

# Wine & Dine / Wings

## Winning Wings

CRISPED TO PERFECTION AND SLATHERED IN UNIQUE SAUCES, DRUMETTES IN LAGUNA ARE FINGER-LICKING GOOD.

By ASHLEY RYAN



Left: Skyloft's smoked wings; above: Flavors for wings at Finney's Crafthouse range from mango habanero to yuzu Buffalo.

**F**ried chicken wings are a quintessential American classic, served at barbecues and on menus across the country. But local chefs are putting their own spin on them, with Laguna Beach restaurants serving up unique alternatives to traditional hot wings.

"Everyone gets wings—[they're] sort of a casual comfort food," says Jared Cook, executive chef-partner at Sapphire, Cellar-Craft-Cook. "They're fun to eat ... [and] a great way to start a meal or have at the

bar as a snack." From spicy yuzu buffalo to crispy duck varieties, it's not hard to find flavorful options to entice your taste buds all around this coastal town.

### SKYLOFT

For some of the best barbecue in town, turn to Skyloft. Using bone-in wings for added flavor, they are smoked fresh each day, resting in the smoker with applewood for about two hours. "Our wings provide the experience of 'slow and low' cooked meat in

a quick bite," says Angel Velazquez, Skyloft's head chef. Once smoked, the restaurant finishes them with a blend of Creole and Cajun spices as well as the diner's choice of house-made barbecue or Buffalo sauce. "Chicken wings are the perfect appetizer to share while you catch the game with friends in our downstairs loft," Velazquez adds. Available as an appetizer or as part of the build-your-own barbecue plate, you can also find them on the daily happy hour menu. (949-715-1550; skyloftoc.com)

### FINNEY'S CRAFTHOUSE

There's a whole section on the Finney's Crafthouse menu devoted to hot wings, making it the place to go if you're looking for some heat. You can choose from flavors like chipotle barbecue, mango habanero or Cajun 7-Spice, but don't sleep on the tangy yuzu



Left: Mozambique utilizes peri-peri sauce for its wings. Top right: Sapphire, Cellar-Craft-Cook trades chicken for duck to make its crispy Meyer lemon and honey wings. Bottom right: zpizza's wings, which are offered with sauces from organic basil pesto to spicy Korean barbecue



Buffalo wings. "The yuzu buffalo wings are a twist ... [on] a national favorite and a re-creation of a hot sauce that our founder brought back from Singapore ... for me to try," says Eric Bosrau, Finney's executive chef. "I fell in love with the flavor profile." Choose between boneless or bone-in wings (with a mixture of drumettes and flats), which are brined for 24 hours before coated in a gluten-free batter that stays crispy but still soaks up the house-made sauces well for a shareable snack or an easy meal for one. (949-484-8140; finneycrafthouse.com)

### MOZAMBIQUE

Find one of the most unique varieties in town at Mozambique, where South African-inspired fare populates the menu. As such, the eatery's chicken wings have their own cultural twist. First seasoned and marinated for six hours, Velazquez, also the head chef at Mozambique, then bakes them to seal in moisture before frying them to crispy perfection. "We use Mozambique Spice Co. peri-peri sauce, made with bird's eye chile pepper," Velazquez notes. "It's got a

unique flavor. ... Peri-peri sauce originated in Mozambique and is featured on our most popular dishes, including peri-peri prawns and peri-peri chicken pops and, of course, the wings." Easy to share, these bone-in wings are available on the daily happy hour menu. (949-715-7777; mozambiqueoc.com)

### SAPPHIRE, CELLAR-CRAFT-COOK

While many of the restaurants in town stick purely to chicken, Sapphire, Cellar-Craft-Cook specializes in another type of poultry with one of its signature dishes: crispy Meyer lemon and honey duck wings. After Cook ordered whole ducks and took out the breasts for an entree he was creating, he was left with a pile of wings, which triggered the idea and led him to experiment with a wing appetizer. Since duck is more tender than chicken and has a more earthy taste, he thought it might be a fun alternative to traditional wings. Now a favorite amongst locals, they are inspired by duck a l'orange, with sweet citrus that blends perfectly with the floral honey. Cooked confit to give them a fall-off-the-bone texture,

they're then flash fried to add a crunch to the exterior. Tossed in a Thai chile paste and freshly chopped chives, these are a mainstay of the Sapphire menu. (949-715-9888; sapphirelagunabeach.com)

### ZPIZZA

Pizza and wings go hand in hand, and you'll find some of the plumpest at zpizza in south Laguna. "When we started to sell wings 10 years ago and it was the fad, there were hardly any wings available except for extra large, so we ... have used them ever since," explains zpizza founder Sid Fanarof. "Our customers seem to enjoy that they are more meaty." Instead of being fried, zwings are roasted at 600 degrees in a stone pizza oven. Select a dressing for your wings: medium-hot Buffalo, sweet-and-savory barbecue, organic basil pesto, sweet-and-spicy Korean barbecue or tangy lemon pepper dry rub. Each one, Fanarof notes, pairs perfectly with the eatery's signature pizzas and a glass of beer. (949-499-4949; zpizza.com) ■

LEFT: SHARON WILLIAMS; RIGHT: COURTESY OF FINNEY'S CRAFTHOUSE

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: JON STEINGARD; COURTESY OF SAPPHIRE, CELLAR-CRAFT-COOK