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Santa Fe Scoop

Everything Hip, Hot and Happening in the City Different

By John Vollertsen Photo by Signeli Agnew

Notes from the Santa Fe Wine and Chile grand tasting: A mob scene to sample **Geronimo's** grilled lobster tails—Chef DiStefano passed out 2,500 tails that afternoon. I loved **El Meson's** simply sautéed Patron chile, an eloquent flavor capturing the essence of the event.

Ristra and **315** battled it out with mussel dishes, the former with a Thai red curry and coconut broth, the latter with a classic white wine broth version—both were terrific.

The Old House combined braised oxtails with seared scallops for a winning combination. I missed **The Compound's** seafood ceviche cones but heard they were great. **Mu Du Noodles** tossed 1500 chicken wings in a zippy curry sauce, **Pranzo** took us back to Delancey Street in New York City with a huge antipasti display, and **Il Piatto** celebrated the absolute freshness of the farmers' market with delicate crostini with diced heirloom tomatoes and basil. My favorite? It was all grand. Tickets sold out very fast again this year, so call the **Wine and Chile Fiesta** (505-438-8060) today and get put on the mailing list for next year.

The O'Keeffe Café (505-946-1065), which had been receiving great reviews but perhaps not a great number of customers, quietly changed hands at the end of September. Operated for the last 12 months by Walter Burke Catering services, the cozy café, in the shadow of the O'Keeffe museum, struggled to find its niche in the local food scene. So when the annual contract to renew came up, Burke opted out so he can concentrate on his newer venture at the Museum Hill development. In calling the new proprietor, Michael O'Reilly, I discovered that I had worked with the guy at a restaurant in New York City circa 1982! Small world, but that certainly is how Santa Fe works. The new concept will include a more intense focus on wine and wine tastings.



Reid Michaels, Sheila Nixon and Roland Richter of Pizza Etc.



Second Annual Critics' Choice Awards



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Find out what other food lovers are saying about your favorite restaurants on Chowhound.com's Southwest message board.



Executive Chef Chase Wilcox will still be at the helm of the kitchen, but O'Reilly will draw on his decades of experience in wine sales and promotion to create an atmosphere sure to please even the most hardened wine enthusiast. There will be an eight-spigot Cruvinet wine dispenser and regular "blind" tasting seminars will be planned and held in the café's swanky boardroom, designed for the bigwigs from the museum next door. Join a Super Tuscan tasting on Tuesday, Nov. 5 and a "Best of Napa" tasting on Tuesday, Nov. 19. Call Michael for full details of all wine events; who knows, maybe you knew him in New York too!

Inn at Loretto has a new chef and a new restaurant tucked in the courtyard of the Loretto Chapel. The former Nellie's has been revamped and is now called simply, "The Restaurant." Executive Chef Mike Dimas joined the Inn's staff in June and has created a unique menu featuring an eclectic mix of regional American cooking with a focus on local and indigenous flavors and influences. Dimas, a native Texan, moved to Santa Fe for the position after running the special events kitchen at the Dallas Museum of Art. He has chuffed at numerous upscale restaurants around Texas as well as at the prestigious Bacara Resort and Spa in Santa Barbara, California. The menu shows Mike's love of a variety of ethnic cuisines with such dishes as steamed shrimp and poblano dumplings, crispy tempura red snapper, blue cheese hash browns (yum!) and goat cheese mash. With a view of the historic chapel and a kiva fireplace to set an autumn mood, the restaurant is a welcome addition to downtown dining. For reservations call 505-988-5531 or stop by and welcome Chef Dimas to town.

Santa Fe restaurants were all over the national media this fall. The October issue of *Gourmet* had a special pullout guide to America's best restaurants, which mentioned **The Compound** (... it's a chile-free zone. But don't hold that against the place—it's terrific in every other way), **Café Pasqual's** (... a place where you could in theory, happily eat breakfast, lunch and dinner), **Café San Estevan** (Northern New Mexican specialties ... with big-city finesse and small-town soul), and **Standard Market** (... the food keeps everyone coming back).

Café San Estevan also figures prominently in a charming story by seasoned veteran writer Calvin Trillin. In it, Trillin espouses his love of posole and all food things New Mexican. **Tecolote Café, El Paragua, Horseman's Haven, Café Pasqual's, The Santa Fe School of Cooking, The Shed, La Choza, Tia Sophia's** and **Maria's New Mexican Kitchen** all receive a mention.

In the photo-filled September issue of *Bon Appétit*, the **Old Mexico Grill** warrants a full-page color photo and recipe for their grilled pork tenderloin with pipian sauce and **Bert's La Taqueria** is lauded for their shrimp enchiladas with poblano cream and squash blossoms. Congratulations to all these restaurants for keeping us in the eye of the nation's food scene. These mentions will only mean more visitors to our fair town in the future.

Fans of **Pizza Etc.** in DeVargas Mall will be thrilled to know that Owner/Chef Roland Richter is opening another great medium-priced eatery just south of town, in the Rodeo Plaza. The new **Joe's Diner and Pizza** (505-471-

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3800) will inhabit the space formerly occupied by Spare-X and will be a 110-seat diner with beer and wine, take out and delivery. The menu will be a fair facsimile of the Pizza Etc. menu, with the addition of some main course pastas, meat dishes and traditional diner items including an awesome burger. That part of town is pretty much no-man's land for a sit-down restaurant and Roland was thrilled to hear that a lot of his regular customers live out that way. Joe's Diner and Pizza will be open seven days from 11am to 9pm. Pizza Etc. will continue with its quality menu at easy-on-the-wallet prices in its next-to-the-movie setting.

Got dish for the Scoop? E-mail foodnews@lacocinita.com or call 505-346-0660 ext. 245.

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