

WINNER

BEST CITY
MAGAZINE

WESTERN PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION 2012

LAGUNA BEACH

SEPTEMBER 2012 LAGUNABEACHMAGAZINE.COM

Magazine



EAT + DRINK ISSUE

KITCHEN INK

LAGUNA CHEFS REVEAL
THEIR TATTOOS

FRONT BURNER

TOP FOOD & DRINK TRENDS

TALES FROM THE DIRTY BIRD

SANDPIPER CELEBRATES
70 YEARS

CHEERS!

THE HOTTEST HAPPY
HOURS IN TOWN

CHEFS JOHN HERNDON,
RYAN ADAMS AND
ABEL VARGAS IV

PLUS

TASTY
BREAKFASTS

LAGUNATICS
AND LAUGHTER

SCUBA DIVING

KAUAI GETAWAY



GOURMET INK

LOCAL CHEFS TAKE THEIR CREATIVITY BEYOND THE PLATE, EXPLAINING THE INSPIRATION BEHIND THEIR PERSONALIZED BODY ART.

By Debbie Lavdas | Photos by Jody Tiongco

IN THE OLD DAYS, THE SAYING WAS, “NEVER TRUST A SKINNY CHEF.” Now an un-inked chef may be the one in question. Have you noticed how the majority of chefs in town, from Umami Burger to The Beach House, seem to be tattooed? Sneak a peek in any gourmet kitchen, and you’ll likely see a head chef’s full sleeve of tattoos as meticulously done up as his beautifully plated cuisine. So are chef tats now as accepted as a badass Anthony Bourdain getting his own show on CNN? Are these culinary artists simply hungry for more creative canvasses? Perhaps it’s all just part of the new rock star chef persona? “Chefs, in general, are expressive in the dishes they create,” Chef Ryan Adams of Three Seventy Common Kitchen + Drink says. “This is another form of expression.”

Chef Abel Vargas IV of Katsuya by Stark says his ink is indeed art. “I took images from Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. Their work represented their forward thinking and nonstop work ethic.”

Other chefs describe how their tattoos point to a kind of inner pirate lifestyle: cut-up, burned, tattered, little glory and lots of moving around. “We’re like the head of the ship,” says chef John Herndon of Umami Burger. “We work really hard for our art, but most chefs are stuck back in the kitchen and don’t get to experience guest reactions. Tattoos create individualism. We crave that kind of attention and notoriety.”

Different slants, different chefs and a whole lot of ink—here, we got some insight from eight of our skin-scribed chefs.







COURTESY OF THREE SEVENTY COMMON

CHEF JOHN HERNDON UMAMI RESTAURANT GROUP

“Tattoos almost go with the culture around here,” says chef John of the Umami Restaurant Group, which recently opened the Laguna Beach location of Umami Burger.

“Chefs speak through our food and our body, so tattoos are another way we can stand out and make our art known,” he says. John’s tattoos are sushi-cut style (three-quarters in length). Interestingly, he points out that in Japan, the only jobs the Yakuza (criminals and social misfits) could get were chef jobs since their full-body tattoos stopped where a chef’s coat rolled up.

All of his tattoos have stories behind them. “I have this dragon that represents perseverance, and this phoenix represents rebirth and rising from the ashes. Between them, it’s inspiration to keep trying no matter what,” he says. “You can’t let the world get you down. Perfection is never achieved, but always hoped for.”



CHEF RYAN ADAMS THREE SEVENTY COMMON KITCHEN + DRINK

You won’t see the Weber grill tattoo on his chest, but you’ll see his sleeves of tats as he works in his black, double-breasted, short sleeve chef jacket in his open kitchen.

Ryan Adams, a graduate of California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, honed his skills at various restaurants in Chicago and New York and is now the chef and owner of Three Seventy Common. Want to get him to smile? Ask him about his tattoos; he lights up like his Weber that’s flame-grilling a steak. “This is one of my favorite tattoos. It was inspired by a friend’s dad who said, ‘Every man needs a Weber Kettle. I now have a Weber for life,’” Ryan says. His latest ink? “I was inspired by a picture out of a chef Martin Picard cookbook of a one-eyed, one-legged pig dressed in 18th century garb drinking a beer. When I saw it, I knew I had to get that tattooed on one of my forearms.” Picard’s restaurant, named Au Pied de Cochon, means “the pig’s foot.”

Ryan also dishes on a tattoo on his leg that a friend freehanded. It depicts a giant blue, naked, devil-esque woman with a chef’s knife and a chef’s hat. “I’m not sure where his inspiration came from, but we’ve nicknamed it Chef Death,” he says. He says collecting food-related tattoos shows off what chefs are passionate about.

CHEF AMAR SANTANA BROADWAY BY AMAR SANTANA

Chef Amar Santana has one pig tattoo on his back, and he employs many full-sleeve inked chefs in his kitchen. He plans to get more tattoos and has been thinking lately about getting an apple on one arm and an orange on the other. “The apple for New York, the orange for Orange County—two places that have meant a lot in my career,” Amar says.

“Chefs are very proud of what they do, so they want to show it in ink form. About 10 years ago, chefs used to cover their tattoos before going to talk with a guest in the dining room, and it was kind of a big deal, but these days, it’s about an art and a passion for cooking, and chefs really want to show them,” he says.

Oh, and why the one pig tattoo? “It was my last day at Aureole (Charlie Palmer’s flagship in New York, where Amar got his start), back in New York, the kitchen staff gave me a gift certificate to a tattoo shop and a picture of a pig. I went to the tattoo place and got it done the same day,” Amar says. If you dine at Broadway by Amar Santana, you’ll find plenty of pork on the menu.





When delicious, freshly prepared Turkish and Mediterranean cuisine is on your mind, the family owned and operated GG's Bistro is the place to go. The restaurant offers cozy indoor and patio dining in a convenient location on Coast Highway. The patio is great for people-watching while also enjoying an intimate dining experience. In colder months, the bistro offers blankets and heaters, making GG's the ultimate dining experience year-round.

The extensive menu includes Turkish, Greek, Italian and other Mediterranean-style dishes. All sauces and recipes are prepared in-house, resulting in an authentic and fresh dining experience.

For a taste of Turkey, try the meze platter (Turkish for appetizer), featuring a selection of authentic Turkish foods including börek, a pastry roll filled with feta cheese and parsley, and pilaki, lima beans cooked with carrots, tomatoes and onions and served chilled. The array of appetizers on one plate makes it fun and easy to share, and provides an overview of Turkish foods.

Popular Turkish entrees include Alexander Kebab, thinly sliced roast beef topped with yogurt and a crushed tomato sauce and served on pita bread; Ali Nazik, charbroiled beef served on eggplant puree; and shish kabobs with shrimp, lamb, chicken or beef. Italian pastas, seafood and a host of other dishes are available to satisfy a variety of palates. The lunch menu includes pita sandwiches, Panini sandwiches, bistro burgers and more. (For the younger set, GG's Bistro offers a children's menu featuring kid-friendly foods like hamburgers, chicken fingers and spaghetti.)

Turkish coffee—similar to espresso, except the grinds stay in the coffee, and served in a silver cup—is a wonderful end to a delicious GG's Bistro meal. For a less intense after-dinner drink, try the traditional Turkish tea.

For sipping before, during or after (or without) any meal, GG's offers an assortment of wine and cocktails. Happy hour takes place from 4 to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday; enjoy alcoholic beverages and small plates for \$5 each. Another special night at the bistro is Thursday, when Laguna locals receive 20 percent off their dinner.

Starting in October (and running through April), live music returns to GG's. Every Wednesday is jazz night and some Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays will also feature music. Once a month, live Turkish music will be played.

In addition to providing a delicious and comfortable dining experience, GG's Bistro provides catering service. Popular dishes from the regular menu are included on the catering menu.

GG's Bistro is open daily for lunch and dinner. Breakfast is served on Sunday's only. The restaurant is also dog-friendly. Your best friend is welcome to dine with you on the outdoor patio.





CHEF STEVE WAN
THE RITZ-CARLTON, LAGUNA NIGUEL

Chef Tournant Steve Wan works in all areas of the kitchen at The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel. He's also a commissioned graffiti muralist for the City of Los Angeles and has worked with some of the most progressive and well-known LA-based muralists.

"Whether on a plate, canvas, wall or expressed on my body, I love to express my creativity," Steve explains.

He proudly has his last name tattooed in graffiti-style lettering across his back and says it points to his Chinese heritage and love of graffiti art culture. "Guests never see my tattoo, and I kind of like that," Steve says. More tats are on the front burner too with his plans to soon add flames and a sauté pan on his back to represent his passion for cooking. Steve and an artist friend plan to create the culinary tattoo as they go along.



CHEF MICHAEL INGINO
THE DECK AND THE BEACH HOUSE

Born and raised in New York, chef Michael Ingino is a graduate of The New York Restaurant School, now known as The Art Institute of New York City. He wears his heart, and art, on his sleeve with his tattoo of the twin towers and the letters "NY" above the ashes. "I got it two years ago because my roots are in New York, and I lost a very good friend in 9/11," he says.

Walk in The Deck or The Beach House while he's working, and you'll see his art on display. "I don't cover them up. They're a good talking piece. People always tend to ask if I'm from New York."

Michael also has a tattoo of Cantonese letters that say "chef." "Why do we get tattoos? Because we're all crazy ... kidding," he jokes of those inked in his business. "Chefs are artists and tattoos are art."



CHEF LINDSAY SMITH-ROSALES
NIRVANA GRILLE

Her food is meant to invoke a feeling of harmony in mind, body and spirit, and chef Lindsay Smith-Rosales' American Indian sun god tattoo represents the need for rain to water the crops for food. It's on her lower back, so you may catch a glimpse if she's reaching down or wearing low-rise jeans. When asked about all the inked chefs, she says, "I think it's the adrenaline and the speed of the kitchen. The nature of our business leads to a more edgy individual, a risk taker, an adrenaline junky."

Lindsay got inked at 16. "A tattoo-artist friend had a studio in his garage, and so leaning over a weight bench, I had my tattoo placed on the small of my back," she says. "My father, an American Indian antiquities dealer in Santa Fe, N.M, had given me a pin as a young girl with the American Indian sun god." The tattoo was meant to be, she says.



CHEF ABEL VARGAS IV KATSUYA

“I started getting tattoos the second I turned 18 and haven’t looked back,” says heavily tattooed chef Abel Vargas of Katsuya. “To be a chef is not your average 9-to-5 job, and it’s definitely not for everyone. Tattoos say what we don’t need to say—that our job is rough, stressful, fun, fast, rewarding and painful, just like the ink that we have.” Abel says his ink is art, and it’s all about creativity. He talks about his many da Vinci and Michelangelo works on his left arm, explaining, “When I see religious artwork, I see something that has been well established, beautiful, tasteful and well known.” When asked how guests react, he explains, “It’s funny because they look at me, and then at my tattoos, and just carry on with the conversation as if it is normal. I think nowadays permanent ink on your body is much more accepted than before, when it was taboo. Tattoos are exactly like clothes, hair, makeup, heels, jewelry, cars, et cetera. They do not define you as a person but simply add to your personality.” LBM



Visit OCinSite.com to check out the video of the chefs and their tattoos.

SPONSORED SECTION



EAT, DRINK & BE MERRY!

“That’s our motto at Sundried Tomato American Bistro & Cafés,” says founder Rob Quest. “We strive to create a comfortable environment where people can come to have a great time with family and friends—and at a reasonable price, too!” In addition to Laguna Beach, there are locations in San Juan Capistrano and San Clemente.

Nestled in a cozy courtyard in the heart of downtown, the Laguna Beach location is complete with a bubbling fountain and is within walking distance of Main Beach, Pageant of the Masters and Festival of the Arts. It is a favorite of locals and tourists alike, boasting an intimate bar and dining room, as well as an expansive canine-friendly patio.

Executive Chef Robert Opelle brings his culinary expertise to all three locations, creating a cutting-edge menu of creative California cuisine made from the freshest ingredients that are organic whenever possible.

Customer favorite starters include blackened chicken spring rolls, oven roasted artichokes, the famous chopped salad and, of course, the signature Sundried Tomato soup.

Lunch and dinner specialties include shrimp scampi pasta, rack of lamb with blackberry sauce, Quest’s lamb cheeseburger and chipotle barbecue baby back ribs.

Happy hour is from 2 – 7 p.m. daily in the bar. Daily specials on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

SAUTEED SEAFOOD MEDLEY

Serves 2

- olive oil
- 2 jumbo shrimp
- 2 jumbo scallops
- 2 2-ounce pieces of salmon
- 2 2-ounce pieces of halibut, ahi or seabass
- 2 cloves chopped garlic
- 2 chopped shallots
- 2 tablespoons assorted herbs (thyme, dill, parsley)
- 1/3 cup white wine
- 1/3 cup chicken broth

- 8 ounces risotto
- 4 ounces beurre blanc
- 6 ounces julienned vegetables (carrots, zucchini, red bell peppers)
- 1 ounces micro greens

Method: In sauté pan, heat olive oil and add seafood, sauté until golden brown. Add chopped garlic, shallots and herbs, sauté until garlic and shallots are translucent, add wine and broth to pan and reduce slightly. In a separate pan, add small amount of olive oil and sauté vegetables. Add premade risotto and mix together and warm through. Place risotto/vegetable mixture in center of plate, stack seafood on top, spoon sauce over seafood, sprinkle with micro greens and drizzle beurre blanc on top.