

Pizza Fusion

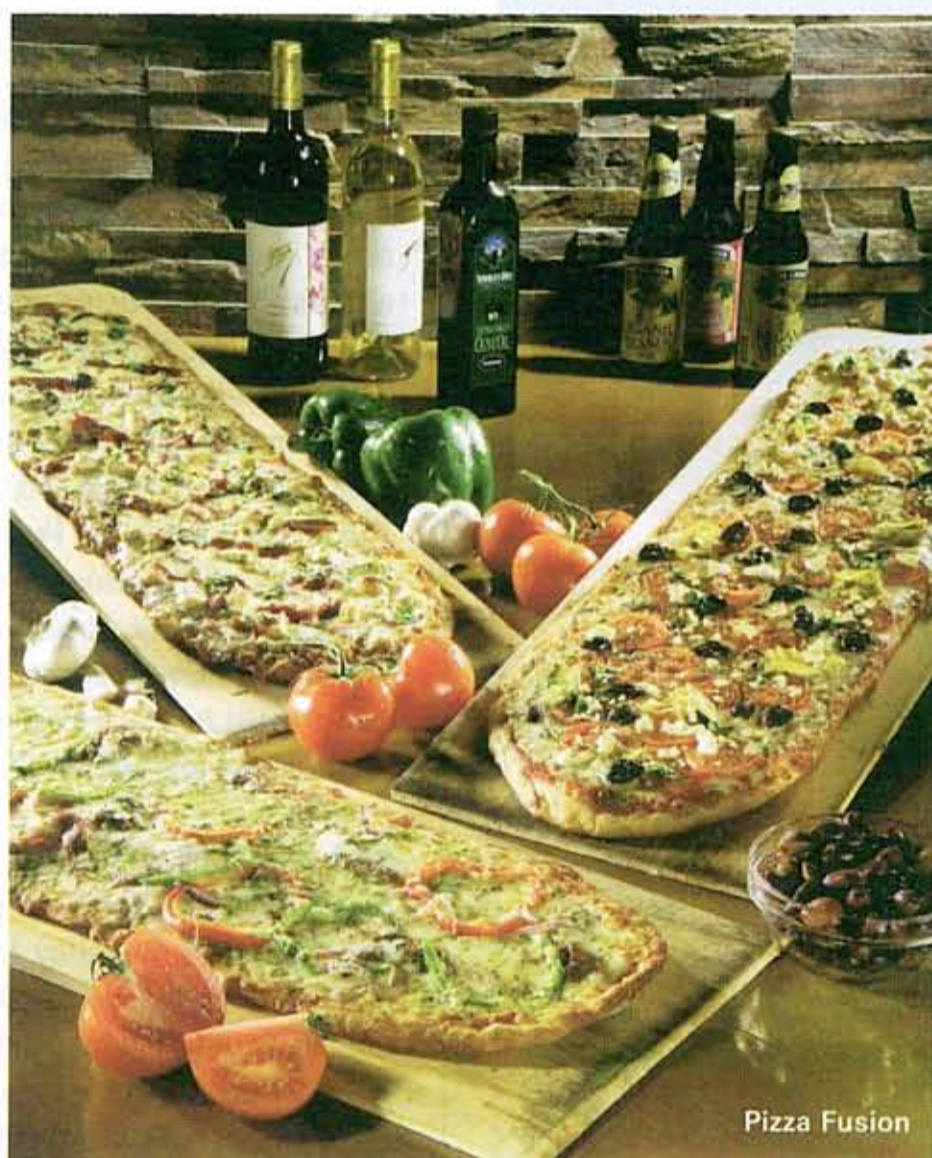
DINING

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Chains, Cheese and Chocolate

CHAINS, CHAINS, CHAINS keep crowding into San Diego, and some are pretty interesting, if for widely varying reasons. “Saving the Earth, One Pizza at a Time” is the challenge taken by Fort Lauderdale-based Pizza Fusion, which opens soon on Fifth Avenue in Hillcrest.



Pizza Fusion

The menu of “Earth-friendly fast food” stars organic pizzas built on a choice of three crusts, with toppings like the “Very Vegan” veggies with soy “mozzarella” and the tony, \$48 Surf & Turf with New York steak, Key West shrimp and Maine lobster . . . A fast pitch from Petco Park’s 10th Avenue gate, Tilted Kilt Pub & Eatery comes to us from Scottsdale, not exactly the global epicenter of culinary creativity. Hey, guys, this well-endowed sports bar not only offers multiple TV monitors but is staffed with “Tilted Kilt girls” (that’s what they call ‘em), costumed in a way one observer characterized as “Brit-

ney Spears meets Austin Powers.” The hefty menu focuses on chili, sandwiches and pizzas — among them a pineapple-topped pie unsubtly named “Kamana-Wana-Lei-U” . . . Up the street, Basic Urban Kitchen, a pizza-only lounge and restaurant that owns a high-voltage buzz, is set to clone itself (a copy in Roseville, California, opens this summer) and to produce an offspring chain of pizza houses called URBN. Owner Jon Mangini ambitiously plans to sprinkle 15 or 20 URBNs around San Diego County alone.

E.T. MIGHT HAVE RETURNED had he tasted the chocolate-and-peanut butter confections produced by locally based Jer’s Handmade Chocolates (jers.com). Like any number of enterprises, Jer’s began as a hobby. Founder Jerry Swain, at one time an IBM sales manager, used to roll chocolate-enrobed peanut butter balls as holiday gifts. His line now includes the original “IncrediBall” of

SIDE DISH

He who Churns the Butter

RYAN JOHNSTON, the admirable young chef of Whisknadle — the downtown La Jolla restaurant formerly known as Fresh-er — treads the less-traveled side of the street. A master at producing swoon-inducing flavors, such as the celebrated sauce Bolognese he lathers atop eggy pappardelle, Johnston has reset his kitchen clock to the do-it-yourself era. The chef and his crew cure meats, brine pickles, bake breads, roll pasta, churn ice cream and, not inconceivably, will sing under the harvest moon when it floats overhead this fall. The butter is produced in-house at this distinctive Wall Street eatery, which seats guests mostly on a semi-open terrace with cozy corners and low lights. Proprietor Arturo Kassel and Johnston molded Fresh-er into Whisknadle by casting it as a casual neighborhood bistro, and while by-the-glass wine prices of \$8 to \$13 suggest a pricy neighborhood, the affordable small plates and entrées provide good value. Johnston makes flavors spark like matches and kindling, in dishes like a pretty salad of beets, tangerines and Humboldt Fog goat cheese or a plate of succulent roasted sweetbreads and aromatic bacon. The cheese fondue properly should be called raclette, after the musky, melted French cheese that marries so deliciously with house-cured bresaola (think beef prosciutto), tart cornichon pickles and palate-calming potatoes. Entrées range from an impressive hangar steak au poivre to fried chicken with pea vines and fiery harissa sauce, and simple grilled fish with Chino’s vegetables.

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DISH

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PAIRING WINE AND CHEESE is hardly a new idea, and the mutual affinity of wine and chocolate is not exactly unknown in self-indulgent circles. Bringing the three together is a novelty, however, one deliciously realized by the new Eno tasting room at Hotel del Coronado. Extremely elegant truffles crafted by master pastry chef and confectioner Jack Fisher are featured alongside truly gorgeous cheeses and fine wines. And while tasting trios of these at any time of day is a treat, you could compose a one-of-a-kind (and quite remarkable) dinner on occasion ... New in Little Italy, Enoteca Style calls itself "The Best Panini Wine Bar in San Diego." The claim might raise eyebrows up India Street at Sogno di Vino, but this chic hideout does serve one hot list of toasted Italian sandwiches. Named for neighborhood streets, the list cruises the alphabet from Ash (cold cuts, pickled peppers, garlic aioli) to Laurel (albacore tuna and garnishes), unconscionably skipping over Fir and Grape ... Maybe The Restaurant at The Pearl, the tiny dinery at Point Loma's remodeled Pearl hotel on Rosecrans Street, finally will find its way under chef number three, Trey Hartinger, a 26-year-old former Floridian who's worked at Stingaree and Bar West.

RED MARLIN AND HALIBUT: With the funky old Hyatt Islandia grandly remade into the Hyatt Regency Mission Bay, the upscale Red Marlin restaurant features choice aquatic vistas that should delight guests from fly-over states—and San Diegans, too—especially those who love brunch. Doves may crowd the \$39.95 (half-price for kids) Sunday buffets, which pair creative hot entrées with old favorites like iced jumbo shrimp, eggs Benedict, custom omelets and waffles ... For the duration of the Alaska halibut season, Brian Malarkey of The Oceanaire Seafood Room will serve this succulent fish as a grilled, 16-ounce T-bone, pan-seared with spring peas and a lovely ham risotto and baked with Asian mushrooms, baby artichokes and Umbrian truffles. ■



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