

2010 Restaurant Issue

No Pomp. No Circumstance. Just Real Food.

Listen up, good people: review sites such as Yelp! gather opinions from thousands of people from thousands of backgrounds. Reading them, if you're lucky, may help you piece together the collective mind regarding a particular restaurant. Sounds wonderful and democratic... *except you don't know these people!*

What's worse, you don't know what they know (and don't know) about food.

A critic, the sort who shows up week in, week out in your weekly *Reader* — her you know. (And him you know — hi, Ed!) Her history, her gastronomical education, her sense of place, her pet peeves and

soft spots — it's all there for you to read. What she writes will resonate with your own personal experience. Because while there may be a collective mind, there is no collective palate.

I could go on, but I don't want to get in the way. Dig in.

— *Ambrose Martin*

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Top Chefs

Jack Fisher



Our culinary Ramblin' Jack began as a professional bodyboarder before discovering a passion for pastry. After partnering with chef Michael Stebner at Azzura Point, Nine-Ten, and Region, he began roving — but now he's back to where he best belongs, at La Jolla's Nine-Ten, collaborating with Jason Knibb, another top-tenner. A questing spirit impels him to explore varied foodcrafts (e.g., cheese-making, exquisite chocolates). His desserts (never icky-sweet) often include surprising flavors, such as exotic spices or summer tomatoes. His ice creams and sorbets are arresting. Best of all, his trembling panna cottas define the words "sweet-flavored air." Never mere afterthoughts, Fisher's extraordinary desserts are playful, serious cuisine.

Trey Foshee



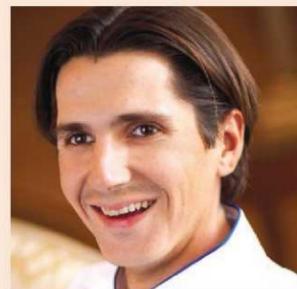
At George's California Modern, Foshee provides consistent deliciousness, using the finest local produce (Chino Farms, mainly) and top-grade meats on a seasonally changing menu. A protégé of Roland Passot of San Francisco's acclaimed La Folie, and a veteran of southwestern resort restaurants, Trey's creativity may be somewhat constrained by George's popularity with vacationers and upscale locals celebrating special occasions. The food runs to the conservative side but is always outstanding, with luscious textures and memorably rich flavors.

Bernard Guillas



Flashy! Guillas's food at Marine Room is as flashy as the high tides smacking the windows. After a standard rigorous French apprenticeship in his native Normandy, Guillas indulged his wanderlust in French Guiana and Brazil. While working in Washington, DC, he accepted an assignment from his culinary mentor in France and moved to San Diego. He's been here ever since, though he's continued to travel, incorporating the exotic flavors of jaunts to Australia, Asia, etc. Guillas is one of two chefs (Patrick Ponsaty is the other) to appear in both the 2000 and the current "top tens."

Fabrice Hardel



Apparently you don't get to be a famous chef by working at the luxurious, old-fashioned Westgate Hotel. But French-trained Fabrice Hardel has been doing just that for years, and now, with the opening of a new ground-floor dining room (with air! — not to mention lower prices), he's come into his own. Sure, he has to cook lots of stuffy conservative meat dishes for the hotel's banker guests, but with his seafood, he shows that he's made of more adventurous stuff, with discreet touches of "molecular gastronomy" in tasty, mysterious garnishes that had me and my tablemates wondering, "How did he do this?"

Jason Knibb



Trendy farm-to-fork California cuisine is often excellent but, dare I say it, a little boring. Not at Nine-Ten, where Jamaican-born, So-Cal raised Jason Knibb (a protégé of Trey Foshee) uses great sustainable products to take off into fresh directions. My last meal there included the best Maine lobster (poached for an appetizer) anybody at my table of New York émigrés had ever tasted, as well as surprise jellied balsamic cubes (looking like beet cubes, only soft) on a salad. He'll have you gobbling up vegetables (okra!) you think you don't like. Knibb's food is not just clever, it's also impossibly delicious.