

## Gigi Settles In as a Local Favorite

By Susie Iventosch

One step inside the front door of Gigi Restaurant in Lafayette had me dreaming of herb-roasted chicken and caramelized vegetables. The aroma was heavenly and when I asked Jeff Amber, chef/owner what it was, he said, in fact, it was duck. Whatever the fowl, I'm fairly positive I'll be ordering that dish next time I go in, because it smelled divine.

Amber opened Gigi, a sophisticated neighborhood restaurant, just about a year ago. He says they seem to be well-known for seasonally-driven dinners and very popular brunch items such as eggs Benedict and seasonal veggie and steak scramble.

"We select really fresh, locally-grown produce for our salads and our menu features handmade pastas, local fish and even great hamburgers," Amber said.

Many of the salads are made with seasonal fruit and greens, and the day I was there, the dinner menu included northwestern trout with Dungeness crab-meat; seared Tombo tuna with shitake mushrooms, bok choy and pea shoot salad; organic Cornish game hens – buttermilk fried; sautéed flank steak with summer squash, artichoke hearts, bacon and blue cheese; and braised Sonoma lamb shanks with roasted corn, arugula and black olive vinaigrette.

Need I say more? Actually, yes, because the side dishes are also unusual and include warm olives, a bowl of local Brentwood cherries, baked organic broccoli and fries with whole-grain mustard aioli.

Prior to opening Gigi, Amber worked in the restaurant business for 15 years in San Francisco and says he learned his craft on the job. So far, he is very pleased with his first attempt at restaurant ownership.

"We'd like to thank the city of Lafayette for supporting us," he said. "We're off the beaten path, so we really appreciate our devout local following and are looking forward to our second year of business in this community."

When I asked Chef Amber if he'd be willing to share one of his recipes, he sent me a spinach-peach salad with champagne vinaigrette. Because we're right in the middle of the peach harvest, you'll have no trouble at all finding excellent ripe, but firm peaches for this dish. Be sure to use plenty of spinach, as it really shrinks down in size once dressed.



Roxanne Logan and Jeff Amber in the lobby of Gigi Restaurant in Lafayette

**Gigi Restaurant**  
1005 Brown Avenue, Lafayette, CA. 94549  
(925) 962-0882, [www.gigirestaurant.com](http://www.gigirestaurant.com)

Hours:

*Tuesday - Friday* 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. for lunch and 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. for dinner

*Saturday* 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. for brunch and 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. for dinner

*Sunday* 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. for brunch and 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. for dinner

*Closed Mondays*



### Gigi's Peach Salad

(Yields about 4 dinner salads)

#### Ingredients

8 cups baby spinach

3 ripe yellow peaches – sliced thin off the core

12 tablespoons toasted almonds\* (approximately ¾ cup)

2 ounces shaved ricotta salata (if unavailable, substitute feta)

5 ½ ounces champagne vinaigrette (see recipe below)

#### Directions

Place spinach and peaches in a large mixing bowl and gently toss with vinaigrette. Add salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle almonds and cheese over top as garnish.

\*Place almonds on a baking sheet and spread out in a thin layer. Then bake in a 300-degree oven for about 5 minutes, or until golden brown.

Champagne vinaigrette

½ cup Champagne vinegar

1 shallot, chopped

Juice of one-half lemon

4 tablespoons Dijon mustard

2 cups canola oil (I used 1 ¼ cups of oil and it was slightly tart, but we liked it)

Salt and pepper to taste

Combine all dressing ingredients in a blender. Blend until