

# LA JOLLA LIGHT

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PAGE B12 - DECEMBER 12, 2019 - LA JOLLA LIGHT

## BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

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Jamaican Jerk Pork Belly with baby carrots, swiss chard, plantains, black-eyed peas, spicy jellies and sweet-potato purée



Mushroom Tortellini with wild mushrooms and confit piquillo peppers



Heirloom Tomato Salad with cucumbers, pickled red onions, tahini and parsley

COURTESY PHOTOS

## NINE-TEN Restaurant a pioneer in farm-to-table dining

BY JEANNE RAWDIN

Not many restaurants can boast of a menu that changes daily. But NINE-TEN can. The chic restaurant at the Grande Colonial Hotel focuses on seasonal cooking, ever changing its entrees to incorporate fresh, local produce and whatever bounty the sea offers up.

Executive Chef Jason Knibb is known for his ability to pair unique items that complement each other, developing farm-to-table combinations around different harvests.

"We still source local product as best as we can," Knibb told the *Light*, "staying true to the core values the restaurant was built upon."

The restaurant was built upon a historic spot in 2001 — the former site of the La Jolla Drugstore, owned and operated by Kansas native Silas Putnam since 1926. The drugstore's pharmacist was the father of Gregory Peck, who grew up in La Jolla and eventually left for Hollywood to become a film star.

In 1980, the space became Putnam's Grille, which quickly became a local landmark. Then in February 2001, Putnam's Grille closed its doors and six months later opened as NINE-TEN. In 2017, the restaurant's bar, main dining room and sidewalk patio were renovated for a fresh, new look.

"We've come a long way since opening, continuing to evolve our market cuisine into what it has become today," Chef Knibb said. "But one thing has remained constant: our signature Half-Baked Chocolate Cake. It has been on the menu since Day 1 and we've served up more than 50,000 of them to our guests." (That's equal to 2,375 pounds of dark chocolate, 20,000 eggs, another 20,000 egg yolks, 1,250 pounds of sugar and 172 pounds



NINE-TEN's narrow, high-ceiling dining room with a casually elegant, contemporary ambiance is enhanced with color-scheme infusions of emerald green and light wood. The restaurant's main focal point is the vibrant and locally inspired ocean-and-fauna wall panorama created by acclaimed artist Dana Montlack.

of flour for one big sweet tooth!)

Although the restaurant is part of the hotel, most of its customers aren't hotel patrons; they're locals.

As general manager Terry Underwood explained: "La Jollans really use our restaurant as an extension of their own kitchens. They visit multiple times each week for breakfast, lunch, dinner, weekend brunch or happy hour. We're also considered

a 'special occasion' restaurant, so many people who live in other parts of San Diego will visit when celebrating something or when entertaining out-of-town guests."

Nevertheless, the restaurant still gets a healthy percentage of its customers from hotels in the area, as it's on the concierge list at all of them.

Diners who want a true epicurean experience any night of the week can put

themselves at the "Mercy of the Chef" for dinner, which is a special prix-fixe menu created at the whim and inspiration of Chef Knibb and features matching wines.

"It's truly the ideal way to experience all the best of what Chef Knibb puts out of the kitchen," Underwood said. "It's a lot of fun and adventurous and you really get to try many more of his culinary creations than if you were to just order the typical three-course dinner."

In 2014, the U.S. Healthful Food Council (USHFC) awarded the restaurant its REAL certification, which stands for Responsible Epicurean and Agricultural Leadership. This recognition is an emerging national standard for nutrition and sustainability best practices in the food-service industry.

Beyond sustainability, NINE-TEN's list of culinary accolades is impressive. The restaurant was awarded Michelin California Guide's 2019 "Plate Distinction," and was also named 2019 Reader's and Critic's Pick for best restaurants in *San Diego Magazine*. It also received the first place Gold Award in the Zagat Survey this year.

According to Chef Knibb, NINE-TEN is distinctive because of its consistency. "We have remained true to who we are and what we do best since we opened our doors in 2001. That consistency in the food and the service delivery is what sets us apart and brings our guests coming back multiple times each week."

NINE-TEN Restaurant is at 910 Prospect St. Reservations recommended. (858) 964-5400. [nine-ten.com](http://nine-ten.com)

— *Business Spotlight* features commercial enterprises that support La Jolla Light. ♦