

Wine & Dine / Summer Berries

Berry Tasty

ENJOY THE FLAVORS OF SUMMER WITH THESE LOCAL DISHES, ALL OF WHICH ARE RIPE WITH VIBRANT FRUIT THAT'S SO BOUNTIFUL THIS SEASON.

By ASHLEY RYAN



The Raspberry Beret cocktail at The Drake, with a citrus-infused smoke bubble on top

From juicy strawberries and ruby red raspberries to plump blueberries, few things scream summer like fresh, flavor-packed berries. Elsewhere, you might pick them off the vine and pop them in your mouth before a relaxing day on the river. But in Southern California—where wild-grown produce and open natural spaces are a little more sparse—the best way to enjoy the flavors of summer is by dining at a local restaurant.

Laguna eateries are embracing these seasonal flavors with dishes ranging from seafood plates, bowls and salads to fruity cocktails, ensuring that fresh berries are found all over town.

THE DRAKE

Named for the Prince song “Raspberry Beret,” this unique, fruit-forward cocktail is the perfect complement to any dish on the menu. “Like the song, it captures the essence of summer,” says Matthew Timmes, director

of operations at The Drake restaurant and music venue. “It is ... [an] eye-catcher—ethereal and mysterious—that ends with a true refreshing, light ... flavor.” Ketel One Citroen vodka, Cointreau orange liqueur, lemon juice and fresh raspberry puree are placed into a shaker with ice, mixed, then strained into a martini glass. Perhaps the most interesting element is the citrus-infused smoke bubble placed atop the drink, which elevates the flavor of the cocktail. (949-376-1000; thedrakelaguna.com)

SARAH KING PHOTOGRAPHY



Clockwise from top left: mixed berry risotto at Maro Wood Grill; balsamic salmon on spinach with raspberry vinaigrette and strawberries at The Cliff; peaches and burrata with strawberry pesto at Ahba; the Super Food Bowl, which incorporates raw blueberries, at Mosaic Bar & Grille

THE CLIFF

Seafood lovers looking for delicious berry dishes will rejoice at the flavors and colors present in the balsamic salmon dish at The Cliff. “The dish is light and refreshing, and pairs perfectly with the view,” says James Brice, director of culinary operations at The Cliff. The North Atlantic salmon filet is lightly grilled and glazed with a balsamic reduction before being plated atop a bed of spinach, feta cheese and candied pecans in a raspberry vinaigrette. Strawberries line the edge of the bowl, making for a stunning presentation. “They are the perfect accompaniment with the other flavors of the dish,” Brice says. “They are delicious and beautiful right now. California loves its fresh fruit.” (949-494-1956; thecliffrestaurant.com)

MARO WOOD GRILL

A light, refreshing alternative to the heavier dishes on the menu, the mixed berry risotto at Maro Wood Grill is extremely versatile and can be enjoyed as an entree or appetizer. To make the dish, chefs at the Argentinean bistro saute diced onions in butter before adding Arborio rice, white wine and hot vegetable broth to the pan. After the mixture cooks for a while,

strawberries, blueberries and raspberries are folded in so that the berry juice soaks into the rice. The dish is finished with Parmesan cheese, which gives it a creamier texture, and a mint leaf garnish. “The decision to incorporate mixed berries in this dish was driven by their natural sweetness and vibrant colors, which add a refreshing and summery twist to the traditional risotto,” says Hristo Fiziev, co-owner of Maro Wood Grill. “The berries also provide a nice balance to the richness of the rice and cheese.” (949-793-4044; marowoodgrill.com)

MOSAIC BAR & GRILLE

For a simple tossed salad that offers myriad health benefits, visit Montage Laguna Beach, where the poolside Mosaic Bar & Grille serves up the Super Food Bowl. This health-conscious dish, created by Executive Chef David Serus, helps boost energy levels while packing your body full of nutrients. Baby kale, oven-roasted golden beets and heirloom cauliflower are tossed in a goji berry vinaigrette then topped with toasted pistachios, raw blueberries and fresh goat cheese. “Blueberries are ... low in calories and high in nutrients, which makes a great source of vitamins that help protect the

body. They also taste delicious, especially when in season,” Serus says. “Goji berries are also a very powerful source of antioxidants. I thought it would add good flavor and a pop of color.” Salmon, shrimp or chicken can be added to the dish. (949-715-6132; montagehotels.com)

AHBA

For a unique presentation of berries, try Ahba's peaches and burrata dish. “Peaches and other stone fruits have such a limited season,” says Ahba chef Gage LaMetterey, “and we try our best to honor that by sourcing them the best we can.” Hand-selected each day at a farmers market and grown by Sunny Cal Farms in Central California, the juicy fruit blends perfectly with the flavor of a special strawberry pesto sauce. The berries are incorporated—along with arugula, basil, pine nuts, lemon juice and zest, and pickled shallots—to create a sauce that offers a light flavor inspired by the season. The pesto accompanies fresh peaches, burrata cheese and Aleppo pepper brown butter. “The strawberries ... add more sweetness to the pesto to complement the peppery arugula,” LaMetterey says. This plate's freshness makes it the perfect summer appetizer. (949-549-4556; eatahba.com) ■