

Wine Guide

O.C. VINTNERS BEHIND LABELS YOU LOVE

Orange Coast

SEAFOOD SPECTACULAR

O.C.'S BEST



DISHES, SAUCES, MARKETS & RAW BARS

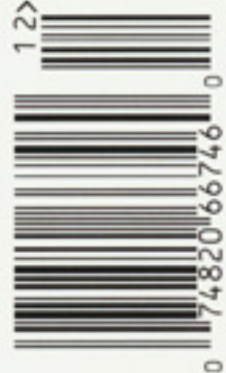


Home
AN OCEAN VIEW
IN COSTA MESA?

Travel
GOLDEN, COLO.

Dining
JULIETTE
KITCHEN & BAR

DECEMBER 2012 \$4.95



Dining

A TASTE OF O.C.

Five Crowns ages with grace, P. 66

Colorful Korean bibimbap, P. 72

Our definitive dining guide, P. 142



Newport Beach
foodistas fall
for the charms
of Juliette



Juliette Kitchen & Bar

Newport Beach's new watering hole is a must-try for discerning diners
by GRETCHEN KURZ

EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD DESERVES a casual, accessible haunt where food is king, wine is queen, and prices are fair. Newport Beach's new Juliette Kitchen & Bar is a fine example of such a place. ¶ I blame our rambling, freeway-laced geography for the rarity of unfussy indies with clued-in

cuisine. Unlike those in Chicago or San Francisco, nearly every good restaurant in O.C. requires a drive, and simply can't survive on business generated by diners within walking distance. It's a defining reality that makes a newbie such as Juliette shine all the brighter.

Open since July in the longtime digs of Tradition by Pascal, the space's speedy revamp leaves no trace of Pascal Olhat's decorous French flagship. White linens and masses of roses are gone, and the revamped room is now unmistakably hip-casual, with



weathered paneling, wood floors, and a coffered ceiling hung with a glimmering chandelier—a wink of refinement amid studied rusticity. The 70-seat room seems bigger, perhaps because it's busier and livelier than the former scene.

A gleaming full bar is center stage, flanked by a high communal table for welcome seating when the eight-stool bar reaches capacity. That's all but certain on Thursday through Saturday evenings. The particularly



1000 BRISTOL ST. N.
NEWPORT BEACH
949-752-5854
JULIETTENB.COM

★★½

thoughtful choice of beer, wine, and seasonal cocktails explains the bar's popularity, but what's coming out of the kitchen also lures a spirited crowd of office warriors, local foodies, and Pascal ex-pats.

Juliette is a modern family affair. Hyun-Sook "Juliette" Chung runs the room, husband John Hughes nurtures the attached wine boutique, and Chung's daughter Erica Choi is pastry chef. Chung and Hughes are the founders of the Filling Station in Old Towne

Orange, a charming diner they helmed for a decade before selling in 2010. Juliette is a sophisticated step up and a nod to cuisine they seek out on their travels, especially in California's wine-producing regions.

Executive chef Daniel Hyatt is a good fit, sharing their appreciation for market-driven cuisine that exploits the best of choice ingredients. For searching and sorting purposes, Hyatt's menus might well be tagged New American. Yes, there's a luscious burger at lunch and garlicky grilled prawns at dinner, but Hyatt's long stint at Signal Hill's esteemed Delius, under chef Louise Solzman, reveals itself in the dynamic dinner carte, much of it produce-driven.

Small plates, good for sharing or starters, bounce from grilled fruit with dark greens and aged sherry, to Prince Edward Island mussels steamed with sweet onion and harissa butter, to pillowy gnocchi with duck confit and arugula pesto. House-smoked ocean trout, mild and succulent, stars in a mix of wild arugula, stewed grapes, baby tomatoes, and puckery pickled onions, all dressed with honey-lime vinaigrette.

Hyatt's take on pork belly (of course) is a bit busy and disconnected. The chewy-rich meat is sticky with a tamarind glaze. Crisp slivers of pickled radish and turnips amplify the tamarind's tang while dried cherries add more tart-sweet, and pistachios lend crunch. But all the parts lack a dominant lead. Farro risotto is a dazzler, however. The slow simmering helps the grain hold its nutty integrity against musky trumpet mushrooms, silky squash blossoms, streaks of slightly bitter Swiss chard, and chunks of tomato. This striking starch could put dreary potatoes on notice.

Outstanding dishes from my warm-weather visits are bound to be gone by now—fall-apart pork cheeks with peaches and roasted garlic jus, tuna crudo with jalapeno mango sorbet—replaced by wintry fare such as hot pots and braised meats. The beautiful roasted tomatoes

Opposite: Hanger steak chimichurri over potato confit; Prince Edward Island mussels with chorizo and harissa butter; above: executive chef Daniel Hyatt; braised oxtail gnocchi with trumpet mushrooms; seasonal cocktails are a bar specialty.

and sweet corn on the hanger steak plate will surely make way for squashes and Brussels sprouts. But do order this flavorful cut of beef, cooked to perfect medium rare. A roasted Jidori chicken, a bistro classic, needs salt. Salt also is lacking in a cone of unremarkable French fries that look better than they taste, even with the aid of house-made ketchup.

Several unique cheeses and charcuterie items stand out for their careful selection. How nice to see a tart goat cheese from small producer Drake Family Farms. And the aged, butterscotch-y Gouda from Holland. Cured-meat fiends will appreciate the Creminelli sopressata from Utah and chianti-tinged Olli's Norcino salame from Virginia. To accompany, grilled baguette slices and raisins on the vine arrive on a plank that also might bear marinated olives, fig jam, or spiced almonds, all prepped in-house.

Desserts nicely complement the kitchen's personality. Salted caramel pot de crème is velvet on the tongue, the tangy creme fraiche revving the palate up for more, and spicy pepita brittle adding a brilliant crunch. Affogato marries nectarous espresso from cult coffee roaster, Blue Bottle, with satin-smooth vanilla ice cream, bested only by the fragile sea salt chocolate-chip cookies on the side—some of the best cookies of my year. The chocolate soufflé cake, however, lacks dimension and character. If in doubt, stick with the affogato. Or cheese.

Service varies from jaded to pleasant to overambitious, depending on the server you catch. Sitting at the bar can help, no doubt because it's in sight of gracious Juliette at the hostess post.

I see why Juliette Kitchen & Bar landed promptly on the discerning diners' must-try list. For a neighborhood upstart with high standards, it's finding itself quickly. If you live in 92660, your dining future has fresh promise. The rest of us will just have to drive a bit. **OC**

JULIETTE KITCHEN & BAR

BEST DISHES

Juliette burger, grilled fruit with greens, grilled prawns, Prince Edward Island mussels, smoked ocean trout salad, gnocchi, pork belly, pork cheeks, farro risotto, hanger steak, cheeses and charcuterie, salted caramel pot de creme, affogato.

PRICE RANGE

Small plates, \$9 to \$16; large plates, \$21 to \$32; corkage \$5 for any bottle from the adjacent boutique, \$15 otherwise.

FYI

Closed Sunday.

SMACKDOWN

Canelés

Macarons and cupcakes continue to coexist, but it's time to make room for *canelés*, small, fluted cakes with caramelized crusts and custardy centers. The little French pastries aren't new by any stretch—they originated in 18th century Bordeaux—but they're fast making it into O.C.'s personal-size pastry pantheon. We compare two of the local treats. —Priscilla Mayfield



PAT'A CHOU	SAPPHIRE LAGUNA
1421 W. MacArthur Blvd., Santa Ana, 714-850-1545, pat-achou.com	1200 S. Coast Highway, Laguna Beach, 949-715-9888, sapphirelaguna.com
Christian Chereau, award-winning <i>pâtissier</i> and owner of Pat'a Chou, makes two sizes. \$1.50; or four minis, \$2	Produced by an Orange County <i>pâtissière</i> exclusively for the restaurant, to chef Azmin Ghahreman's specifications. \$2.
These <i>canelés</i> are perfectly formed and pretty. The browned exterior is glossy and firm, with a slight chew.	The crust's burnished mahogany sheen indicates a satisfying caramel-y chew.
The cake is moist and eggy, and the aroma is vanishingly subtle.	The all-important interior is cooked through, but remains lusciously custardy—in short, it's just right.
The short-lived interior flavor is indiscernible, though each bite tastes of buttery burnt sugar.	With few ingredients—flour, sugar, butter, eggs, rum, and lemon—you taste each, while the contrast between crust and interior makes every bite unique.

THE VERDICT Both are good, but Sapphire gets it right on "chew" and flavor. Pat'a Chou's central location makes it a convenient *canelé* backup.

Made in Orange, Wish Upon a Plate meringues are low-cal and endlessly customizable. Top with whipped cream, fruit, chocolate drizzle, or sorbet. A dozen large, \$15; 24 minis, \$17; free O.C. delivery. wishuponaplate.com



See Priscilla Mayfield's "Taste of Orange County" blog for news about food, dining, and recipes. Go to orangecoast.com.