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LIVING

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LOVE,
Romance &
Guilty Pleasures



DIALED IN

News from the local dining scene.

Wine, Chocolate, and Cheese

This being an issue about indulgence, there had to be a mention of the launch of Oxnard's **Wine, Chocolate, & Cheese Tours**. The tour is an extension of the Ventura County Wine Trail and may include stops at Bella Victorian Vineyard, Herzog Wine Cellars, and Rancho Ventavo Cellars in Oxnard; and Cantara Cellars in Camarillo (check www.visitoxnard.com for an updated list of participating wineries). Each winery pairs its wine with cheese, chocolate, or small appetizers. Tours are held every Saturday (except for Herzog) and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. and include a shuttle ride between wineries. The price is \$75 per person; reservations are required 24 hours in advance and can be made by calling the California Welcome Center (805-988-0717). Tours depart from the Welcome Center located at 1000 Town Center Drive, Suite 135, Oxnard.

PUCK UPGRADE

The **Wolfgang Puck Bistro** in Westlake Village has retooled its menu in order to deliver higher-quality food at still-reasonable prices. Joe Essa, the president of Wolfgang Puck Worldwide and a managing partner, recently discussed the change in the restaurant's approach. "I was wrong before," he said. "We can't be competitive as a fast-food restaurant because of the quality that Wolfgang demands. We need to do what we do best." Therefore, Essa sat down with the culinary director of the Bistros, Matt Bencivenga, to recapture the style of the early Spago menus. Puck himself approved the final Bistro menu, which incorporates higher-end ingredients (bigger shrimp, finer olive oil, better cheeses) in its salads, sandwiches, pizzas, and entrées. The food presentation has gotten better, too. Salads are composed, not tossed; the roasted beet salad (\$7) and the Greek shrimp salad (\$15) are both set on whole, tender Bibb lettuce leaves. The pizza crust is thinner and less uniform than before with more crunch (\$9 to \$16 per pie). The



fish is fresh, and diners will likely taste the difference in the oven-roasted salmon with roasted potatoes and horseradish cream (\$17). The sirloin burger (\$12) is topped with aged cheddar and Niman Ranch bacon. To reflect the new upscale attitude toward the food, counter service has been discontinued. Even at lunchtime there is full table service. (Oh, yes, the plates are new, too.) *The Wolfgang Puck Bistro is located at 30990 Russell Ranch Road, Westlake Village, 818-597-1902. For more information visit www.wolfgangpuck.com/restaurants/casual-dining/Wolfgang-Puck-Bistros/7562/section-overview.*

Indulge Your Funny Bone

Mike Takeda, owner of **CAFÉ FIRENZE** in Moorpark, has invited The Laugh Pack into his wine bar to perform every Thursday night. Doors open at 6 p.m. with the comedy starting up around 8 p.m. The entire dinner menu is available during the shows. Of course, the full bar will be pouring stiff drinks all night. The Laugh Pack has a large stable of comedians, so check the website (www.thelaughpack.com) for the lineup of the evening's performances. Host Bruce Fine introduces comics like Wendy Liebman, Orny Adams, John Heffron, and Dwayne Perkins; often a crooner is included in the lineup, too. The young Frank Sinatra impersonator Phil Turk does a bang-up job of keeping spirits high. Tickets are \$15; there is no drink minimum. *Café Firenze is located at 563 W. Los Angeles Ave. in Moorpark. Call 805-530-3764 for reservations and to reserve tickets. You can also reserve tickets online through The Laugh Pack website. ■*

Have a tip for our restaurant news pages? E-mail our dining editor at angela@805living.com.