

# 805 LIVING

## The Restaurant Issue



# HOTEL CHEFS DISH

Creators of the fare served at 10 prestigious area resorts share their best new menu items, observations on industry trends, favorite local ingredients, and go-to eats made by other chefs.

BY LESLIE DINABERG

Great chefs love great food. So who better qualified to share their insights on the 805 dining scene than top chefs at local resorts? With their insider intel on what's new in Central Coast restaurants right now, crave-worthy dishes from their own kitchens and other chefs, as well as their favorite local ingredients, here's what 10 area hotel chefs say is trending in the 805.

DENIZOT: BARON SPAFFORD; DISH: GARY MOSS





**EXECUTIVE CHEF  
JOHAN DENIZOT**

Belmond El Encanto,  
Santa Barbara  
[belmond.com/hotels/  
north-america/usa/ca/  
santa-barbara/belmond-el-encanto](http://belmond.com/hotels/north-america/usa/ca/santa-barbara/belmond-el-encanto)

**What's trending on the 805 restaurant scene right now?** Upscale Mexican cuisine. At least three new Mexican restaurants opened between last year and this year.

**Of your latest dishes, which is your favorite?** Our vegan ramen. It's comfort food that pleases everyone.

**What is your current go-to dish by another chef?** The veggie burger at the Goat Tree restaurant [[hotelcalifornian.com](http://hotelcalifornian.com)] in Santa Barbara's Hotel Californian is very tasty, my to-go dish for lunch.

**What other 805-area chef is doing particularly creative, interesting things with food?** Chef Yoichi Kawabata at the Japanese restaurant Yoichi's [[yoichis.com](http://yoichis.com)] in Santa Barbara, for clean flavors and clean presentations.

**What 805-area ingredient has contributed the most to the elevation of your culinary creations?** There are too many to list, but one in particular is the finger lime caviar. It's fun to use and fits many dishes—from raw fish to desserts—with its bright and bold flavor.

Among chef Johan Denizot's latest culinary creations at Belmond El Encanto, Santa Barbara, he says his Vegan Ramen stands out as a crowd-pleasing comfort food.



**EXECUTIVE CHEF  
EDWARD RUIZ**

The Gardens of Avila,  
Sycamore Mineral Springs  
Resort & Spa, San Luis Obispo  
sycamoresprings.com

**What is your current go-to dish by another chef?** My go-to dish is always a steak, medium rare. My favorite steak place is The Hitching Post II [hitchingpost2.com] in Buellton. I remember having one on my birthday. It was a 32-ounce rib eye grilled over oak.

**What other 805-area chef is doing particularly creative, interesting things with food?** Chef Brian Collins at Ember in Arroyo Grande. He does farm-to-table and the menu changes every month. It's a really good experience from the service to the food.

**What 805-area ingredient has contributed the most to the elevation of your culinary creations?** I'm very lucky to have a one-acre garden that we harvest a lot of our ingredients from, including melons, cucumbers, radishes, heirloom tomatoes, beets, greens, herbs, and edible flowers. We have a full-time farmer on-site—Haley Trengove—who is super helpful and really knowledgeable. That is something most restaurants in the area don't have, and it sets us apart.



Chef Edward Ruiz of Sycamore Mineral Springs in San Luis Obispo is impressed by the rib eye steak (below) at The Hitching Post II in Buellton and the ever-changing farm-to-table menus that chef Brian Collins (below, left) turns out at Ember in Arroyo Grande.

RUIZ: JANNIEDION; STEAK/DISH: LISA THOMPSON; COLLINS: GARY MOSS



### EXECUTIVE CHEF MATT JOHNSON

San Ysidro Ranch, Montecito  
sanysidoranch.com

#### **What's trending on the 805 restaurant scene right now?**

Microbrews are popping up everywhere, which has food trucks coming to serve small plates, whether they're taco, wood-fired pizza, or barbecue trucks. Also with more and more vegans and gluten-free diners, a lot of restaurants are going in that direction with healthier and lighter dishes. There are so many different options now in the 805 compared to 10 years ago when it was mainly tacos, Italian food, and cafés.

**Of your latest dishes, which is your favorite?** One of our dishes at Stonehouse restaurant is Local Spiny Lobster with gnocchi, *romanesco*, speck ham, and Meyer lemon emulsion. The lobster is from Santa Cruz Island and the Meyer lemons that make up the sauce are from our gardens at San Ysidro Ranch.

**What is your current go-to dish by another chef?** One of my favorite dishes is at Kitanoya Ramen & Sushi [805-382-1222] in Oxnard. It's the Fried Chicken Ramen with crispy garlic, pickled egg, and spicy miso, along with a side of their house-made kimchi. It is my comfort dish on a cold evening; it's so good.

**What 805-area ingredient has contributed the most to the elevation of your culinary creations?** My favorite ingredient right now is definitely Meyer lemons from our property. We also have beehives on the property that make our honey. It's got flavors of rosemary and lavender.



At San Ysidro Ranch in Montecito, honey produced by on-site beehives and Meyer lemons grown on the grounds inspire chef Matt Johnson's menu at Stonehouse restaurant. Hence, the Meyer Lemon Tart (above).



### EXECUTIVE CHEF RICHARD PFAFF

Lido, Dolphin Bay Resort & Spa, Pismo Beach  
thedolphinbay.com

**What's trending on the 805 restaurant scene right now?** Not just in the 805 but countrywide, diners have moved to either a plant-based diet or have chosen to omit gluten and carbs from their diets. We here at Lido make an effort to accommodate diners with a host of different diets. Recently we released a house-made vegan burger consisting of edamame, shitake mushrooms, garbanzo beans, and hominy, which is very popular. We also appeal to gluten-free diners who frequent our resort. I am most proud of this, considering 80 percent of our menu is gluten-free or has the option to be prepared that way, everything

from our crab cakes and French fries all the way to our garbanzo bean flour-breaded fritto misto appetizer.

**What is your current go-to dish by another chef?** Oh, hands down the pork belly and abalone dish by chef Brian Collins at Ember [emberwoodfire.com] in Arroyo Grande. I usually am off on Mondays when they are closed, but every time I visit Ember that is my go-to dish!

**What other 805-area chef is doing particularly creative, interesting things with food?** Nicola Allegretta at Mistura [misturarestaurants.com] in San Luis Obispo. Mistura stands out because of the lack of Peruvian food represented here in the 805. With fun, eclectic flavors and beautiful presentation, it's just a fun and interesting place all around.

Chef Richard Pfaff of Lido at Pismo Beach's Dolphin Bay Resort & Spa finds chef Nicola Allegretta's Peruvian fare at Mistura in San Luis Obispo fun, flavorful, and beautiful. His Halibut Tiradito (right) is a shining example.





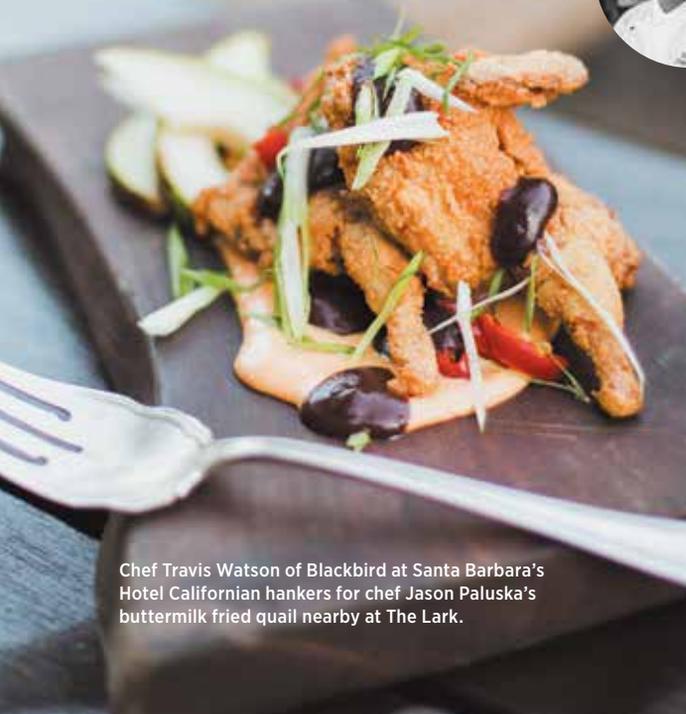
### EXECUTIVE CHEF TRAVIS WATSON

Blackbird, Hotel Californian, Santa Barbara  
hotelcalifornian.com

**Of your latest dishes, which is your favorite?** My favorite dish on the Blackbird menu right now is our Prime New York Steak. It is a grass-fed, all-natural product that is aged for at least 33 days. It's so tender and delicious by itself, but we accompany it with heirloom carrot variations, caramelized cipollini onions, chimichurri, and a smoked-blue cheese bread pudding. The preparation is beautiful and over-the-top delicious!

**What is your current go-to dish by another chef?** The buttermilk fried quail from chef Jason Paluska at The Lark [thelarksb.com] in Santa Barbara. It is spectacular, and I love that he took such a classic approach to a great ingredient.

**What 805-area ingredient has contributed the most to the elevation of your culinary creations?** One of the best things about living and cooking in Santa Barbara is the access to great seafood. Right now we are getting the best spiny lobsters I can remember. At Hotel Californian we have great relationships within our local fishing community and are able to get fresh lobsters right off the boat. It doesn't get any fresher than that! Forging those partnerships means that Hotel Californian will always be able to source the best product in the area. I have such respect for the fishermen and farmers who are passionate about sustainability and being stewards of our natural resources.



Chef Travis Watson of Blackbird at Santa Barbara's Hotel Californian hankers for chef Jason Paluska's buttermilk fried quail nearby at The Lark.

WATSON: JACQUELINE PILAR PHOTOGRAPHY; QUAIL DISH: ALI BECK PHOTOGRAPHY; PATRIA: STEPHANIE DAY; SEA URCHIN: GARY MOSS; UNI DISH: FOUR SEASONS RESORT THE BILTMORE SANTA BARBARA



### EXECUTIVE CHEF MICHAEL PATRIA

Four Seasons Resort  
The Biltmore Santa Barbara  
fourseasons.com/  
santabarbara

**Of your latest dishes, which is your favorite?** We just introduced a new dish to the Bella Vista menu which is, to me, Santa Barbara on a plate! Santa Barbara Uni with cauliflower panna cotta, smoked crème fraîche, trout roe, finger lime, and sea grass. This dish is not only absolutely gorgeous but also packed with flavor.

**What are your current go-to dishes by other chefs?** In Santa Barbara, The Tia Juana [spanish octopus and wild white shrimp] tacos at Corazon Cocina [corazoncocinasb.com] from chef Ramon Velazquez. I crave these



weekly! The Ceviche Verde at Santo Mezcal Restaurante [santomezcalbs.com] from executive chef Ricardo Garcia. The Tri Tip at Barbareño [barbareno.com] by executive chef Julian Martinez is seriously one of the most tender and flavorful pieces of meat in town. Of course I am pretty new to town, so I'm still exploring.

**What other 805-area chef is doing particularly creative, interesting things with food?** I would have to say chef Yoichi Kawabata from Yoichi's [yoichis.com] in Santa Barbara. The kaiseki is steeped in tradition but packed full of creativity. His attention to detail is amazing. And his use of micro-seasonal Japanese ingredients is inspirational.

**What 805-area ingredient has contributed the most to the elevation of your culinary creations?** The amazingly fresh local seafood. Coming from Atlanta, which is minimally three to four hours from the ocean, I find it pretty fantastic being able to work with seafood that is literally only a couple hours out of the water.



"Santa Barbara on a plate" is what chef Michael Patria calls Santa Barbara Uni and cauliflower panna cotta (left), his newest pride and joy made from fresh local sea urchin (right) at Bella Vista at Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara.



**EXECUTIVE CHEF  
JOSE FERNANDEZ**

Four Seasons Hotel  
Westlake Village  
[fourseasons.com/  
westlakevillage](http://fourseasons.com/westlakevillage)

**What's trending on the 805 restaurant scene right now?** What I see now is more attention to flavors, how you can take the best avocado, the best cabbage, or the best carrot to the next level.

**Of your latest dishes, which is your favorite?** Our whole California avocado with Santa Barbara pistachios and seaweed. I think this dish really symbolizes what our restaurant, the region, and the farmers are all about: putting vegetables on the front seat of the plate. The dish has such an interesting story, it is so simple yet so complex and delicious, especially in peak seasons when we get the avocados from Apricot Lane Farms [[apricotlanefarms.com](http://apricotlanefarms.com)].

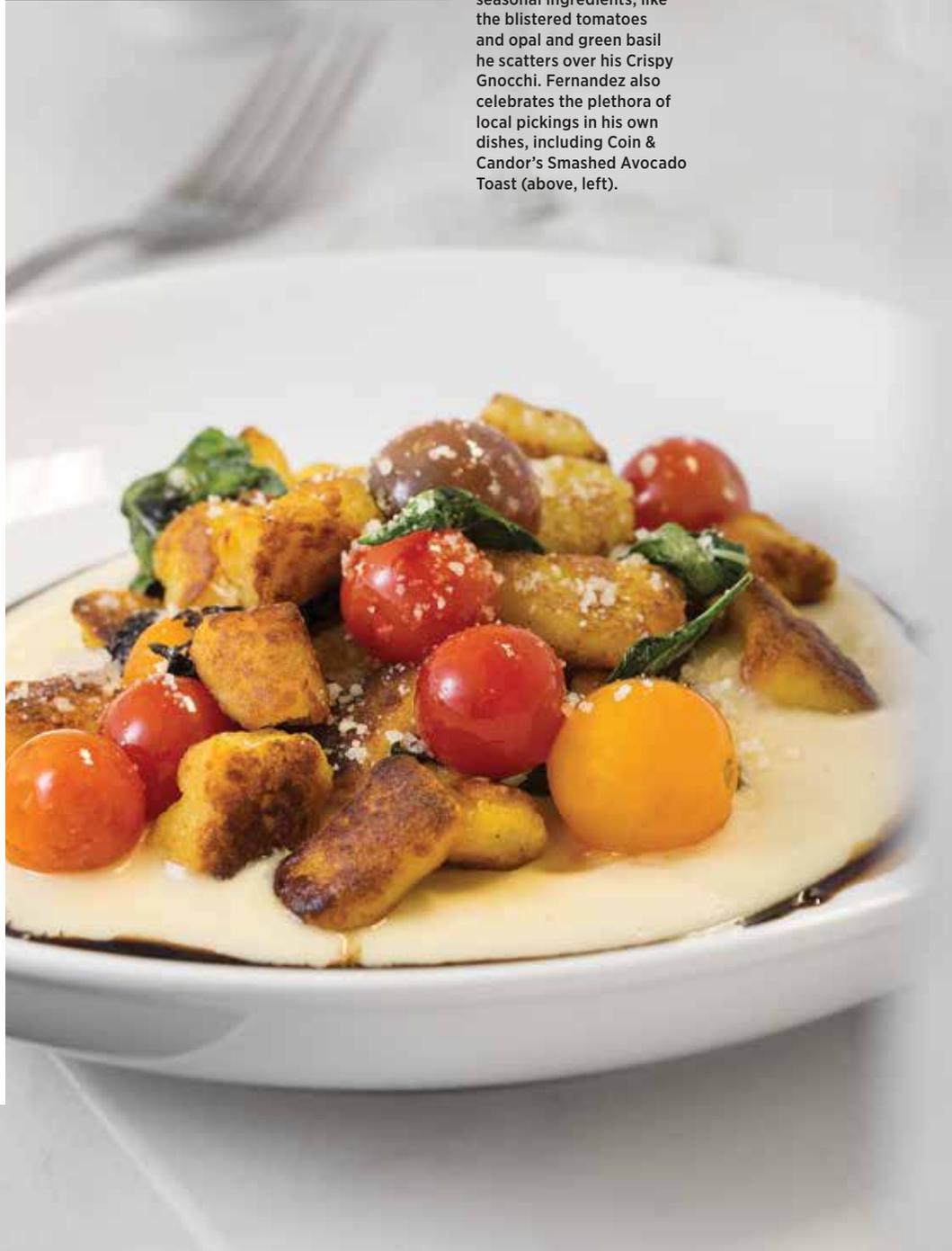
**What is your current go-to dish by another chef?** Lately I have been in Tyger Tyger [[tygertygersb.com](http://tygertygersb.com)] in Santa Barbara more than once. I love what Daniel Palaima has done in that space—best Crispy Chicken Wings and Crispy Brussels Sprouts.

**What other 805-area chef is doing particularly creative, interesting things with food?** Collin Crannell from Moody Roster [[moodyroosterwlv.com](http://moodyroosterwlv.com)] in Westlake Village is super creative in the way he prepares the dishes and incorporates seasonal ingredients into the mix.

**What 805-area ingredient has contributed the most to the elevation of your culinary creations?** From this particular area, so many: fresh avocados, strawberries, Santa Barbara spot prawns, pistachios, citrus, and the list continues.



Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village chef Jose Fernandez applauds Moody Rooster chef Collin Crannell's creativity with seasonal ingredients, like the blistered tomatoes and opal and green basil he scatters over his Crispy Gnocchi. Fernandez also celebrates the plethora of local pickings in his own dishes, including Coin & Candor's Smashed Avocado Toast (above, left).



Westlake Village Inn chef Lisa Biondi enjoys the seafood and vegetable-focused Spanish food of chef Peter Lee at Santa Barbara's Loquita, such as the Spanish octopus with black garlic aioli, potato, and pickled red onion (right).



### EXECUTIVE CHEF LISA BIONDI

Westlake Village Inn  
[westlakevillageinn.com](http://westlakevillageinn.com)

**What's trending on the 805 restaurant scene right now?** Trending in the 805 and the restaurant scene in general are regional foods that highlight a specific cuisine and serving more vegetable-centered items.

**Of your latest dishes, which are your favorites?** Mediterraneo's Roasted Cauliflower Bagna Cauda, which is roasted and bathed with a garlic anchovy sauce that has such umami-rich flavors. *Salatim*, because it offers a different, healthy way to start your meal with vegetables that are marinated and turned into dips and spreads, and our grilled Whole Branzino.

**What other 805-area chef is doing particularly creative, interesting things with food?** Executive chef Peter Lee at Loquita [[loquitasb.com](http://loquitasb.com)] in Santa Barbara is doing fantastic fresh Spanish small plates with a lot of seafood and vegetables.



### EXECUTIVE CHEF JUSTIN PICARD

Allegretto Vineyard Resort, Paso Robles  
[allegrettoresort.com](http://allegrettoresort.com)

**Of your latest dishes, which is your favorite?** An example of old made new is the Burgundy Braised Boneless Beef Short Ribs. I have rejuvenated and improved a perennial favorite. These were on the menu the entire five years [I was] at Roberts Restaurant & Wine Bar [now closed]. It's like reuniting with an old friend, old faithful. It starts off right, using prime grade steak, heavily marbled and thick-cut, lots of fresh herbs picked right here on the Allegretto property, fistfuls of toasted spices, gallons of burgundy, and three hours of slow cooking—and that's just the beginning.

Brian Terrizzi and his crew at Etto [[ettopastificio.com](http://ettopastificio.com)] pasta help to take this dish to the next level with their great pappardelle noodles, which I get fresh every few days. A luxurious sherry cream sauce with oak-roasted oyster and cremini mushrooms coats everything. Rustic, rough-chopped parsley, lemon, and green onion gremolata brighten the palate. The surprise for this dish, which I discovered while snacking in the kitchen late one night, is that the carrots used in the braising of the beef become so delicious. They get their own groove on and just melt in your mouth, so yes, they go on the dish, too.

**What is your current go-to dish by another chef?** *Laub ga*—Thai chicken salad—is my perennial favorite morning, noon, and night. Extra fish sauce, extra lime, extra cilantro, and brown rice. In Paso Robles, Basil Thai [805-238-9945] and Thai Classic [805-226-9032] always hook me up.

**What 805-area ingredients have contributed the most to the elevation of your culinary creations?** Tomatoes! Paso Robles tomatoes are the best I've ever had. Vanessa Harris from Heart of Paso Produce [[heartofpasoproduce.com](http://heartofpasoproduce.com)] and Zina Engel of Loo Loo Farms [[loolooofarms.com](http://loolooofarms.com)] have blessed me with an unlimited abundance of simply amazing fruit, when the season happens. Harris had plus or minus 180 tomato varieties growing. That means they start early and stay late in the season, and the diversity of color and flavor is mind-blowing. Also plum-basil balsamic vinegar and extra-virgin olive oil from Chaparral Gardens [[chaparralgardens.com](http://chaparralgardens.com)] in Atascadero, sea salt, basil, real mozzarella *di bufala*, and pink peppercorns.



Chef Justin Picard of Allegretto Vineyard Resort in Paso Robles praises the fresh wares of local pasta company Etto Pastificio and marvels at the wine country's tomatoes.



OCTOPUS DISH: ROB STARK PHOTOGRAPHY; PICARD: CHUCK PLACE; PASTA: SALVATORE L'CASTO; TOMATOES: ISTOCK.COM/VALENTINRUSSANOV



**CHEF DE CUISINE  
ANDREW FOSKEY**

Olivella at Ojai Valley Inn  
ojaivalleyinn.com

**What's trending on the 805 restaurant scene right now?** Simplicity. Looking around at what other chefs and restaurants are doing throughout Ventura County, I feel they all kind of echo this philosophy of simplicity, and that food doesn't need to be so far out of the box. It should just taste delicious and make diners feel warm and satisfied.

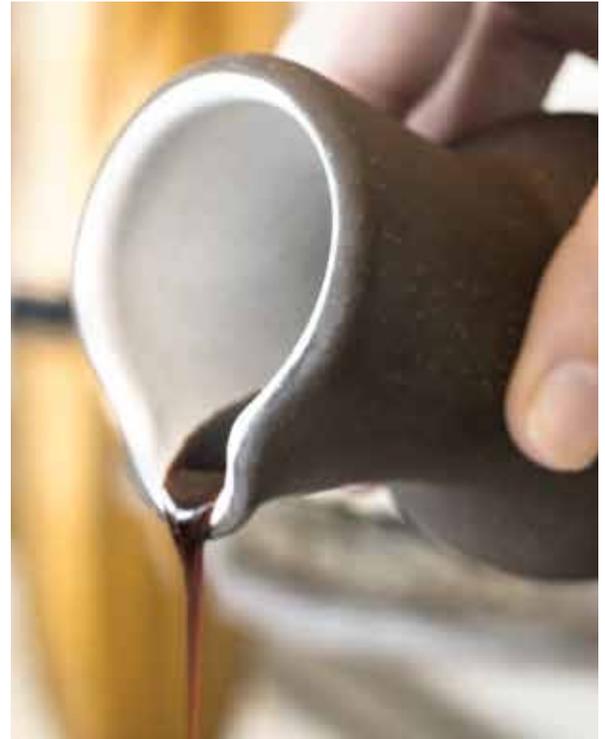
**Of your latest dishes, which is your favorite?** I do have a soft spot for our pan-roasted lamb loin. Beside the fact that it tastes yummy, what makes this dish special is the skill and patience required to execute it consistently. It all starts with the sauce, making a proper lamb jus, simmering it down with marsala, roasted lemons, aromatics, and proper seasoning. The sauce must be just right, balanced between sweet and savory, playing off the flavors of ground espresso seasoning on the lamb loin. Every component on the plate must be done with 100 percent thought and focus, from beginning to end. The

result showcases balanced flavors in what I would consider a very simple and restrained dish.

**What is your current go-to dish by another chef?** The Lamb Korma at The Taj Cafe [thetajcafeventura.com] in downtown Ventura is without a doubt my go-to dish. It is just simply delicious!

**What other 805-area chef is doing particularly creative, interesting things with food?** What Ted and Yong Kim of Seoul Sausage Co. [seoulsausage.com] are doing at The Annex in the Collection at RiverPark in Oxnard is some of the most thoughtful and creative food in the county. It is flat-out soul-satisfying and delicious.

**What 805-area ingredient has contributed the most to the elevation of your culinary creations?** The largest contribution that the local farming community has provided us at Olivella is the bounty of fruits that are being showcased year-round. Whether it's persimmons, pixies, lemons, limes, strawberries, or melons, they all give us an opportunity to elevate our food and add unique flavors and textures. ♦



Of the menu items he has developed most recently, chef Andrew Foskey of Ojai Valley Inn's Olivella says he favors his pan-roasted lamb loin served with a marsala lamb jus.

