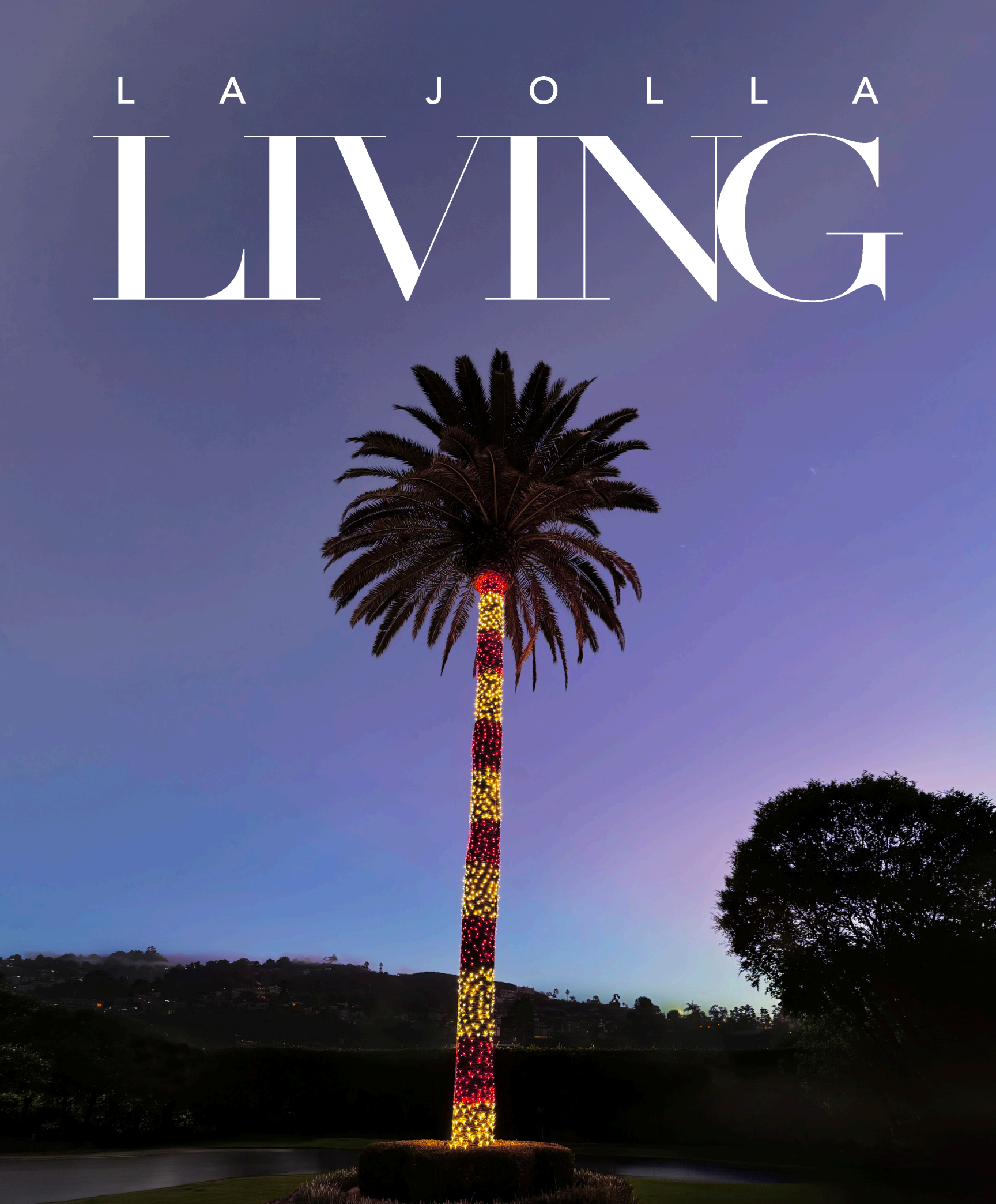
LA JOLLA LIVING





25 Years of Nine-Ten: *A Conversation With Chef Jason Knibb*

For 25 years, NINE-TEN has been part of La Jolla's dining story. At the heart of that story is Chef Jason Knibb, whose ingredient-driven cooking, commitment to hospitality, and appreciation for San Diego's local bounty have helped shape the restaurant for more than two decades. As NINE-TEN celebrates its 25th anniversary, we sat down with Jason as he reflects on his culinary journey, the mentors who shaped him, and what continues to inspire him.

WHAT INSPIRED YOUR JOURNEY INTO THE CULINARY WORLD, AND HOW HAS YOUR PERSPECTIVE EVOLVED OVER TIME?

My culinary journey began through surfing, which eventually led me to restaurant work. Through a friend, I landed an interview at Wolfgang Puck's Eureka, and





the rest is history. I was always motivated to prove myself because I didn't come from a traditional culinary school background. That pushed me to work harder and earn the respect of the chefs I worked for. I wanted them to feel proud of the effort, discipline, and growth I brought into the kitchen every day. Over the years, I've grown to truly love this industry and appreciate everything it has provided for me.

WHERE DO YOU THINK YOUR WORK ETHIC COMES FROM?

I was fortunate to grow up with hardworking parents who set a strong example. As a Jamaican immigrant family, there was always a sense that we had to prove ourselves through dedication and perseverance. My father worked six days a week while building his company to provide for our family, and my mother worked tirelessly as well, supporting my brother, me, and her parents. This taught me early on that if you wanted something, you had to work for it. My parents' sacrifice, resilience, and commitment to family are where my work ethic comes from.

WHO HAS BEEN MOST INFLUENTIAL IN HELPING YOU DEVELOP AS A CHEF AND LEADER?

One of the most influential people in my career was one of the first chefs I worked for under Wolfgang Puck, Chef Marc Valiani. He was a true mentor, incredibly generous with his knowledge, guidance, and time. He made us cooks feel valued by giving us ownership of our responsibilities and involving us in the creative process. He guided us through dish preparation, menu development, and the thought process behind building a successful kitchen. That sense of ownership and pride was instrumental in shaping my career and leadership style, and it's something I strive to bring to my own kitchen today.

YOU HAVE ALSO CREDITED CHEF TREY FOSHEE OF GEORGE'S AT THE COVE AS AN IMPORTANT INFLUENCE. WHAT HAS HIS FRIENDSHIP MEANT TO YOU?

Trey believed in me early on and gave me the opportunity to become a chef, which had a tremendous impact on my career and my life. Beyond being an incredible mentor and chef, he's also been a great friend. We've maintained a strong friendship for more than 30 years, and I've always appreciated his support, guidance, and belief in me.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE YOUR CULINARY PHILOSOPHY?

My culinary philosophy is simple: Start with great ingredients. Treat every ingredient with respect. Allow the flavors to speak for themselves. For me, it comes down to consistency, simplicity, and attention to detail.

HOW HAS SAN DIEGO'S DINING CULTURE EVOLVED, AND WHERE DO YOU SEE YOUR ROLE WITHIN IT?

San Diego's dining scene has evolved tremendously over the past two decades, with incredible talent shaping the city's culinary identity. While the industry continues to change, I still believe the heart of it comes down to passion, hard work, and dedication to the craft. My role has been staying committed to growth, mentoring young cooks, and helping pave the way for more progressive, ingredient-driven cuisine inspired by the incredible local resources we have here in San Diego.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE GUESTS FEEL WHEN THEY VISIT NINE-TEN?

I want guests to feel like they're stepping into an extension of their home, a place that is warm and welcoming. I hope they experience the incredible bounty of San Diego through food while enjoying an unpretentious experience centered on hospitality, quality, and genuine connection.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE JUST BEGINNING THEIR CULINARY JOURNEY?

First and foremost, enjoy the journey. Focus on becoming a great cook before anything else. Today, many young cooks want to jump straight to the title of "chef," but it's important to first put in the work behind the scenes. Take the time to learn, work hard, and truly master the craft of the kitchen. Being a chef is more than a job; it's a lifestyle that requires passion, discipline, and commitment.

FINALLY, WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR FAVORITE DISHES ON THE NINE-TEN MENU TODAY?

Definitely the Jamaican Jerk Chicken or the Jamaican Jerk Pork Belly. My roots are Jamaican, so the flavors and spices I grew up with have always been an important part of how I think about food. Both are dishes that connect where I come from with where I am today as a chef.

