

STEPPING OUT

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OFF THE MENU

Newport Welcomes New Restaurants

BY CHRISTOPHER TRELA | NB INDY

Coast Highway is getting a make-over—well, not the road, the restaurants. Several new eateries are opening on our scenic coastal highway, which is already packed with popular restaurants. However, two of those restaurants come from seasoned culinary pros with a successful track record.



BY
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Louie's by the Bay, an Italian steakhouse, has opened in the space vacated by The Ritz Seafood, which failed to catch on with the locals and closed after less than two years in business. Personally, I found the interior of that restaurant cold and uninviting, and the food did not live up to the heritage of The Ritz Restaurant in Fashion Island.

I popped in to Louie's this week, and wow—what a difference! The ambiance is warm and inviting, with wood accents and a lively atmosphere. The place was very busy on a Tuesday night, impressive for a new restaurant yet not unexpected given the restaurant's pedigree.

Louie's is a joint venture between restaurateur Ron Salisbury, who owns the historic Cannery Restaurant in Newport Beach and El Cholo in Corona del Mar plus several other locations, and restaurateur Piero Selvaggio, longtime owner of the classic Italian restaurant Valentino in Santa Monica, which closed at the end of 2018.

Louie's menu is approachable Italian—in other words, familiar dishes done right.

I had time to sit at the bar for a glass of pinot noir and stuffed seafood calamari in light tomato broth (\$16), but I vowed to go back and try one of the pastas and a side (the Prager cream corn, a salute to former Ritz owner Hans Prager, is on the menu).

Learn more at LouiesNewport.com. Another new restaurant set to open in Corona del Mar in March is CdM, the sister restaurant to A Restaurant. CdM is in the old Crowbar space, which has been completely reimaged by Hollywood producer McG and restaurateur Jordan Otterbein, the team behind A Restaurant.

Stepping into the new CdM will be an elevated dining experience with a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

"We have completely reimaged the space and CdM is going to be a brand new and super stylish local eatery," said Otterbein. "We are committed to offering the best culinary experience, but we want to do that in a way that's very comfortable and approachable."

Executive Chef Jonathon Blackford of A Restaurant has been promoted to Corporate Executive Chef of River Jetty Restaurant Group (the umbrella organization from McG and Otterbein). The kitchen will boast an in-house dry curing cabinet for custom charcuterie, a pasta extruder for fresh, uniquely shaped pastas and a Wood Stone pizza oven.

More "creative American" and less "steak centric" than A, the menu will draw influence from America's melting pot of cuisine and change multiple times a year.

I have been told that the décor of the restaurant will feature unique light fixtures from salvage shipyards. Hand selected tile and 19th century wood pulled from a Chicago warehouse will create the flooring. Natural light will spill into the restaurant, highlighting comfortable leather booths and tables



CdM interior



Louie's calamari

surrounding the centralized bar.

Downstairs is a speakeasy-style bar offering an exclusive selection of cocktails and spirits as well as a vintage photo booth.

According to McG, CdM restaurant is "born of Sea Kings and Sailors," referring to the team names from Newport Harbor High School and Corona del Mar High School, the alma mater of both McG and Otterbein. "About half the people that come in to A Restaurant are Newport Harbor people, the other half are Corona del Mar people. We

want to provide a place where everyone is welcome. We love the magic of a British pub, kind of a 'Cheers' culture."

McG told me that that while the vibe of a restaurant is important, you're nothing without quality cuisine.

"Everyone today demands the best, so our food needs to be excellent, and the service needs to be excellent and friendly," he said. "Those are the three elements—vibe, food, service."

McG also praised Chef Blackford, whom he called "a passionate guy in what he does. We support him and go on his food journeys. He's always interested in evolving and learning, moving with the ever-demanding taste buds of our customers. Without that passion you have nothing."

Visit CdMRestaurant.com.

A few doors down from Louie's, a new restaurant has quietly taken over the spot vacated by Joe's Crab Shack.

Guac Amigos (yes, that's the restaurant's name) has been hiring staff and looks nearly ready to open. Their website reveals an eatery with a variety of Mexican dishes, including 10 different tacos (among them shrimp, lobster and king crab) plus tableside guacamole, surf and turf, and other dishes done south-of-the-border style.

Visit GuacAmigos.com.

SIDE DISH

Newport and Laguna Chefs Cook for Charity

Imagine 30 of the top chefs in Southern California coming together to create multi-course dinners for guests who are there to support a charitable cause.

No need to imagine. The event is called Table for Ten, an annual extravaganza where a noted chef is assigned to a table of ten hungry guests. The chef creates an over-the-top menu with wine

pairings, served at an exquisitely decorated table by white-gloved waiters.

This year's Table for Ten event is on March 3 at the Laguna Cliffs Marriott Resort & Spa. The chosen charity is The Teen Project.

The chosen chefs include many from Newport Beach and Laguna Beach:

- Andy Arndt of Newport Beach Marriott

- Diego Bernal of Coliseum Pool & Grill at Pelican Hill Resort
- Greg Daniels of Harley
- Ron Fougeray of Splashes at the Surf & Sand Resort
- Sean Gebo of Current Coastal Cuisine
- Joosung Lee of The Loft at Montage
- David Martin of The Pacific Club
- Noe Moreno of True Food Kitchen



Table for Ten chef Andy Arndt

- Jessica Roy of Current Coastal Cuisine
- Josh Shapiro of A & O Kitchen & Bar / Waterline at Balboa Bay Resort
- Lindsay Smith-Rosales of Nirvana Grill
- Kyle St. John of The Ranch
- Ryan Sumner of The Lighthouse
- Philip Tangonan of Cannery Sea-

food of the Pacific

"The concept of the event is very entertaining. The whole setup is very attractive and fun, as opposed to one big ballroom with the same food for everyone," said Executive Chef Jean Pierre Dubray of The Resort at Pelican Hill. "I enjoy this event very much. A room full of chefs is the entertainment. It's like having 30 chef's tables."

Executive Chef David Martin of Pacific Club states, "I have been doing Table for Ten for many years, and I always know that it is going to be a great evening and a ton of fun for the chefs."

Individual Seats are \$1,000 per person and are almost sold out. Tickets for the cocktail reception only are \$150 and include small bites and cocktails. Visit TableForTen.org for more information.