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### Cafe Society: Ojai chef takes menu on road to N.Y.'s James Beard House

By Lisa McKinnon (Contact)  
Sunday, September 6, 2009

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Heirloom tomato gazpacho and California avocado sorbet will be the first course during chef Jamie West's Taste of Ojai dinner at the James Beard House. West previewed the dinner last month at the Ojai Valley Inn.

Cooking in someone else's kitchen isn't easy, especially when the meal at hand is a five-course extravaganza for serious foodies at the James Beard House in New York.

But that's precisely what Jamie West, executive chef at the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa, plans to do Thursday, when he presents a Taste of Ojai dinner for members of the James Beard Foundation and their guests at the three-story townhouse that the American gourmand and cookbook author called home until his death in 1985.

"They say it's comparable to a musician who gets to play a concert at Carnegie Hall," said West, who, as luck would have it, counts this week's dinner as an encore. (He also cooked there while representing Montecito's San Ysidro Ranch). Luckier still: After flying east on Monday, West will have access to the kitchen — and his former sous chef — at The Mayflower Inn & Spa in nearby Connecticut. He'll do his prep work there, then drive to New York the day of the dinner.

In the culinary world, winning a James Beard Award is akin to snagging an Oscar. An invitation to "perform" in Beard's kitchen also is an honor, bestowed on chefs known for their use of high-quality, seasonal and/or local ingredients, said Izabela Wojcik, the foundation's director of house programming.

West's dinner will showcase two Ojai-made wines (Casa Barranca's 2007 "Pink Moment" rosé and Ojai Vineyard's 2007 Bien Nacido chardonnay) along

with dishes featuring duck from Carpenter Ranch, Meyer lemons from Hoot Ranch and honey from the bees of Ojai. It was easy to gather those ingredients for the James Beard preview dinner that took place last month at the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa, West said. And having them shipped to New York was (almost) as easy to arrange.

"The big question now is, do I ship my knives there or do I take them with me in my checked baggage?" West said.

**HERE, KITTY KITTY:** Already famous for greeting the public at their respective businesses, two local felines are now ready to pounce on culinary greatness.

Bronco, a 3-year-old ranch cat who lives at Old Creek Ranch Winery in Oak View, is the inspiration for Bronco Rojo, a newly released red blend. That's Bronco on the label, staring out from the center of the plastic collar he was forced to wear when the winery's owners, John and Carmel Whitman, had him, er, snipped. The winery and tasting room are open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily (10024 Old Creek Road, 649-4132).

Known as "the most intelligent cat in Santa Paula," Sespe Red, the big orange cat who watches over John Nichols Gallery, now can also be called the "hottest." The chipotle-based Sespe Red Hot Sauce made by Red Hot Foods of Santa Paula is coming soon to a shop near you; for word on when and where, call the gallery at 525-7804.

**WINE TIME:** The in-progress tasting room at Camarillo Custom Crush will be open for a summer open house, art show and wine tasting from noon to 5 today. Stafford Premium Wines will be poured along with vintages made from grapes grown in Malibu and Topanga Canyon. The \$15 fee includes appetizers and a keepsake glass (300 S. Lewis Road, 484-0597).

Prices everywhere seem to be going up — except at this year's Symphony of Wine. Tickets for the Sept. 13 event benefiting the New West Symphony and its programs for children cost \$200 per person. That's \$75 less than last year, and \$50 less than in 2007. But the location and the agenda remain the same: Taking place at the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village, the event will start at 3 p.m. with a silent auction before segueing into a multicourse dinner and a program honoring Archie McLaren, executive director of the Central Coast Wine Classic. It will conclude with a live auction of wines, vacation packages and "experiences," including a private dinner with winemaker Doug Margerum (during which you could, conceivably, grill him about his plans to reopen the Wine Cask in Santa Barbara in November). For tickets, call 818-225-1795 or click on <http://www.symphonyofwine.com>.

Part-time restaurant cook and full-time English professor Amy Madsen will combine the best of both worlds during her food-and-wine pairing class from 6:30 p.m. Sept. 14 at The SideCar Restaurant in Ventura. Featured pairings: Dow's 10-year-old tawny port with blue cheese-stuffed dates. Required reservations, \$69: 654-6459 or <http://www.communityed.venturacollege.edu>.

**YOU GOTTA HAVE (FACEBOOK) FRIENDS:** The Star now has a Facebook "fan" page devoted to news and photos of good stuff to eat and drink. Look for it at VCS Eats.

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