

ModernLuxury

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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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) 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 (hotelrepublics.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) 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).

DEFINING DISH His hamachi jalapeno features local yellowtail, showcasing his prowess with Mexican and Japanese flavors.

5. DAVIN WAITE, CHEF-OWNER, WRENCH & RODENT SEABASTROPUB

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 Seabastropub (seabastropub.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.