

RIVIERA

ORANGE COUNTY

INSIDE:

KATE BECKINSALE: NEW YEAR, NEW BLOOD

GAME ON! RIVIERA GOES CENTER ICE

UNDENIABLE: STAR CANDY'S GOT DAZZLE

DANIELLE ROBB HITS IT AT HIGH VELOCITY

BEAUTYLICIOUS LOTIONS AND POTIONS

BEST OF THE CITY 2012!

STYLE
HOME
CULTURE
FOOD
AND MORE!



TABLE TANTALIZER From left: The salmon, served with root veggies, nicoise butter and chard, is a must-try; get a dose of "The King" with The Presley dessert.

Extraordinarily Common

A former executive chef for the Wilhelm dynasty, Ryan Adams can finally show off his unique culinary style in a restaurant that's truly all his own.

| *By Tina Borgatta* |
| *Photography by Andrea Bricco* |

My plate arrived piled high with rice, green beans, caramelized baby onions and a large fillet of striped sea bass. The dish was so full that my food almost spilled over the edges. At first glance, it looked like something you might get at an old-fashioned diner—a heaping helping of chow. But it only took one bite to realize this was no greasy-spoon production. The rice: wild and nutty. The green beans: fresh and well seasoned, with just the right amount of snap. And the sea bass? Light. Flaky. Citrusy. Not a hint of fishiness. The combination of flavors were sophisticated and balanced on my palate. But that should have come as no surprise, considering this was the handiwork of chef Ryan Adams. After years of heading the kitchens at some of

Orange County's top restaurants, Adams now has the freedom to dish out his own style of culinary artistry at his new Three Seventy Common Kitchen+Drink (formerly Sorrento Grille) in Laguna Beach.

Ask me to describe this place in just one word, and I'd have to say "eclectic." Instead of a basket of bread, diners are presented with a small bowl of popcorn flavored with maple and a little salt. And as diner-esque as the sea bass entrée is—or, rather, appears to be—the salmon (a house favorite) is every bit as classic in preparation and appearance. It arrived in an artful presentation—a tidyportion of pink fish (served at just the right degree of rare, so it's moist but not gelatinous) neatly placed atop a modest serving of sautéed chard, with caramelized baby onions (which, by the way, my husband loved) and sweet sliced carrots carefully dotting the outer rim of the plate.

If Adams seems at home here, it's because he is—in a number of ways. For starters, he headed the Sorrento kitchen for two years before it closed this past summer. He bought the restaurant from owners Philo and Diane Smith, and wasted no time going to **CONTINUED...**



Three Seventy Common Kitchen+Drink

★★★

370 Glenneyre St., Laguna Beach, 949.494.8686, 370common.com

What the stars mean:

★ fair, some noteworthy qualities

★★ good, above average

★★★ very good, well above norm

★★★★ excellent, among the area's best

★★★★★ world-class, extraordinary in every detail

Reviews are based on multiple visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall reaction to food, ambience and service.

HOURS

Tue.-Sun., 5-10PM;
bar opens at 4PM

WHO GOES THERE

Locals and tourists who venture off the beaten path

FOR THE REGULARS

Pre-purchase a libation for a friend, and your bartender will put your pal's name and drink on a chalkboard for all to see.

ANOTHER FUN FACT

The appetizer specials menu is presented the way sushi menus are—in list form.

WHAT IT COSTS

Salads and small plates, \$5-\$13; entrées, \$9-\$27; sides, \$5; desserts, \$6



DOMESTICATED!
Clockwise from left: The eatery's enviro is urban retro meets modern; a meat and cheese platter is perfect for sharing; ingredients are produced locally

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...CONTINUED work on its reincarnation. By mid-October, Adams was offering preview tastings—and the old Sorrento sign wasn't even off the building yet. Within days of its hard opening, Three Seventy Common was drawing many of Sorrento's old regulars.

And then there's the menu—a true reflection of the chef. It's hearty, down-home comfort food, because Adams is a down-home kind of guy who spent lots of time in the kitchen with his grandmother when he was a kid. You'll find meatloaf (wrapped in bacon), pork belly (so good) and shepherd's pie (made with veal and accompanied by a cheesy side of mashed potatoes). But you'll also find some European and Asian influences. And that's because he was trained in classic French cooking and then spent two years working in Hawaii. One example of that European slant: Adams' take on fried eggs and ham. The egg is served atop broccolini, a crispy sheet of prosciutto and a slice of Asiago, then finished with a light dusting of seasoned bread crumbs. It's classic diner-type fare elevated to a whole new level

because of the ingredients (which, by the way, are all farmed and produced locally) and, of course, the panache. The Asian influence? An appetizer specials menu on one recent visit featured barbecued chicken wings (deliciously smoky) drizzled with a sweet-and-spicy sauce. And Adams serves his lamb chops with yuzu, chili, mizuna and ponzu vinaigrette. You'll find both of those dishes served right alongside stuff like oysters Rockefeller, foie gras and poutine.

That same juxtaposition of classic and creative appears on the drink menu, which features favorites like the Old Fashioned, Singapore Sling and Moscow Mule, along with more modern and unique concoctions like the Ginger Loves Me (ginger liqueur, Aperol, lime juice, bitters and tonic) and the Chupacabra (tequila, lime juice and agave muddled with cilantro and garnished with cucumber).

There's a bit of an edge to everything here—much like Adams, who sports tats down his left arm. (Take a look at his info page on Facebook. It says, simply, "eat me.") And the décor: a blend of urban retro (an

old, giant neon arrow hanging from a stairway wall directing diners to an upstairs loft looks like it could have been swiped from a roadside diner along Route 66) and modern (there's a sleek open kitchen with counter seating—the kind you'd expect to find at a hip, new sushi bar).

And the restaurant's folksy weekly promotions bring another element to that down-home vibe—but with a clever, subtle sophistication (again, much like Adams). There's a family-style Sunday dinner. And Tuesdays are Brown Bag nights—diners can choose from a selection of wines specially priced at \$15, and the bottles are delivered to tables in brown bags. Kitschy but cool.

As for Adams, his hard-edge looks belie his refined demeanor, classic culinary training and heft of experience. Before landing at Sorrento in 2009, he spent 11 years working for David Wilhelm as executive chef for the Culinary Adventures dynasty (French 75, Char Noir, Savannah, Chimayo). In a 2008 interview with *Great Taste* (an O.C. dining industry mag), Adams admitted he's not the corporate type: "I am not nine-to-five. I don't dress corporate. I don't act corporate. And I speak my mind." (Perhaps it's yet another reason he appears so confident and comfortable in his new home.) But he got his start, as I mentioned earlier, in his grandma's kitchen. It seems Adams was a precocious little boy (and, surprisingly, a finicky eater), and whenever he got into trouble (which appears to have been often), his grandma would put him to work. You'll find a nod to her on the dessert menu. The Grandma B's Chocolate Cake With Love is really his grandmother's recipe. However, Adams claims the "Love" is just the name he gave to the strawberry sauce that's drizzled on the plate. But, like my entrée, something tells me there's much more to it than that. **E**

