

805 LIVING

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FOOD & WINE



keeping it fresh

Two new restaurants and two new chefs have arrived on the scene, making the 805 an even more delicious dining destination.



By Mary Ann Norbom | Photographs by Gary Moss

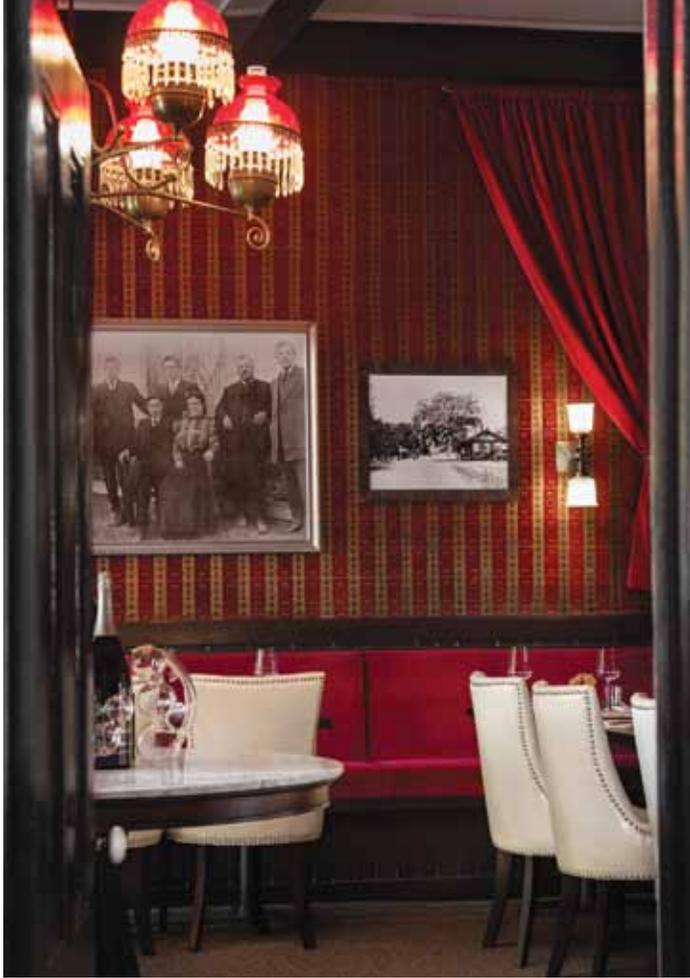


Mattei's Tavern in Los Olivos Contemporary cooking in historic digs.

Opposite: Grilled Artichokes With Green Harissa Dip (recipe on page 75) from the newly revamped Mattei's Tavern in Los Olivos. **Above:** Chef Robbie Wilson and his wife, Emily Perry Wilson, both partners and co-owners.

Felix Mattei opened his now-iconic stagecoach stop and inn in 1886, and he'd most surely appreciate the respectful renovation and refurbishing it has received by its new owners, who reopened Mattei's Tavern restaurant (matteistavern.com) in July. Chef-partner Robbie Wilson and his wife, managing partner-owner Emily Perry Wilson, both were brought in from Nashville by Mattei's developers Ali and Charles Banks. They'll be breaking ground in the spring on a new resort, the Inn at Mattei's Tavern, next to the restaurant.

Although his CV includes working under star chefs Thomas Keller, Nobu Matsuhisa, and Tom Colicchio, Robbie hasn't turned Mattei's into a special occasion-only destination. "I want everything here to be fun and witty," he says. "That takes the same effort as a serious French restaurant." Chilled raw oysters from nearby Morro Bay are served with shrimp and *hamachi* plus Tabasco-flavored shaved ice on vintage turntables, with the platter billed on the menu as Morro Bay's Greatest Hits. The children's menu is read via bright red View-Masters. But the delightful silliness of some of the presentations doesn't take away from the sophistication of the food. There are dishes such as a bone marrow appetizer and Campfire Trout that hark back to 1886 as well as contemporary offerings like grilled octopus and Salisbury lamb. "Robbie is the most passionate person about food I've ever met," says Emily, who oversees the business side.



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Its Los Olivos location puts Mattei’s Tavern smack in the middle of wine country, and its expansive wine list reflects that. A large number of local bottlings are offered as are a stunningly broad selection from around the world. Wine and beverage director Stephane Colling groups the wines by varietal rather than region, so if diners are thinking pinot noir, they’ll see selections from California, France, New Zealand, and Germany all together. “We pay homage to the many wonderful local wines,” says Robbie, “but we know we’ll also have customers who will want a French wine or something from Austria or Australia.”

The restaurant is divided, as it originally was, into several different spaces. There’s a bar, a lounge, the sunny Stage Room, and the more formal Red Room—ideal for a private birthday or an anniversary party. Comfy rocking chairs on the front porch provide the perfect place to enjoy a glass of wine. The massive kitchen boasts not only a chef’s table but also a winemaker’s table, where local vintners can meet up to exchange news, try each other’s newest vintages, and maybe have a bite to eat.

Oh, and those rooms from the inn above the restaurant? They are still being put to good use but now as offices for the Wilsons and their staff.

This page: Mattei’s décor is as varied and sophisticated as the cooking. The aptly named Red Room (above left) features flocked red wallpaper and a red velvet banquette, while taxidermy can be checked out in the library (bottom). **Opposite:** The library is a cozy and captivating spot for diners to enjoy cocktails while the chefs are busy prepping in the open kitchen.



Grilled Artichokes With Green Harissa Dip

This appetizer recipe comes courtesy of Mattei's Tavern (matteistavern.com) in Los Olivos.

- 1 lemon, quartered
 - 2 large artichokes
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil
 - 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- Green Harissa Dip (see recipe)

Fill a large bowl with cold water. Squeeze the juice from one lemon quarter into the water. Trim the tops from the artichokes, then cut in half lengthwise, and place halves into the bowl of lemon water to prevent them from turning brown.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Meanwhile, preheat an outdoor grill for medium-high heat.

Add artichokes to boiling water, and cook for about 15 minutes. Drain. Squeeze juice from the remaining lemon quarters into a medium bowl. Stir in the olive oil and garlic, and season with salt and pepper.

Brush the artichokes with a coating of the garlic oil, and place them on the preheated grill. Grill the artichokes for 5 to 10 minutes, basting with oil and turning frequently, until the tips are a little charred. Serve immediately with the Green Harissa Dip (see recipe).

Green Harissa Dip

- 1 cup chopped fresh cilantro
 - 1 cup chopped spinach
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil
 - 1 garlic clove, smashed
 - 2 small green onions, chopped
 - 3 jalapeños, seeded, chopped
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground coriander
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cumin
 - 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- Kosher salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup homemade aioli or high-quality mayonnaise

Combine all the ingredients except lemon juice, salt, and aioli in a food processor and puree until smooth. Season the harissa with lemon juice and salt to taste. Mix in aioli until desired consistency is reached.

Serves 4.





Patrice Martineau knows the finer points of fine dining.

El Encanto, Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara's legendary El Encanto (elencanto.com) hotel reopened in March to the highest of expectations. Closed since 2006 following its sale to Orient-Express Hotels, the iconic property's top-to-bottom renovation included the acquisition of Patrice Martineau as the new executive chef.

A native of Troyes in France's Champagne-Ardenne region, where he also began his cooking career, Martineau found his way to the 805 area via New York, London, and Tokyo. But California was long in his sights. "I always knew I wanted to live and work here," he says, as he glances around El Encanto's heavenly property with views to the ocean.

Martineau graciously gives credit for his rising superstar status to two Michelin three-star chefs who inspired and mentored him. Early in his career he worked for Jean Michel Lorain at his acclaimed La Côte Saint Jacques in Burgundy. After moving to the United States he worked under Daniel Boulud, whose New York restaurant, Daniel, is considered by many to be the best in the country. "They both influenced me in ways that I will always carry with me," Martineau says.

He describes his menu as "California coastal cuisine with French and Japanese influences," giving a nod to his experience in Tokyo. That especially comes into play with sea urchins. He'd prepared them in Tokyo, but they'd been shipped in from Santa Barbara. "I had never seen a sea urchin actually come out of the sea before."

During his stint as the executive chef at The Savoy in London, Martineau became quite the celebrity thanks to numerous appearances on the BBC, including as a guest judge on *Celebrity MasterChef*, and he's anxious to have that experience again. "I want to appear on *Iron Chef America*, I really do," he says with a devilish smile. "I am creative and fast, and I love a challenge. I think they should make it a Santa Barbara competition and put me up against Cat Cora. I would love that!"



Georg Paulussen brings the world to Ojai.

Ojai Valley Inn & Spa

With seven different restaurants and cafés at the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa (ojairesort.com), Georg Paulussen had his work cut out for him when he became the new executive chef in July. He felt up to the challenge from his first day, though, because of the experience he brought to the table.

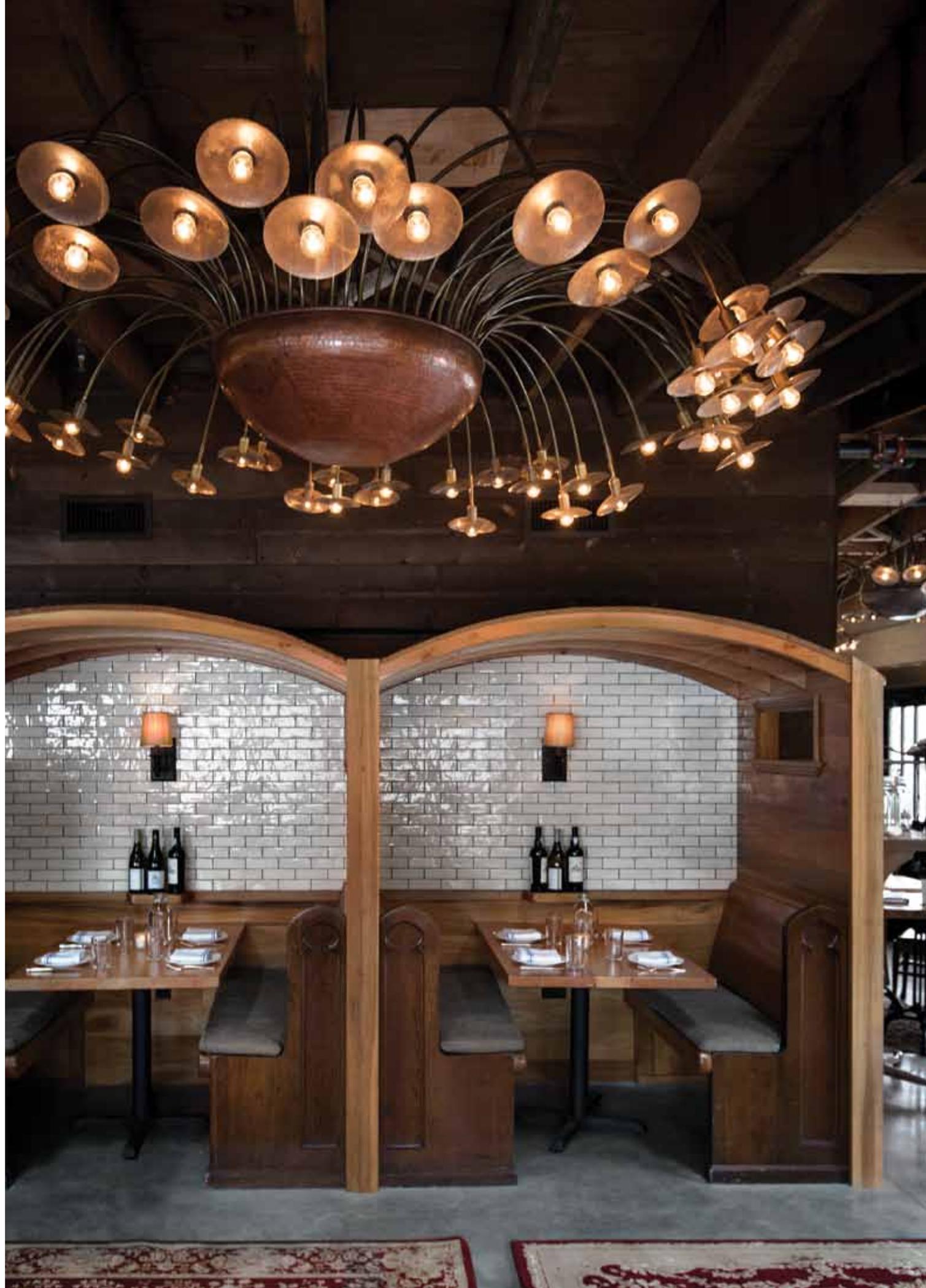
Born and raised in the small town of Adendorf, Germany, Paulussen apprenticed for three years, starting at the age of 15. He went on to work in New York, London, Tokyo, New Delhi, the Bahamas, and Las Vegas. “My specialty is my flexibility, and that comes from having worked in so many different countries,” Paulussen says. “I also love what I’m doing and have a passion for teaching and training. There is a tremendous amount of culinary potential here at Ojai, and I’m going to see that we reach that.”

He’s already instituted classes for his kitchen staff and servers. “Servers are the salespeople for my food, so it’s essential they are familiar with what I’m doing,” he says. Classes cover seafood, pastry, baking, chocolate, salts

and chilies, and vegetables. Classes for hotel guests will be added soon.

Since he grew up in the country, Paulussen says he has an affinity for life in Ojai. “My menus are locally driven. That doesn’t mean we’re going to force something just so we can say ‘farm to table,’ but we will take advantage of the best of what’s produced here and make it interesting.” For instance, the large on-site garden turns out magnificent tomatoes that had previously only been cut up for salads. Paulussen has at least half a dozen other ideas for them, including chutneys, marmalades, and sauces. Local strawberries and raspberries are headed to his dazzling ice-cream pizza, which is made with sponge cake standing in for the crust and topped with raspberry sauce, vanilla ice cream, and various fruits.

Paulussen says his motto is “QTTP: quality, taste, texture, and presentation. I’m driven by commitment and passion to achieve excellence at all times.” He’s doing his best to live up to that every day.





Opposite: *The Lark* was a train that serviced Santa Barbara in the first half of the 20th century, and now the restaurant of the same name has three booths designed to look like train cars. **This page:** Executive chef Jason Paluska (center) and executive sous chef Nick Flores (right) keep an eye on things in the kitchen.

The Lark in Santa Barbara An urban gathering spot for the foodie community.

The fast-growing Funk Zone has a new centerpiece. The Lark (thelarksb.com) is an “eat, drink, and be happy” restaurant, says executive chef Jason Paluska, who sees the establishment as a community builder. Located in the former Santa Barbara Fish Market, The Lark is the keystone of the redevelopment of two historic buildings into a complex that also includes Lucky Penny, which is a grab-and-go pizzeria and coffee spot; Les Marchands Wine Bar & Merchant; Cutler’s Artisan Spirits, a distillery; the Figueroa Mountain Brewing Co. brew pub; plus two wine tasting rooms and a guitar shop featuring live music.

“Santa Barbara was missing a real center of gravity, and the Funk Zone in particular was light on food options,” says The Lark and Lucky Penny managing partner-owner Sherry Villanueva, the visionary behind the project. The Lark, she says, “has an urban edge but with service standards that are first-rate. We have great respect for the guests who come in and spend their hard-earned money.”

At The Lark, 31-year-old Paluska has confidently taken on the title of executive chef for the first time, but he comes with an impressive résumé, most recently as sous chef at Michael Mina’s acclaimed RN74 in San Francisco. “My menu is ingredient-driven, and spices are important. There are familiar dishes with global influences, but nothing is pretentious,” he says. Crispy chicken wings are coated in *harissa* and served with a cucumber-mint yogurt, and Santa Barbara spot prawns are seasoned with garam masala. “We also have a number of great shared plates—from olives to desserts—on the menu.”



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True to its commitment to the community, the restaurant features a magnificent wood 24-seat communal dining table directly across from the open kitchen. It was handcrafted by design-build contractor Dan Bush, who, along with designer Doug Washington, also came up with the concept for three small booths built to look like train cars. (Trivia note: *The Lark* was the name of the Southern Pacific Railroad’s Pullman train that serviced Santa Barbara from 1910 to 1968.) Outside, there is a 60-seat patio with three fire pits.

The Lark is open daily for lunch and dinner and also offers a happy hour. This is a casual spot that takes its food seriously and has a wine list to match. Sommeliers Brian McClintic and Eric Railsback (see “Faces in the Crowd,” page 62) of next door’s Les Marchands are the wine directors—the list is about 60-percent California bottlings—and can help diners with wine selections.

“I want people to leave knowing we put our heart and soul into the restaurant,” says general manager Dan Russo, another RN74 transplant, who is committed to offering The Lark customers memorable food and a stellar experience at affordable prices. “With our menu, you can have a different experience every time you come in.”

This page: The team behind The Lark—including (above, from left) designer Doug Washington, general manager Dan Russo, and managing partner-owner Sherry Villanueva—got all the details just right. **Opposite:** Satisfying dishes like the Slow-Cooked Pork Shanks With Smoked Chili Cornbread, Beer-Braised Chard, and Blackberry Jus are on the menu; the long communal dining table encourages conversation and provides a sense of community.



Slow-Cooked Pork Shanks With Smoked Chili Cornbread, Beer-Braised Chard, and Blackberry Jus

This recipe comes courtesy of Jason Paluska, executive chef at The Lark and Lucky Penny in Santa Barbara.

Smoked Chili Cornbread

- 1¼ pounds butter
- 1½ cups flour
- 3 cups cornmeal
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 cups sugar
- ⅓ cup salt
- 2½ pounds crème fraîche
- 10 eggs
- 6 ounces honey
- ¼ cup chopped chipotle chili in adobo sauce from a can

Preheat oven to 350° F. Gently brown butter in saucepan. Meanwhile whisk together flour, cornmeal, baking soda, sugar, and salt. Whisk together crème fraîche, eggs, and honey. Add chilies. Gently whisk the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients followed by the browned butter. Pour into a standard 12-cup muffin pan and bake until you can remove a toothpick cleanly, about 30 to 40 minutes.

Beer-Braised Chard

- 1 bunch Rainbow Swiss chard
- 4 teaspoons olive oil, plus more for serving
- Salt
- 6 ounces beer
- Cracked pepper

Rinse Rainbow Swiss chard under cold water to free it of any soil. Remove the leaves from the stems and roughly chop the leaves (discard stems or save for another use). In a medium sauté pan lightly cook the chard in the olive oil and add a pinch of salt. Deglaze the pan with enough beer to coat the chard and reduce the beer until almost dry. Season with cracked pepper and a touch more olive oil to give it a glossy finish.

Pork Shanks

- 6 pork shanks
- Kosher Salt
- Fresh cracked pepper
- 2 tablespoons canola oil

- 5 carrots, peeled and roughly chopped
- 5 celery stalks, roughly chopped
- 2 white onions, peeled and quartered
- 4 dried ancho peppers, toasted
- 1 bunch of parsley, chopped
- 2 fresh bay leaves
- 1 head of garlic split in half
- 1 bottle red wine
- 64 ounces chicken stock

Season pork shanks with salt and pepper. Heat oil in a large, wide pot. Add pork shanks and sear on all sides until rich caramelization occurs. Remove shanks from the pot. In the same pot, sauté the carrots, celery, onions, ancho peppers, parsley, bay leaves, and garlic. Once caramelized, deglaze with red wine. Pour chicken stock into pot. Place pork shanks back into the pot and bring to a slow simmer. Be sure not to boil or the meat will become tough.

Once the shanks are just about ready to fall off the bone, after about 3 to 4 hours, turn the heat off and let them steep in the cooking liquid until the shanks reach room temperature.

Remove the shanks and allow to cool; reserve shank braising liquid.

Blackberry Jus

- Pork shank braising liquid
- 1 cup cleaned blackberries
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar or fresh lemon juice

Strain off all cooking liquid once the shanks are cooked. Reduce slowly and skim any fat that collects on the surface. Once the jus is concentrated and viscous, check to see that it coats the back of a spoon. Steep the blackberries in the sauce for 20 minutes. Check for acidity and adjust with red wine vinegar or fresh lemon juice.

To serve, reheat chard slowly in heavy saucepan on low. Reheat shanks in a roasting pan covered with foil at 350°F for about 30 minutes. Rewarm blackberry jus in saucepan. Spoon chard onto serving platter and place shanks over. Spoon blackberry jus over.

Serves 6. ♦

