

Lamorinda's Specialties of the House

Local Restaurateurs and Chefs Share What's Hot

By Amanda Kuehn



Table 24's off-menu pork chop with roasted herbed russet potatoes and a citrusy sweet Pink Lady apple-pear sauce Photo Amanda Kuehn

There is a lot of good food to be had in the Lamorinda area. So much so that making a decision can be difficult. Even if you've narrowed your choices to a type of food or a particular location, how do you decide between caramelized onions or apple-smoked bacon, chocolate ganache or passion fruit-infused Swiss buttercream? Sometimes it's best to let the venue choose for you, to leave it to the experts to give you their best.

In upcoming issues, *Lamorinda Weekly* will be taking you on a tasting adventure, featuring specialties of the house at some of the area's popular restaurants. The following is a sampling of some of the personal favorites you'll find at just a few:

After 11 years of serving tried and true favorites to the people of Moraga. Ristorante Amoroma has changed up its authentic Italian menu. Partner Hafiz Haidari suggested that a first-time visitor try the homemade ravioli stuffed with ricotta and spinach and covered in homemade marinara, or the seafood linguine – a plate of handmade linguine noodles sheltering clams, mussels, shrimp, calamari and lobster, all bathed in a fresh tomato garlic and white wine and saffron sauce. "My partner's dad was a chef in Rome," said Haidari. "He has a cookbook we sell here and we [get] all of our stuff from that book." Specialty of the house? Fresh, authentic Italian. Ristorante Amoroma is located at 360 Park St. in Moraga. For information, call (925) 377-7662 or go to www.amoroma1.com.

When asked to recommend a house favorite at Pennini's Pizza & Pasta, front house manager Matthew Poirer likes to give his patrons options. "We're most known for our Friday and Saturday night prime rib special," he said. The rub, created by executive chef Patrick Vahey, is key. "It has the secret ingredients to flavor the prime rib – herbs, spices and some dijon mustard. [Vahey] lets it marinate and then puts it in the oven." The prime rib is served with seasonal veggies and a choice of garlic mashed potatoes, red baby potato cake, polenta cake, or rice pilaf. Poirer's personal favorite, though, is the Tre Formaggi (three cheese) pasta. "It's a cream sauce pasta, with Asiago, parmesan

and gorgonzola cheeses, pine nuts and pancetta served over penne pasta." Pennini's is located at 1375 Moraga Way Suite D in Moraga. Call (925) 376-1515 or visit www.penninis.com for info.

The antithesis of most things "foodie," the Village Inn Cafe in Orinda specializes in "great, recognizable food for breakfast and lunch." If he had to narrow it down to one specialty, owner and cook Kurt Bellows would recommend his corned beef hash. "I start with fresh beef brisket and cure it in brine for at least 25 days to make the corned beef. The brisket is then slow-cooked for five hours before it is cubed and mixed with potatoes to form the hash." It's a popular item. "We currently use about 100 lbs. of beef brisket a week just for the hash," said Bellows. The hash can be ordered with array of choices including eggs, pancakes and waffles. The Village Inn Cafe is located at 204 Village Square. For info, call (924) 254-6080 or visit www.orindacoffee.com.

Theatre Square, the "restaurant row" of Orinda, boasts specialties of all kinds. At Table 24, the buzzwords are quality, consistency and community. Under new director of operations, Rickey Dobbs and new executive chef Jason Yerbick, what was already good is getting even better. "I love food. I love fresh," said Yerbick. "From sliders to a nice piece of fish, we make good comfort food, just a little stepped up." Dobbs agreed. "In today's food culture, the general public cooks a lot more. We need to do a step above what you might be comfortable doing yourself," Dobbs said. A good example of this is Table 24's pork chop, an off-menu special glazed in a Grand Marnier marinade and served with roasted asparagus drizzled in a balsamic reduction, roasted herbed russet potatoes and a citrusy sweet Pink Lady apple-pear sauce. Another Table 24 special is the salted caramel pudding. With real whipped cream and flecks of Hawaiian black salt, it's a creamy sweet treat that will always be on the menu. Table 24 is located at 2 Theatre Square, Suite 153, in Orinda. For information, call (925) 254-0124 or go to www.table24orinda.com.

A final recommendation comes

from Chow in Lafayette, which has been a favorite eating space for years, with a rotating menu of sustainable, local, organic, biodynamic dishes. They are known for their local wines, featuring vintages you can't find at any grocery store or wine shop. Manager Joseph Pisahl's favorite dish is the fish tacos. "We use sustainable cod or mahi when it's in season, and add layers of cabbage, chipotle cream cheese, sliced avocado and salsa wrapped in a corn tortilla." Chow's most popular dish, though, is their Thai noodles, an Asian fusion of Thai-style linguine noodles with steak or chicken finished with a lime citrus miso sauce, "There's a little bit of a spicy kick," said Pisahl, who highly recommends both dishes. Chow is located at 53 Lafayette Circle. For information, call (925) 962-2469 or go to www.chowfoodbar.com. Bon appetite!



HOLY WEEK SERVICES

PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 13
8:15 a.m. Traditions Worship
10:45 a.m. Celebrations Worship
Childcare throughout the morning

MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 17
7:00 p.m.

GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 18
12 Noon & 7:00 p.m.

EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 20
8:15 a.m. Traditions Worship
9:30 a.m. Blended Worship
10:45 a.m. Celebrations Worship
Coffee Fellowship and Childcare throughout the morning

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www.holyshepherd.org

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