

Elaborate 18-course tastings are the calling card of The Silver Bough.

PHOTO: JOE SCHMEIZER

Stealing the Culinary Show in Montecito

THERE'S A **NEW DINING SCENE** TO EXPLORE JUST SOUTH OF SANTA BARBARA by Hana-Lee Sedgwick

PHOTO: JAKOB N. LAYMAN



Meals at The Monarch are served family-style.

At first glance, Montecito may seem like just another posh coastal enclave—a hideaway for Hollywood A-listers nestled between the Pacific Ocean and the Santa Ynez Mountains just outside of Santa Barbara, California. But behind the veil of secluded luxury is a town with a laid-back vibe and deep sense of community: one that's proving its resiliency after a devastating year of disasters in 2018. Indeed, thanks to a spate of new restaurants, Montecito is not just surviving but thriving as a culinary destination.

Among its most recent debuts is **The Silver Bough**, an ambitious fine-dining concept from Phillip Frankland Lee and his wife, Margarita Kallas Lee, of Scratch|Bar & Kitchen in Los Angeles. Located inside the Montecito Inn, this intimate eight-seater is a showcase for 18-course tasting menus; split up into three main parts called "acts," they're composed of exquisitely plated dishes featuring high-quality ingredients from around the world.

Complementing the meal is a lineup of curated wine pairings that likewise span the globe: think vibrant Sancerre alongside lightly grilled king crab with sea-urchin emulsion, gooseberries, and caviar or vintage Napa Valley Cabernet with center-cut Olive Wagyu rib-eye with pommes puree and black truffles. Between the ticket price of \$550 per person and the limited number of seatings—only four are offered each week—The Silver Bough isn't exactly an option for everyday dining, but it delivers a memorable experience unlike any in the area that's rich in flavor and high on opulence.

At **The Monarch**, their first venture at the Montecito Inn, Lee and Kallas Lee take a more relaxed approach, serving family-style meals that celebrate the bounty of



PHOTO: JEREMY BALL

Naturally leavened sourdough is used for the wood-fired pizza crusts at Bettina.

Santa Barbara County in a lively yet elegant setting. Though the wine list does include a large selection of local bottlings, highlighting small producers from Ballard Canyon, the Sta. Rita Hills, and Happy Canyon, it also features numerous Old World options, with an emphasis on organic and Biodynamic producers.

Tucked inside the Montecito Country Mart less than a mile down the road is cozy neighborhood gem **Bettina**. Opened late last year by another husband-and-wife team, Brendan Smith and Rachel Greenspan, Bettina specializes in delectable Neapolitan-style pizzas made from naturally leavened sourdough; topped with local, seasonal ingredients, the pies are charred to perfection in the wood-fired oven.

Though the two met while Smith



Khao Kaeng's Northern Thai-style curried noodles.

was running the bread program at Roberta's in Brooklyn, New York, they have certainly made their mark on Montecito, drawing people from all over to savor specialties like the pepperoni pizza with chili oil and local Hollister Ranch honey and the sunchoke pie with aged cheddar, escarole, and torpedo onions. A mouthwatering array of antipasti and farmers market-driven fare round out the menu, and to wash it all down, the vermouth-heavy cocktail list ranges from a refreshing Venetian Spritz to a complex Americano. The frequently rotating wine and beer list, meanwhile, highlights global producers spanning from Santa Barbara to Sicily.

Bettina isn't the only new Montecito restaurant capturing the culinary essence of another country. At

Renaud's Patisserie, chef/owner Renaud Gonthier's French pastries are served alongside a menu of French bistro favorites like croques monsieurs plus a selection of wine and beer. Nearby, **Khao Kaeng**—sister restaurant of the popular Empty Bowl Gourmet Noodle Bar in Santa Barbara's Public Market—specializes in elevated Thai food.

Owned by Chef Nui Pannak, Jerry Lee, and Emre Balli, Khao Kaeng—which translates to “rice

curry”—crafts a variety of dishes from organic ingredients and free-range proteins to reveal the regional diversity of Pannak's homeland, including stewed lamb shoulder with roasted baby potatoes, cherry-tomato confit, and housemade massaman-curry paste and Jidori chicken with bamboo shoots, makrut-lime leaves, and green-curry paste, also made in house. The wine list features 16 pours by the glass and 120 bottle selections that range from Central Coast favorites to Old World classics from Burgundy, Sancerre, and the Loire, plus several Rieslings and an Austrian Grüner Veltliner to complement the spicy, vibrant flavors.

While not technically new, **The Stonehouse** at the San Ysidro Ranch—which was closed for the entire year of 2018 following extensive damage from mudslides—has reopened for lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch, providing the same romantic atmosphere and superb service it had previously been known for along with a noteworthy new wine list. Also notable on the high-end hotel-dining front is Italian restaurant **Caruso's** at the much-anticipated new luxury property Rosewood Miramar Beach. With its stylish interior reminiscent of a glamorous yacht—all blue hues and glossy lacquered wood panels—and its unobstructed views of the Pacific, Caruso's is yet another welcome addition to Montecito's increasingly impressive dining scene. Time to dig in. ■■



PHOTO: BLAKE BRONSTAD

Renaud's Patisserie has three locations, two in Santa Barbara and one in Montecito; only the latter serves bistro fare for dinner.