

RANCH & COAST

SAN DIEGO'S LUXURY LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

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THE LA JOLLA ISSUE



Celebrating 25 years of Nine-Ten Restaurant & Bar

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Travel has a way of changing our perspective, but sometimes the most memorable journeys require the fewest miles. During a recent staycation at The Lodge at Torrey Pines, my family and I found ourselves rediscovering La Jolla — not as locals rushing from one commitment to the next, but as guests savoring every moment. From morning walks above the Pacific, leisurely afternoons by the pool overlooking the golf course, and an afternoon excursion to the Torrey Pines Gliderport to exceptional dining and the quiet luxury of simply slowing down, the experience served as a reminder that one of California's finest destinations has been here all along. It's that renewed appreciation that we celebrate in this month's La Jolla-focused issue.

La Jolla's story is told through its people, its places, and the institutions that have stood the test of time. For our cover feature, photographed by James Tran, *Ranch & Coast* Food & Beverage Editor Brandon Hernández sits down with acclaimed chef Jason Knibb to discuss Nine-Ten Restaurant & Bar's remarkable 25-year journey and the recipe for its enduring success as the signature restaurant of the historic Grande Colonial hotel.

Philanthropy also takes center stage as we visit the La Jolla Shores home of Jenny and Mike McGowan. As chair of Las Patronas' milestone 80th Jewel Ball on August 8 at La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club, Jenny connects with Editor-at-Large Andrea Naversen to share how her love of Venice inspired this year's "Festa di Venezia" theme while opening the doors to a home that has become the unofficial headquarters for one of San Diego's most long-lasting charitable traditions. It's a story of family, friendship, and the remarkable impact of a volunteer organization that has quietly transformed our community for eight decades.



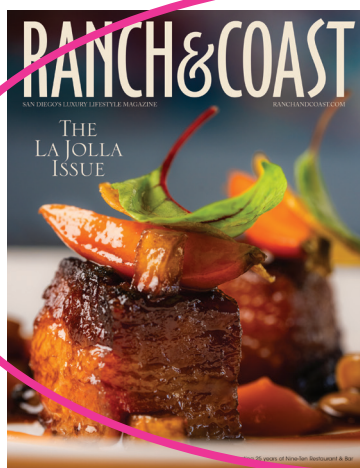
PHOTO BY BOB STEFANKO

Looking ahead at the weeks to come, I hope to see you at the 30th anniversary of Symphony at Salk on August 15. There's something magical about gathering at Louis Kahn's architectural masterpiece as the sun sets over the Pacific, knowing the music and philanthropy support groundbreaking scientific research. Then, this fall Celebrate the Craft returns to The Lodge at Torrey Pines on October 18, bringing together California's finest chefs, vintners, farmers, and artisans. Both are wonderful reminders of what makes La Jolla so extraordinary: its ability to blend natural beauty, culture, innovation, and community in ways that are uniquely its own.

Whether this issue inspires you to book a staycation, discover a new favorite boutique, linger over a memorable meal, or attend one of these signature events, I hope it serves as a reminder that sometimes the greatest luxury isn't traveling somewhere new — it's rediscovering the extraordinary places right here in our own backyard.

Mia

Mia Park, Editor-in-Chief



On the Cover

Executive Chef Jason Knibb of Nine-Ten Restaurant & Bar's Grilled Half Jamaican Jerk Chicken: confit Japanese sweet potato, broccolini, pickled green onion, Jimmy Nardello peppers, Fresno chili sofrito

Photography by James Tran

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INDULGE

DINING



Nine-Ten Restaurant & Bar's
Cacio E Pepe: porcini mushroom
spaghettini, cured egg yolk,
Parmesan, cracked black pepper,
shaved mushroom

A RECIPE FOR LONGEVITY

NINE-TEN EXECUTIVE CHEF JASON KNIBB REFLECTS ON HIS DECADES AT THE HELM

BY BRANDON HERNÁNDEZ | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES TRAN

When Nine-Ten launched as a literal cornerstone of La Jolla's historic Grande Colonial hotel in 2001, it embodied Southern California's burgeoning farm-to-table ethos. Daily changing menus featured spontaneous dishes composed of just-harvested, seasonal produce procured from the likes of

Chino Farms and other local purveyors. It was access to such fresh ingredients, and the ability to touch, feel, and utilize the region's vast bounty, that inspired Jason Knibb to relocate from Utah, where he and his wife had started a family, to helm Nine-Ten as its executive chef. »

The job did not disappoint. Knibb was given *carte blanche* to run the restaurant his way, flex his creativity, and compose dishes free of micromanagement or approval from ownership. His mornings were spent visiting farms, forging relationships with producers, and selecting ingredients for that same day's service. It was the type of dream scenario most chefs yearn for. Yet, exhausted by the fast-paced perpetual grind of fashioning daily menus, Knibb wondered if he would be able to last very long in his new role.

Fast-forward to present day, and Nine-Ten is celebrating a quarter-century on Prospect Street. That longevity is incredibly impressive. So, too, is the fact that Knibb is not only still there but enthusiastic and thriving after all these years. Not bad for a chef who initially thought he might be "one-and-done." So, what changed? A lot.



"Having a different menu every day was difficult. I tried to run with it for a while, but it was hard to achieve consistency, and we really wanted stability," says Knibb. Determined to right the ship, he took a step back to reevaluate the manner in which he and his team operated. "We realized that, with the exception of hyper-seasonal items, most products stick around for a while, so there was no need to flip the menu as often as we were."

Knibb decided to slow things down and develop new menus every three months, shifting with the seasons to showcase their timely offerings. Doing so allowed him to not only develop but also refine his dishes. After several months — with a solid menu and a team which had fully bought into his vision — he felt he was finally getting his feet under him. Regulars and critics agreed, as the restaurant began receiving steady patronage and scores of accolades behind dishes steeped in purpose and originality.

"Nine-Ten's cuisine is market-driven and well-presented but not overly manipulated," says Knibb. "What's kept us moving forward over the years has been embracing more global flavors, and sometimes dipping into our cultural backgrounds to bring in some Latin, Asian, and Caribbean influences."

A key example is a Jamaican jerk pork belly starter that Knibb, who was born in Montego Bay, developed early on and still has on the menu. Lacquered, unctuous pork belly, Swiss chard, baby carrots, and tender black-eyed peas are served with a purée of sweet potato enlivened by a capsicum-rich scotch-bonnet jelly. It's exemplary of Nine-Ten's style, with myriad diverse elements coming together in a balanced manner.





OPPOSITE TOP Grilled Half Jamaican Jerk Chicken: confit Japanese sweet potato, broccolini, pickled green onion, Jimmy Nardello peppers, Fresno chili sofrito

OPPOSITE BOTTOM Nine-Ten Executive Chef Jason Knibb
LEFT Smoked Liberty Duck Breast: roasted fennel, Sungold tomato, plum, sorrel, elderflower, fennel pollen, chamomile/strawberry duck

BELOW Tuna Crudo: charred cucumber, rainier cherry, cucumber blossom, thai basil, black lime, lemon verbena oil, coconut/finger lime jus

Romano is converted into a decadent umami bomb by way of fungi. Knibb's house-made noodles are infused with porcini powder, tossed in a rich mushroom broth, and topped with shaved cremini mushrooms.

Other dishes Knibb says encapsulate his culinary point of view include a summer-inspired sweet-and-sour crudo of local tuna with flame grapes, purple shiso, and lemon verbena oil; and smoked duck breast with plums, Sungold tomatoes, and a delicate strawberry-chamomile jus. Both dishes offer unique, eclectic accoutrements with a focus on freshness, seasonality, and sustainability.

Beyond development of high-quality flavors, dishes, and menus, Knibb says his greatest accomplishments while at Nine-Ten have come from learning how to be a good leader. That includes mentoring his staff and putting trust in others, something that was challenging at first given his inherently hands-on personality. Knibb says putting in time, listening to his staff, and empowering them has made them more invested and led to long-tenured teammates whose energy and input he has greatly benefitted from.

"We try to build bites for diners — combining components that work well together — versus having people meander through a plate," says Knibb. "And we enjoy doing different types of riffs on dishes. It sets us apart, especially when it comes to entrées, making them more fun and intriguing instead of standard or cumbersome."

Case in point, Nine-Ten's take on *cacio e pepe*. What would traditionally be a plate of peppered spaghetti with Pecorino

"Everybody that has worked at Nine-Ten has contributed to it in some fashion. Whether they were cooks, sous chefs, or pastry chefs, they all leave their mark," says Knibb. "At the end of the day, we are a team. Passion ebbs and flows, creativity is something that may come and go, but this is an everyday affair. There are things that need to be done, so we lean on each other. That's a big part of what's kept us going all these years." 858.964.5400, nine-ten.com 

