



3 MINUTE READ

COSTA LIVING



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COSTA MAKES ITS DELICIOUS DEBUT AT MAR MONTE HOTEL

As a creative, culinary, and cultural hub, Santa Barbara is constantly exposed to new talent within our community. Despite its profound sense of loyalty to the long-standing institutions of the area, the Santa Barbara culinary scene is also known for rearing a handful of breakout stars yearly, the freshman class of our new mainstays. Consider this an official nomination of Costa Kitchen & Bar, the fresh Mediterranean concept opening at Mar Monte Hotel this spring, as the top of such a class.



Costa is where you take your cavalier friends when they announce they have tried all that Santa Barbara's dining has to offer; where you plan a grand cocktail party, just to hear the harmonizing of your closest acquaintances, praising your superior taste in both cuisine and ambiance. It is the place you suggest when meeting your boyfriend's parents for the first time, for its daring pairings, yet down-to-earth methodology. It is the bite and cocktail you want on your way home from work and it is the only place you could imagine entrusting with your best friend's milestone birthday party. Lemon-print wallpaper is a vehicle to Sicily, while velvet mustard club chairs ooze Californian panache. The space houses woodpaneled ceilings bookended by glossy white brick arches that allow the scents and songs of the kitchen to waft to every corner of the restaurant. With East Beach as the backdrop of this Italian time machine, Costa is all at once highly cultivated and charmingly laidback, contemporary, and nostalgic.

As cocktails arrive—an Italian mojito with lemon that successfully fools me into believing I am somewhere with my toes in the sand—I am told Chef Nathan Lingle will be sending out the spot’s standout dishes. My favorite words to hear. Naturally indecisive, and when it comes to food, aggressively so, I am relieved and elated. A spectrum of appetizers is laid before me, spanning the entirety of the rainbow and then some. Heirloom carrots of crimson, indigo, and gold are blanketed in a hearty drizzle of yogurt and sprinkled with pistachios, dill, and green olives. Yellowtail crudo with red chilis complements the creamy-sweet brine of the carrots, and sourdough pita triangles soothe the spice of the red chili with the help of three dips: eggplant tahini, butternut squash hummus, and red pepper hummus. A roasted snapper (eyes and tail intact) is set upon the table as appetizers are whisked away, the plates licked clean. Instead of cowering at the intimidating specimen, I cannot dig my fork in fast enough. After my palate bears witness to the meal’s first act, I am frantic for my next taste. Olives, often the star of coastal Italian cuisine, mingle seamlessly with salsa verde to put an American Riviera spin on the traditional dish. Squash blossoms stuffed with cashew cheese steal my heart, not in small part due to the chef’s heeding of my dairy-free preferences. Olive oil cake, apple tarte, and a plethora of homemade gelatos signal our meal is coming to a close, albeit a cacophonous one. In an act of divine intervention (or, rather, our astute waiter sensing my aversion to leaving), espresso martinis arrive to an appreciative applause.

The chef’s compliments are paid in the form of homemade macarons, bursting at their seams with fresh strawberry cream. The French delicacy realigns itself with Mediterranean values in its flavor profile, which bears a likeness to buttered sourdough with fresh strawberry jam. Martinis are polished off and cake crumbs are salvaged from empty plates as we successfully close down Costa. I am the last to float out the door, levitating on the knowledge that I have found my new goto hotspot and glued to my phone, furiously typing to each of my contacts how they must let me take them to Costa next weekend. *

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