owners, visitors and residents.

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At noon on Friday, June 29th the community gathered to acknowledge Eddy Greenberg, Third Street Promenade and Parking Structure Maintenance Supervisor for 30 years of service for the City of Santa Monica. City officials, business and community leaders, city staff and long-time friends thanked Eddy for his many years of hard work, dedication and leadership.