

WESTERN GOURMET

On The Trail With John Mariani



By John Mariani

IN WHICH OUR WESTERN GOURMET SAMPLES THE FINE NEW FARE AT Encantado in Tesuque, New Mexico, revisits favorite eateries in nearby Santa Fe, gets seaside service in the Nayarit region of Mexico, and gives a good Pacific Northwest Riesling its due.

■ ENCANTADO AND ITS SANTA FE NEIGHBORS

By the time you read this I'm sure Encantado in Tesuque, New Mexico, will have developed into one of the West's finest resorts, complete with state-of-the-art spa, elegantly appointed guest casitas, and first-rate service. When I visited, none of that was up and running yet, but what was in place provided a preview of how beautiful and tasteful the resort would be. [*Ed note: Encantado opened last August; watch Wild West for a future story on the property.*]

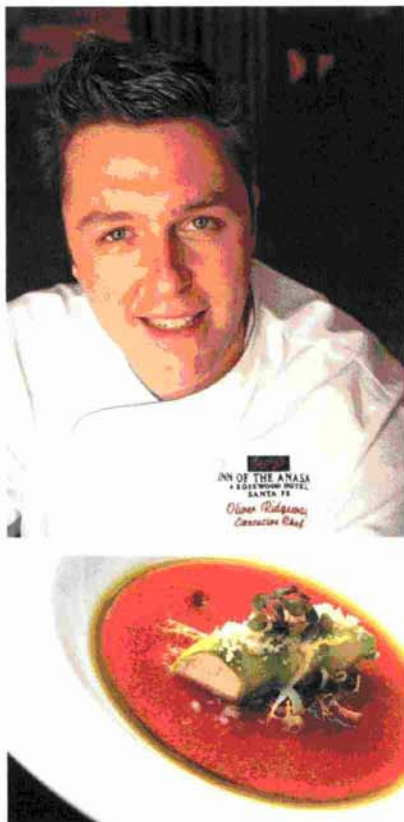
The Encantado's restaurant is named Terra—set within sight of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, it is abloom with wildflowers in springtime and possessed of glorious sunsets year-round. There is a lovely patio, a sleek, sexy bar—the margaritas are perfect—and a dining room done in rough-hewn stone, marble, tiles, and wood, all echoing the landscape and the desert architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West.

The chef at Terra is Charles Dale, who for many years was considered one of Aspen's finest and most innovative cuisiniers, at both Renaissance and Rustique. In Aspen his cuisine was geared to the Colorado mountain region and based in French classicism; here in New Mexico the cooking is more global, while drawing as much as possible from the region's food culture. Thus, you might begin with an heirloom-tomato salad with slices of homemade mozzarella and frisée lettuce—very simple, yet transcendent when made with the absolute perfect ingredients. And then you might follow with translucent ravioli stuffed with greens and graced with a pistachio pesto in a tomato broth. The food is not fussy; although Dale's delicious duck tamale comes with high-end foie gras, it is bathed in a Cherry Coke sauce. His "slow-cooked suckling pig" spends two days in a brine of Chinese five-spice powder and Spanish paprika, then simmers in lard to make a soft confit, which is shredded, heated with the



ABOVE: Terra at the Encantado Resort, Tesuque, New Mexico. **OPPOSITE** (clockwise from top left): Giant scallops with ricotta cheese and tomato confit raviolis in bouillabaisse broth at Café des Artistes Del Mar. Napoleon chocolate cake, crème à la vanille rosé, and mango caramel at Café des Artistes Del Mar. Roasted beets with coriander and goat cheese *crema* at Santa Fe's La Boca. Slow-cooked suckling pig confit with white corn pancakes, chipotle hoisin sauce, and serrano ham at Terra.

PHOTOGRAPHY: LA BOCA SANTA FE PHOTOGRAPHY BY KITTY LEAKEN, CAFÉ DES ARTISTES DEL MAR COURTESY HOTEL DES ARTISTES, TERRA AT ENCANTADO RESORT BY CLAY ELLIS PHOTOGRAPHY



CLOCKWISE (from top left): Oliver Ridgeway, chef at the Inn of the Anasazi in Santa Fe. Sea bass with pumpkin gnocchi and spiced nage at the Inn of the Anasazi. Dining room at the Café des Artistes Del Mar. Avocado cannelloni stuffed with goat cheese in gazpacho at the Inn of the Anasazi.

pork stock, placed on a rice pancake, and dressed with a salad of pickled jicama, chives, chipotle hoisin sauce, and a paper-thin slice of serrano ham—Peking pork Southwestern style.

Encantado is just 10 minutes from downtown Santa Fe, so on the nights you are not dining at Terra, consider some of the new culinary action going on in that historic City Different. There's a new chef—a Brit named Oliver Ridgeway—at the Inn of the Anasazi, where the decor still charms with its timbered adobe and folk art. Ridgeway, who has cooked his way around the world and was last at the tony Carlyle Hotel in New York, has given the inn a more international style with dishes like his mole-glazed veal medallions with white and green asparagus, Oregon morels, and garlic, as well as his Alaskan halibut with orange zucchini blossoms, maitake mushrooms, fava beans, spicy chorizo

sausage, and an emulsion made with a dash of Krug Champagne. And his take on avocado cannelloni pasta—stuffed with whipped goat's cheese and topped with shaved macadamia nuts and a tangy gazpacho—is a delight. To my mind, a lovely end to a sumptuous meal here, and one of a number of fine desserts, is a saffron crème brûlée with strawberry-papaya tartar and kiwi purée.

I am also very excited by the two-year-old storefront restaurant La Boca, where chef/owner James Campbell Caruso proves that *tapas* are not a flash in the pan but can make a whole meal. Start off with crunchy toasted country bread topped with white anchovies in olive oil. You can nibble on the flash-fried pimento peppers as you consider which of dozens of Latin American and Spanish wines to order. Then scoop up the *albondigas* meatballs in tomato sauce, or the cinnamon-scented

PHOTOGRAPHY: INN OF THE ANASAZI COURTESY ROSEWOOD HOTELS AND RESORTS



CLOCKWISE (from top left): James Campell Caruso, chef/owner at Santa Fe's La Boca. Seared grill tuna over seafood chop suey at Café des Artistes Del Mar in Punta de Mita. Los Xitomates in Puerto Vallarta. Mushrooms stuffed with *cuiltlachoche* at Los Xitomates.

jumbo shrimp with blood sausage and a passion-fruit *crema*. Top off the memorable meal with a peaceful night back at your enchanting casita at Encantado.

ENCANTADO—198 State Road 592, Tesuque, New Mexico. (877) 262-4666 [resort], (505) 946-5800 [Terra]; www.encantado-resort.com.

INN OF THE ANASAZI—113 Washington Ave., Santa Fe, New Mexico. (505) 988-3030; www.innoftheanasazi.com.

LA BOCA—72 W. Marcy St., Santa Fe. (505) 982-3433; www.labocasantafe.com.

■ UP THE COAST OF MEXICO THROUGH NAYARIT

As we drove north from Puerto Vallarta into the region of Nayarit, passing small towns, new condo developments, and surfers' paradises, my wife surveyed the territory and remarked, "Why is it that everything in Mexico looks three-quarters built?"

The simple reason is because there is so *much* building going on, not least along seaside Nayarit, where the Four Seasons put a property in Punta de Mita several years ago that has spurred others to do so and made the prospect of enjoying a fine meal more and more of a sure thing.

You can still get regional Mexican food

just about anywhere—although most of Puerto Vallarta now seems taken over by Pizza Hut and KFC. But at the linen-draped patio of the Café des Artistes Del Mar in the Hotel des Artistes in Punta de Mita, overlooking the gorgeous Banderas Bay, chef Gerardo Sandoval has translated Mexican food culture in a contemporary menu of dishes like *gazpacho moderno*, a beautiful cold soup of tomatoes and pimientos with a spoonful of cucumber *gelée*, a dice of alligator pear, and a lacing of aged vinegar. He also does Mexican ceviches—*tiritas de pescado*—which include a translucent lime-cooked fish marinated in coconut milk with a bite of chiles and cilantro, served with sweet plantain chips.

At the Hotel Garza Canela in San Blas, we had a delightful evening and ate heartily at El Delfin, where chef Betty Vázquez, who studied with San Sebastián's famous José-Mari Arzak, does a sprightly *sopa de mariscos*—a seafood broth tingling with two chiles, coconut, and parsley. She stuffs plump chicken breasts with sweet dates and prunes, then drizzles them with orange-and-ancho-chile sauce. For dessert there was a chile-spiked chocolate cake and a flan

PHOTOGRAPHY: LA BOCA SANTA FE PHOTOGRAPHY BY KITTY LEAKEN, CAFE DES ARTISTES DEL MAR COURTESY HOTEL DES ARTISTES

custard nestled in apples sautéed with five Mexican spices.

For simple fresh seafood fare done with unstinting care, **La Laguna Tino's** in Nuevo Vallarta is a charmer. Sit under a thatched roof at green-and-yellow-topped wooden tables by the lagoon, and enjoy an array of ceviches, crisp shrimp tacos, and wonderful fish broiled in garlic butter, all accompanied by an ice-cold Negro Modelo beer.

If you do enter into the tourist maelstrom of Puerto Vallarta, one of the best, least pretentious restaurants for fine food is **Los Xitomates**. It's not on the water but tucked in a block or so, and it's well-known for its margaritas and terrific signature dishes like Chihuahua-style rib-eye with sautéed oyster mushrooms, red snapper *sarandeado*-style with roasted pineapple, shrimp in Oaxaca *pasilla chile adobo*, and tender octopus in three chiles.

CAFÉ DES ARTISTES DEL MAR—in the Hotel des Artistes. Avenida el Anclote #5, Punta de Mita. (866) 628-2693.

EL DELFIN—in the Hotel Garza Canela. Paredes #106 Sur, San Blas. 011-52-323-28-50112.

LA LAGUNA TINO'S—Km. 1.2's second entrance to Nueva Vallarta, Nueva Vallarta. 011-52-322-297-0221; www.tinosvallarta.com.

LOS XITOMATES—Morelos 601, Puerto Vallarta. 011-52-322-222-9434; www.losxitomates.com.

■ IS RIESLING THE GREAT GRAPE OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST?

When most people think of Riesling wines—if they think about them at all—the image of a cheap semisweet or sour wine in a tall, skinny green bottle may well come to mind from those days when such Rieslings from Germany and California were sold and packaged that way, to be drunk with pieces of Gouda cheese and sculpted radishes on the patio.

Yet the Riesling grape is a very noble varietal in Europe—the basis for the magnificent dessert wines of the Rhine Valley and



the aromatic white table wines of Alsace. Now, however, some of the best Rieslings in the world are coming out of the Pacific Northwest, where the cooler climates are ideal for the varietal.

Indeed, Washington State's Eroica, made by Chateau Ste. Michelle, is considered one of the finest of American wines, and labels like Washington's Long Shadow; Oregon's Elk Cove, Ponzi, Viento, and Argyle; and Idaho's Ste. Chappelle are prize winners at national judgments every year. I love the A to Z Oregon Riesling, whose label reads "Aristocratic Wines at Democratic Prices" (about \$13). The 2006 was A to Z's first release and shows excellent promise for the varietal, revealing flinty slate mineral flavors of "wet stones," along with an enchanting, true Riesling floral aroma. It will certainly mature for the next several years.



Riesling sales are actually up 54 percent in the States the past three years. But the persistent problem for consumers is that there are too many styles—ice wine, late-harvest dessert wines, semisweet, and bone dry. At the annual international Riesling Rendezvous at Chateau Ste. Michelle last July, attended by 70 producers, Jim Trezise, president of the International Riesling Foundation, announced that more than 30 producers have decided to put a taste scale on their bottlings—from dry to sweet. That's going to be a big help.

A good Riesling is a beautiful wine, with bright tartaric acid levels that keep the wine sharp, and it picks up the specific minerality of its *terroir*. Riesling vines are very hardy and resist frost well but cannot bear intense heat, which makes the wines flat-tasting and one-dimensional. Dry and semi-dry Rieslings are increasingly versatile with Pacific Rim food, especially salmon teriyaki, Japanese glazed eel, and spicy Indian food. The elixirlike sweet dessert Rieslings are another story for when the weather gets cool, the fireplace is lighted, and chestnuts pop in the pan. Which is right about now, yes?