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LIVING

The Restaurant Issue





WINE AND DINE IN SANTA BARBARA



Chef Travis Watson

March marks the beginning of spring produce season on the Central Coast, when stone fruit, like nectarines and pluots, and heirloom lettuces, such as the sweet red oak and rose-shaped Salanova, become abundant. “Spring and early summer months allow access to things that other places in the country don’t have,” says Travis Watson, executive chef at **Hotel Californian** in Santa

Barbara’s Funk Zone (hotelcalifornian.com, from \$700). Watson enjoys pairing ingredients like these in monthly winemaker dinners at the hotel’s Blackbird restaurant (from \$150/person).

During the events, winemakers discuss their inspiration, processes, and challenges and sit down to eat with guests. Watson studies tasting notes and works closely with the wineries to pair each sip with the perfect dish, but the hardest part about creating the four-course menu, he says, is narrowing down the options.

HAVE CHEESE WILL TRAVEL

Derived from the French word *racler*, meaning to scrape, *raclette* is the name for a cheese that, following Swiss tradition, is melted from a large piece and scraped onto other foods. But hungry patrons lining up at the **SLO Meltdown** (Instagram @SLO_meltdown) mobile food stand likely care less about the etymology than they do about the ooey gooey cheese that’s dripped onto the Central Coast cheesesteak sandwich brimming with Santa Maria tri-tip, and caramelized, pickled, and green onions.

Co-owners Jenny Thompson and Eric Fossett pack their cars and head



anywhere from Paso Robles to San Luis Obispo and Nipomo to set up their raclette melter on a six-foot table so that it’s eye level to diners, who scramble toward the wheel of cheese. “Once it starts rolling,” Thompson says of the melting cheese, “it’s like a river of love.” Other sandwiches on the menu are filled with garlic-thyme mushrooms, salami, or just plain cheese. Thompson posts the weekly schedule on Instagram, and the food stand is available for private parties.

ELEVATED CAMP CUISINE

Poe & Co. Folk Foods (folk-foods.com) gives new meaning to getting dishes like a black garlic ramen bowl with carrots, edamame, and nori—to go. Created by owners and married chefs Jamie and Jayson Poe, who are outdoor enthusiasts, the Santa Barbara catering company’s plant-based line of dehydrated and freeze-dried meals for the modern-day comfort camper launched in December.

“We didn’t want to compromise our two lifestyles,” says Jamie Poe, who has cooked at New York’s Union Square Cafe and Gramercy Tavern. “We wanted a foodie experience in the outdoors.” The meals, which are prepared simply by adding boiling water, have a two-year shelf life and are as useful for earthquake kits as they are for camping trips.



Coconut Chickpea Stew with basmati rice, cauliflower, and turmeric and Quinoa Sweet Potato Skillet with black beans, tomato, and chipotle are also available, and the couple plans to debut breakfast options at the end of year. The meals are sold on the website and at Campover home goods in Los Alamos.