



Food & Drink | Bon Appétit



Sausal

By Colleen Dunn Bates | Photos by Vanessa Stump

I'm normally wary of restaurants that make up a name for their cooking—like Sausal (pronounced saw-oo-SAL), which calls its fare Nuevo Rancho Cuisine. Sounds a bit twee, right? And yet the modern take on Alta California

Mexican/Spanish dishes turned out by co-owner and chef Anne Conness is anything but pretentious. Conness, who trained at such places as Water Grill and Campanile and co-owned and cooked at South Bay hot spots Tin Roof Bistro and Simmzy's, is neither of Mexican nor Spanish heritage, but she clearly loves the flavors of those countries. And her menu consistently satisfies.

Named for the Spanish rancho Sausal Redondo (Round Willow) that once claimed this piece of beach-adjacent real estate, Sausal has all the things needed for a California restaurant to be popular. Open space with high-beamed ceilings? Check. Gorgeously stocked bar? Check. Sidewalk patio? Check. Excellent house-made margaritas? Double-check. Magically (or perhaps because of the clever panels in between the ceiling beams), the open space is not deafening when full. It's a happy, comfortable place to hang out in.

As for the food, it's downright delicious, with something for everyone. From Baja oysters to a superb ceviche, the seafood is fresh and vibrantly seasoned. Vegetables, from the obligatory caramelized brussels sprouts to the colorful tamarind shrimp salad, are vivacious. Stewed dishes are the best of all—pork *chile verde* with sweet corn *elite*, arroz con pollo, and beef and goat *birria* would make Conness's *abuela* happy, if she had one. The table should share the rich oxtail empanadas; the hominy grits with a tomatillo salsa; and the California-trite-but-terrific salad of Tuscan kale, quinoa, and goat cheese. If you want to eat lighter, a Baja-style fish taco, sold à la carte, will do the trick.

Desserts are worth the calories, or if you're Ubering on a warm night, perhaps another one of the snazzy cocktails, like the prickly pear caipirinha. Me, I'll stick to the superb margaritas.

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