
NOTABLE EDIBLES

BY NANCY MICHALI



EL PESCADOR

A new Mexican restaurant has opened in Fillmore and it's worth the drive. Now open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, or just to sit at the bar and enjoy a margarita and a bite, El Pescador is located on the western edge of the city. The restaurant features a large menu, but their true specialties are found in the centerfold pages—seafood (mariscos) and fish (pescados) dishes—that will transport you from Fillmore to sitting at a seafood café along the Mexican coast.

This fish and seafood section of the menu is divided by their offerings: shrimp, red snapper, pollock fillet and lobster dishes along with salads, cocktails and soups that combine all of these plus more. Salads and cocktails include a mix of abalone, octopus, shrimp and oysters, while seafood soups feature seafood, shrimp, fish and crab legs.

Shrimp can be grilled, broiled, breaded or wrapped in bacon; or served with hot chilies, raw and marinated with lemon juice, with a Veracruz sauce (a tasty combination of green olives, green peppers and onions), with onion rings, jalapeños and cucumber; or cooked in a light creamy red sauce and wrapped in tortillas as enchiladas. Red snapper can be fried with or without a Veracruz sauce, marinated in a garlic sauce or topped with a ranch-style sauce. You get the idea.

The tortilla chips and homemade hot sauce—and it is hot—arrive almost immediately; service is friendly, quick and professional. After you've pored over the menu and made your decision, your reward is a delicious bowl of soup reflecting what you have ordered—soup with shrimp to go with the shrimp enchiladas or meatball soup to accompany the carne asada tostada.

We sampled three dishes and found them to be tasty and satisfying, while adding some new flavors to our taste repertoire. We tried the shrimp sampler with three different presentations: the large butterfly shrimp wrapped in bacon (gone in 60 seconds), breaded (poor shrimp) and marinated in garlic sauce (flavor heaven). The shrimp enchiladas in a light creamy red sauce were scrumptious.

When we ordered the red snapper fried and served in Veracruz sauce, we were informed that there was no fresh red snapper and the fish of the day was tilapia. Sounded good to us. What a presentation! The whole fish was grilled and served on a bed of the tasty Veracruz sauce with additional sauce drizzled on the top. A bit intimidating, but we dug right in using our fingers to tear pieces of the hot fish, dip them in the sauce and wrap it all together in the fresh flour tortillas. The fish skin was crisp, the meat succulent and the sauce enhanced the fish flavor nicely. A truly sensual experience!

El Pescador is located at 1305 W. Ventura St., Fillmore; (805) 524-9999. For a great weekend day getaway, visit Fillmore's lovely historic downtown area, the historic trains, buy some local fruit and eat at El Pescador.

KNEAD

Need bread? Or tarts, cakes, cookies, bars or cheesecakes? Knead Baking Company, the new venture of Bobbi Corbin, pastry chef extraordinaire, provides them—tasty and beautifully presented. You can find Bobbi every Sunday at the Ojai Farmers' Market, where she offers seasonal goodies reflecting the changing availability of local products. Over the years, Bobbi has evolved from an architect to a pastry chef and combines the best of both worlds: lovely architectural structure and garnishing details and awesome, adventuresome flavors. Calling her pastry “precisely rustic,” she seeks to develop textured, layered pastry such as lightly frosting a cake so that you can still see the structure of the cake.

Bobbi worked her way through architectural school by working with Lydia Shire and Sara Moulton at the Harvest Restaurant, where they were creating new food in Harvard Square. Intrigued by food, she sat in on a class at the Cambridge School of Culinary Arts and was hooked. Bobbi's first summer internship was making pastry at the Four Seasons in Boston and she stayed. She still works part-time at the Four Seasons in Los Angeles under a pastry chef from Argentina because she loves to learn new flavors and techniques.

From the beginning of her food career, Bobbi knew she wanted to have her own food business and Knead represents her opportunity to do so by creating a new baking company after working for others. She is pleased that her daughter Rachel has joined her in this venture; she brings her own passion for local fruits, vegetables and nuts.

Bobbi chose the Ojai Farmers' Market as her starting point because she finds Ojai people receptive to new ideas and well-prepared food that uses local, seasonal ingredients. She enjoys interacting with her customers and loves the comments and well-deserved appreciation. Each week her farmers' market offerings are posted on her website—though the final results are always subject to the whim of the baker and the kitchen gods. A recent cookie sampling included her Chocolate Walnut Bars, Ginger Crisps and Sandwich Cookies—all were tasty with layers of flavors as well as being truly beautiful. So lovely that you could sit and appreciate them as works of art, but they were even better to eat!

Knead Baking Company products are available each Sunday at the Ojai Farmers' Market. For information visit www.kneadbakingcompany.com or call her at (805) 652-2136 to place an order.



CHARMAN'S REVENGE

Every Mexican fiesta, and even a daily meal, needs hot sauce. The local heat-filled offering is Charman's Revenge Habanero Pepper Sauce—the brainchild of Chris Sutton.

He grew up enjoying hot sauces and began a collection of local sauces from places he visited when traveling. But nothing satisfied his hot sauce taste buds, so he decided to make his own.

Chris grew up around food (his parents are owners of Sea Fresh); he liked to cook and had developed salsa recipes for the family. Habanero chiles are his favorite peppers, so he started there and began tinkering with the ingredients from the restaurant's sushi bar to develop his own sauce. The resulting hot sauce has a smooth, slightly tropical fruit, sweet flavor with strong heat.

Chris started making his own and friends requested him to make extra, and then friends of friends requested, and as the batches became bigger and bigger, someone said why not bottle and sell it. And the rest is history—he produces the hot sauce in small batches with his own bottling equipment so he can control the hot smooth flavor. His wife came up with the name—Charman's Revenge—and an artist friend developed the graphics.

Charman is an Ojai Valley legend widely believed to have started in 1948, when a large brush fire burned much of the valley and destroyed many homes, including an isolated cabin occupied by a father and a son. The legend says that the father was killed and the son badly burned and went mad fleeing to live in wilds of the Old Creek Road area. This tortured soul has been known to terrorize the locals, mainly teenagers, with his charred appearance ever since. And with five fire-roasted Habanero peppers in every bottle—the hot sauce uses the tagline “Charman's Revenge may become a reality.” A very tasty reality.

Look for future pepper sauces from this hot sauce microbrewery including a green hot sauce which will be a blend of green Thai, Jalapeño and Serrano chiles, resulting in a milder flavor with milder heat. Recipe testing is on going and Chris hopes to have in on the market in the next six months. He is also working on a Mole-Jalapeño hot sauce—chocolate with heat!

Charman's Revenge can be taste-tested during a meal at Sea Fresh, and is available for daily consumption or as a perfect gift from Sea Fresh, Rains, Westridge Market, Rainbow Bridge and Starr Market here in Ojai. If you are in Ventura, look for Charman's Revenge at Eric's Tackle and the Fisherman's Supply House.

Sea Fresh Sea Food is located at 533 E. Ojai Ave., Ojai; (805) 646-7747.



LA GLORIA DE OXNARD

When planning a Mexican fiesta, or any Latino cooking experience, your first stop should be La Gloria de Oxnard. This full-service Latino market is located on Oxnard Boulevard between Fourth and Fifth Streets in the historic downtown area.

Housed in a historic brick building constructed in 1925, La Gloria's interior feels like an old-time market with high wood-truss ceilings and wood floors, filled to bursting with colorful products from piñatas to fish to chilies. The market does not appear that large from the exterior, but once through the front doors you have entered another world that goes on and on and on.

Along with the market space there is a food area housing a wonderful-smelling bakery, tortilleria and several small restaurants offering a wide food selection, fruit drinks, ices and salsas. Once you have made the difficult decision on what to eat, there is an outdoor eating area with a glassed-in tribute to the Virgin Mary. La Gloria primarily serves the region's Latino population with food products, but it also houses a beauty salon; sells phones, jewelry and gifts; provides music, a locksmith, all types of insurance and help with the DMV.

What can you find? Fresh fruits and vegetables perfect for Latino recipes. Chiles galore! Fresh and dried chiles beyond your wildest culinary dreams—Serrano, Habanero, Mulato, Guerito, Pasilla, Cascabel, Puya, de árbol and Morita to mention a few. Spices, cooking products and teas from cornhusks and silk to dried flowers for making tea. A complete range

of fresh cheeses and Mexican creams along with canned and dried goods. And a meat and seafood counter that goes on and on, providing fresh meat from goat to pork, animal parts not typically available elsewhere, carne already marinated with herbs and spices, and a wide variety of freshly caught fish with some prepared with lime slices ready to grill. And friendly people behind the counter to answer your questions.

La Gloria de Oxnard is located at 430 S. Oxnard Blvd. in downtown Oxnard; (805) 486-8735.

END NOTES

National Coverage: The December issue of *Travel + Leisure* magazine features an article on a three-day escape to Ojai—"one of Southern California's prettiest escapes." The article features two local inns—the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa and Su Nido Inn—and four restaurants—Suzanne's, Azu, Movino and Ojai Café Emporium. Their "Best of Ojai" includes Ojai Olive Oil, Rains and Bart's. And for things to do, their list includes the farmers' market and Ojai Culinary Studio. Great to have national coverage highlighting Ojai!

New Lunch Option: The Ojai Coffee Roasting Company is making a delicious lunch—excellent sandwiches and salads. Don't miss the muffaletta sandwich made with Ken's homemade tapenade. Eat there or get it to go. 337 E. Ojai Ave., Ojai; (805) 646-4478.

A New Venue: Be sure and check out the beautiful setting, lovely things to buy for yourself and others, and the delicious, interesting breakfast, brunch and lunch menu at Vesta! This store/restaurant combo is relaxed and welcoming. With its lovely patio dining area behind the restaurant, this is a pleasant new spot where one can eat al fresco. The menu features seven different salads, soups, sandwiches and appetizers with an emphasis on fresh ingredients. 242 E. Ojai Ave. in the Arcade; (805) 646-2339

Nancy Michali, owner and principal instructor of the Ojai Culinary Studio, has more than 30 years of cooking experience along with professional training. She learned to prepare fresh local food from her mother, grandmothers and great-grandmother—all excellent cooks. Nancy honed her skills at the New School of Cooking in Los Angeles and Tante Marie's Cooking School in San Francisco (one of only three American cooking schools named by Gourmet magazine as among the world's 10 great cooking schools).