

MAIN COURSE

Northern Exposure

START PLANNING THAT ROAD TRIP—YOUNG CHEFS ARE RESHAPING DINING ON THE CENTRAL COAST



FEW HOURS north via the 101, the Central Coast has long offered a day-tripper's paradise for venturous Angelinos—tamales at La Super-Rica, *aebelskivers* in Solvang, maybe a glass of Syrah at the Hitching Post. But lately, along the lush expanse of hills between Ventura and Santa Maria, a string of openings has injected the region's food scene with renewed buzz.

Drawn by the area's relative affordability, immaculate produce, and close-knit community, many of the new-restaurant owners are young couples and first-time operators. For Daisy Ryan, chef and co-owner of Bell's in Los Alamos, the primary attraction was returning to the place where she grew up, though the unique landscape offers advantages as well. "The Santa Ynez Valley reminds me of wine regions in France like Beaujolais and Lyon," says Ryan. "Opening a bistro felt right here." Fifteen minutes south, in the sleepy winery town of Los Olivos, is the Bear and the Star, a refined ranch house that opened in 2017 and manages its own herd of Wagyu cattle.

With the arrival of new-wave Indian concept Bibi Ji and neon-hued Southeast Asian spot Tyger Tyger, Santa Barbara has welcomed a host of fresh voices as well. Rachel Greenspan left New York, her home for over a decade, after her husband, Brendan Smith, got offered a job in Santa Barbara. When the opportunity arose, the couple decided to open Bettina, which debuted in November, a restaurant specializing in naturally leavened, wood-fired pizza. "We wanted Bettina to feel like being welcomed into our home," Greenspan says.

A short drive away, Lauren Herman and Christina Olufson—two chefs who met at Lucques in West Hollywood—opened Bossie's Kitchen in January. The couple had their first date stomping grapes in wine



NEW KIDS ON THE DOCK

From top: Northern Thai-style *khao soi* at Tyger Tyger; Brendan Smith of Bettina weighs pizza dough; Bell's rotisserie chicken with peas and spring onions

country, and later got married at the Santa Barbara Courthouse. So when opening their first restaurant, it seemed natural to do it in the area they love. "We're hoping to be a neighborhood restaurant," says Olufson. "The kind of place where you meet a friend for a drink or pick up dinner on your way to the beach." > MARIA ZIZKA

Four to Visit

Bell's

> The small-town charm of Los Alamos is a fitting backdrop for this bistro run by husband-and-wife duo (and Per Se alums) Daisy and Greg Ryan. Caper-studded steak tartare and *moules frites* are must-orders during dinner, accompanied by a phenomenal wine list and buttery gâteau Breton. *bells restaurant.com*.

Tyger Tyger

> Located in Santa Barbara's burgeoning Funk Zone, this Southeast Asian restaurant serves crispy rice salad dotted with grilled albacore and lotus-root summer rolls with apricot chutney. And save room: The spot's owners also run Monkeyshine, an adjacent ice-cream counter offering black sesame soft serve. *tygertygersb.com*.

Bettina

> Brendan Smith's Neapolitan-style pizzas topped with local produce get top billing at this charmer in the Montecito Country Mart. Don't miss the antipasti plates, which come with house-baked focaccia; Smith previously ran the bread program at Brooklyn pizzeria Roberta's. *bettina pizzeria.com*.

Bossie's Kitchen

> Named after the giant cow statue atop its historic building, Bossie's is a casual, counter-service operation powered by ingredients culled from area farmers' markets: seasonal salads and soups, rotisserie chicken, and a selection of glazed doughnuts in flavors like bourbon peach and blueberry buttermilk. *bossies kitchen.com*.

DRINK: TYGER TYGER; ROB STARK; BETTINA; BOTTLE BRANDING; BELL'S; LIZ BARCLAY