



RESTAURANTS & FOOD

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Selanne Steak

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one of six new California restaurants added by the **Michelin Guide** to its list of “new discoveries.”

Selanne Executive Chef **Vincent Terusa** said the Michelin designation lit a fire under everyone at the restaurant.

“It makes you want to push even harder, push for that Michelin experience. It’s hard to keep consistent, but we have an amazing staff and service and ambiance. Everything needs to fire on all cylinders.”

Terusa was at the St. Regis Monarch Beach Resort (now **Waldorf Astoria Monarch Beach Resort & Club**) before coming to Selanne as the opening sous chef. He took over as executive chef six years ago.

“We take care with what we are creating for our guests,” Terusa said.

“People are expecting something remarkable, and we give it to them. It’s a testament to the team, we have people that love the craft. We have a professional service staff. This is their career and it really shows. The service is the best I have worked with.”

Anniversary

The restaurant is celebrating its 10th anniversary and continues to evolve.

Selanne recently added **The B8kery by Selanne**, adjacent to Selanne Steak Tavern. It features an array of pastries and breads created by **Rebekah Eastman**, who is also the new pastry chef at Selanne Steak Tavern. Previously, Eastman worked as pastry chef at **Bourbon Steak**, Chef **Michael Mina**’s restaurant at the Waldorf Astoria Monarch Beach Resort in Dana Point. ■



restaurant entry

Pacific Diver scallops

THE OCBJ REVIEW: BY CHRISTOPHER TRELA

The 10-year anniversary marked a perfect time to return to **Selanne Steak Tavern** and rediscover what made the restaurant as great as its namesake.

My friend and fellow foodie **Jim Owen** and I dined at Selanne Steak Tavern on a Tuesday evening in November. The restaurant was busy for a Tuesday, a tribute to its continued popularity.

We nabbed a prime table and perused the menu until our server, **Rafael**, arrived and we asked him for recommendations. He walked us through the menu, explaining in detail many of the dishes.

I asked to start with the black pepper and thyme loaf that came with sundried tomato tapenade and a flight of seasonal butters.

The loaf came ready to pull apart and enjoy, which we did. The bread was warm, and the soft butter melted into the bread. We were in bread heaven. This is a must to start any Selanne experience.

Next came oysters, but not any oysters. These were Moon Rock oysters from Oregon.

“These were harvested no later than two days ago,” Rafael stated. “They arrived today. They have a buttery finish.”

The oysters came with a variety of accompaniments including vinegar sauce, cocktail sauce, horseradish, tobacco and lemon.

I had a bad experience with oysters several years ago and have avoided them since, but took the plunge and was rewarded with—as Rafael said—buttery oysters that tasted like they just swam in from the ocean and plopped onto my plate.

Next came Scarlett beet “ravioli” with artisanal goat cheese, hazelnuts and golden beet vinaigrette. This is a brilliant dish, a lovely combination of flavors and textures with a creative execution.

Our next dish Rafael said was “my favorite thing on the menu. This is a signature dish. This is sushi grade scallops, pan seared, with cauliflower puree, porcini powder, pickled



oysters

shimeji mushrooms, and fermented black garlic on top.”

Rafael suggested we turn the garlic into a paste and have some with every bite.

“It’s the **Jennifer Grey** and **Patrick Swayze** dance on your palate—it’s just the right amount of dirty,” he said with a smile, referencing the movie “Dirty Dancing.”

He was right. Like the oysters, the scallops ditched the ocean and hitched a ride on a Laguna Trolley to arrive at my table. These were stellar scallops, and the mushrooms were the perfect accouterment.

But there was more to come: Jerusalem artichoke soup with Bosc pear gel and smoked pumpkin seeds with sunchoke chips and micro cilantro with a touch of brown butter.

“I suggest using the spoon, take it for a dance and enjoy everything together,” Rafael said.

Again, his dance metaphor was on point. My spoon provided a pas de deux on my palate. This was a redefinition of

soup—more like a brilliant bisque bath with artichokes taking the spotlight.

Then came a chef’s special: 60-day aged steaks accompanied by grilled onions and mushrooms with truffle butter and garlic chips plus a fennel crust and granny smith apples.

Wow. That says it all.

We ended our gastronomic experience with a lovely strawberry soufflé, a nice change from the typical chocolate soufflé.

Chef-Driven Menu

As Jim and I wondered who would carry us to our cars after all that food, Selanne Executive Chef **Vincent Terusa** came and sat with us to discuss the menu.

I told him we started with the bread, which he said was “a fun way to start. We often change the butter daily. It shows our skill in a subtle way.”

Not so subtle were the scallops, which Terusa said are a fan favorite.

“They have been on the menu since day one. We have tried to move away from that dish but got a lot of pushback from customers, so we give people what they want.”

As to the artichoke soup, “I love artichokes. We use pear gel here. We sauté pears. Most people don’t put those together but it’s one of my favorites.”

Terusa noted that Selanne is a chef-driven steakhouse, so when he was preparing our steak entrée, he decided to add a side of mushrooms because “we can source really good mushrooms. Most steakhouses give you one type of mushroom, here we have six mushrooms. We give them a hard sauté and then glaze with Madeira wine.”

Based on my experience at Selanne Steak Tavern, everything is humming at high gear and shows no sign of slowing down. This is truly one of the best restaurants in Orange County.

Selanne Steak Tavern: 1464 South Coast Highway, Laguna Beach, (949) 715-9881, selannesteaktavern.com