

COAST

A photograph of a beach at night. The ocean is on the left, and the sand is on the right. In the foreground and middle ground, hundreds of umbrellas are planted in the sand. Each umbrella is illuminated from within, creating a warm, glowing effect. The umbrellas are arranged in a somewhat regular pattern, receding into the distance. The overall mood is serene and artistic.

ORANGE
COUNTY

*Create &
Illuminate*

A Strong feeling

BY FRIER McCOLLISTER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RALPH PALUMBO

Is it the Côte d'Azur? Perhaps it's the Italian Riviera? Wait, could it be the Catalonia coast?

No, actually it's Laguna Beach. For some of us, Laguna's captivating views and atmosphere ineluctably conjure the corner of the Mediterranean where the cultures of France, Italy and Spain converge at the sea. Now we can sustain the daydream with a glass of rosé and the ocean breeze on the sun-washed patio of Ocean at Main, the first independent venture by local legend Chef Craig Strong.

For the last nine years, Strong presided over Studio at Montage Laguna Beach. Under Strong, Studio's tasting menus and dishes were both reliably delicious and artfully composed.

Partnered with general manager Dylan Cloughen, Strong boldly unveiled Ocean at Main just last month. With the intention of applying the chef's genius to a more accessible menu and an ambiance that fits neatly in the easy surf culture of the neighborhood, the opening signals a fresh wave of excitement for Laguna Beach diners.

Strong has lived in Laguna Beach for nine years since moving from Pasadena where he helmed the Michelin-starred restaurant at The Langham. He, his wife, Lissa, and their daughter Scarlet live eight minutes from the new restaurant. He knows his town. Having the opportunity to open his own operation as compared to working within a corporate hotel environment, he muses, "It's a different kind of work. What should we do? What makes it feel like we belong here?" He then answers his own question, "Make it good."

How good? We are graced with pressed organic chicken on a bed of black forbidden rice, carrot puree and sherry vinegar jus (presented by Strong with the hearty declaration, "I love chicken!").

Strong's classic French training, his apprenticeship in Barcelona and the mastery achieved at Studio are all in full evidence. When one has the urge to be transported to a sublime seaside idyll and an excellent meal, one can do no better than Laguna and Ocean at Main.

PRESSED ORGANIC CHICKEN

1 deboned chicken, leg and thigh
2 tbsp butter
Salt and pepper, to taste
Season the chicken with salt and pepper. Heat a pan, add butter and bring up to almost browning. Place the chicken in the pan, skin side down. Place a weight on top of chicken to keep it flat. When skin is nice and brown, flip and finish cooking.

SHERRY VINEGAR JUS

½ cup butter (1 stick)
2 ½ pounds chicken wings, chopped
½ cup sherry vinegar
5 cloves, garlic, cut in half
2 bay leaves
2 sprigs thyme
1 tbsp peppercorns
1 quart veal stock
2 cups chicken stock
2 tbsp lemon juice

Brown butter in large sauce pan. Add chicken and roast in butter until very brown. Deglaze with approximately ½ cup water a few times during roasting process to scrap up the brown bits, which add more flavor to sauce. Add vinegar and reduce by half. Add garlic, herbs, peppercorns and stocks. Simmer for about three hours on low heat, or cover and bake for two hours at 300° F. Strain and reduce by half to proper consistency. Finish with fresh lemon juice. Reserve remaining jus.

Decorate plate with carrot puree. Plate rice and add heated chicken and jus. Garnish with edible flowers.

Ocean at Main

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