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JULY 2010



29TH ANNUAL

SILVER FORK AWARDS

BY STEPHEN SILVERMAN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARTIN MANN

Across San Diego County over the last 12 months there's been a topsy-turvy whirl of restaurant openings and closings, resuscitations, makeovers and cash infusions. Old standbys, particularly higher-end special-occasion places, tried every which way to stay afloat. So did a dozen newer places that were well received and favorably reviewed. Sometimes the effort worked and sometimes it did not.

Regardless of the current perils, San Diego is awash, agog and aglimmer with restaurants. New places continue to open with the high-spirited optimism of a Disney film. Established places reinvent and reinvigorate themselves. A grand dame like El Bizcocho is doing gourmet vegan dinners that sell out, and an upstart like Eclipse is doing wildly creative dining adventures where there's chocolate in every course, and it, too, sells out. Laurel did a full-body makeover and transformed itself into Cucina Urbana, instantly morphing from aging siren to Lady Gaga. And who isn't opening a wine bar? Or a burger place? Or a new pizzeria? Or another sushi shop? Whether the location is central or peripheral — that is, East Village or Oceanside — the restaurants keep coming.

When it comes to food, San Diegans are fashion conscious but not fickle. We're a town that continues to love steak and potatoes, and we're about to embrace a bacon and fried-chicken trend. We're in the waning days of Chinese chicken salads and crème brûlées, but they're sure to be with us a while longer. We've got an abundance of celebrity chefs (includes a growing roster of locals who pop up on the Food Network), and we're more than willing to venerate them.

With all this abundance — notwithstanding economic uncertainties — the local food scene has never been more diverse and downright fabulous. So herewith are our 2010 Silver Forks, representing the best bites of the last year.

EL VITRAL

Cuisine: Modern Mexican

What's to Know: High design is all over the room and on your plate. The traditional foods are fine, but what's imaginative is what's dynamite.

Where it's at: 815 J St.
East Village. 619/236-9420

EXTRAORDINARY DESSERTS

Cuisine: Desserts and light bites

What's to Know: First Karen Krasne turned dessert exquisite. Now she's added breakfast, snacks and panini.

Where it's at: 1430 Union St.
Little Italy. 619/294-7001

GRANT GRILL

Cuisine: Continental

What's to Know: A gracious dining experience where spectacle is downplayed and sophisticated food, service and thought soar.

Where it's at: 326 Broadway
downtown. 619/744-2077

HANE SUSHI

Cuisine: Sushi

What's to Know: Modern sushi in a slick and suitably modern setting.

Where it's at: 2760 Fifth Ave.
Bankers Hill. 619/260-1411

JSIX

Cuisine: California coastal cuisine

What's to Know: Chef Christian Graves has a sensibility for fish that few can match. His ingenuity ranks him among our best chefs.

Where it's at: 616 J St.
Gaslamp Quarter. 619/531-8744



Above: Grant Grill's sophisticated style has an Art Deco ambience.

Left: Chocolate chiffon mousse cake with espresso ice cream and cocoa nibs

Below: Some Hane Sushi signature dishes, front to back: Salmon battera (box-style sushi), sashimi plate and tuna tartare topped with a poached quail egg.

