

MODERN LUXURY

# RIVERA

ORANGE COUNTY

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DEPARTMENTS



### REVIEW

**158** With old-school glam and creative takes on classic dishes, Harlow's is wowing foodies up and down the coast.

# THE REAL DEAL

WITH ITS FOCUS ON ORIGINALITY, HARLOW'S IS MAKING OLD SCHOOL COOL.

By Jamie Gwen

Photography by Tim Melideo

When I hear the words, "farm to table," I get a bit dizzy. What farm? Is it coming to my table? How close is the farm? Is it the same as every other restaurant on the block using that catchphrase? But Harlow's Kitchen & Craft Bar is different. It's real. And authentic. And Executive Chef Aaron Anderson's food is downright delicious. You'd be smart to make your way to the San Juan Capistrano spot. Seriously, you should get in the car now.

It's off the beaten path—in an unassuming shopping center—but once inside, you'll be welcomed with old-school hospitality and a warm, casual air. The decor is a rich and elegant throwback to 1800s Europe, but with a New Orleans vibe. It's swanky and cool, and it's an ideal fit for Anderson, an Indiana native who has this strange and wonderful combination of talent and outrageous humility (and the man knows his meat and potatoes).

The rest of the staff is equally skilled. A friendly host will seat you at the best table available—no games here—and your server will promptly arrive to take your drink order. Try the Moscow Mule, made with Tito's Handmade Vodka and housemade ginger beer (all the syrups are crafted on-site), and garnished with candied ginger and lime. It's not too sweet, with just the right ratio of vodka to mixer. The Piccolo is also a fine choice—because lambrusco and limoncello pair in a playful way.

Sip your cocktail while perusing the menu. You won't find any genetically modified foods or antibiotics here. Instead, everything is made



**FARM FRESH** From top: The spicy chicken arrabiatta; Harlow's warm, richly appointed dining room; the apple pie creme brulee.

from scratch—including breads, served toasty with freshly churned soft butter—and sourced from eco-friendly purveyors. Anderson also offers off-menu items almost every night. Those in the know need only ask for the VIP treatment.

I suggest beginning your meal with an order of the seasonal oysters to share. If they're the kushi variety, they'll be small and sweet, and you can thank the state of Washington for them. The bivalves are served with charred lemon and cocktail sauce, and they're scrumptious—as is the tuna tartare. The fish is of a nice quality (a bit more white membrane than I like, but still good), with mint accents and a

sprinkling of black tobiko for that textural high. The taro chips that accompany it are the perfect vehicles for scooping up the stuff—but it's the housemade Sriracha sauce that makes the dish, so ask for extra.

The winter pear and prosciutto salad should come next. It's an incredible mix of domestic prosciutto, sweet but well-balanced grilled fruit and burrata. It's finished with the chef's vanilla oil; the sweet, aromatic sauce perfumes the salad and ties it all together in a magnificent way. And do not miss the tomato bisque, with its gorgeous mouthfeel, served warm—not hot—to allow the herbaceous flavor to **CONTINUED...**



## Who Goes There

Foodies, groups, cocktail aficionados, nostalgists

## Must-Try Dish

The Colorado rib-eye cap, the tomato bisque, the osso buco

## Cutthroat Kitchen

One of Harlow's regular weekend guests loves chocolate desserts and has challenged the team not to repeat any.

## Best Seat in the House

Anywhere in the first room off the bar

## Insider's Tip

Ask for the chef's special to enjoy a secret off-menu creation.

...CONTINUED release. It's topped with croutons that meld into the soup and Thai basil for a kick.

Take a break between courses and survey the wine list. It's a subtle combination of blue chips and boutique vinos, and you'll find a nice array of Argentinian picks, along with bottles from Napa, Sonoma and the famed Alexander Valley—all of which will complement the incredible lineup of entrees that will soon excite your taste buds.

The New Zealand lamb rack, for example, is rubbed with coffee grounds and chilli powders, then seared to form an exquisite crust. Asparagus tips and crispy foraged mushrooms adorn the plate—it's a quintessential winter meal. The osso buco, meanwhile, is an experience in its own right. Anderson prepares this off-the-menu item a day ahead—don't worry, you can order it at any time—using lamb necks (as opposed to legs), which are smothered in the most sumptuous jus you've ever tasted. And then there's the Colorado rib-eye cap (aka the deckle, the butcher's choice). Cut from the cap that runs along the part of the cow where rib-eye steaks come from, this generous portion of beef is set atop a toasted crostini to soak up the meaty juices and comes with Kennebec french fries that are coated in rice bran for crunchy exteriors and tender middles. It's outrageous, and when you try it with the blistered cherry tomatoes joining it on the plate, you'll think you've died and gone to culinary heaven.

By this point, you'll certainly be full, but you cannot skip dessert. Anderson challenges his line cooks to come up with their own unique confections, and the champ's treat will grace the unwritten menu. On my visits, sweets included an apple pie creme brulee with a luscious custard filling and a pumpkin cheesecake; its creamy yet light texture made it the winner. While there's no telling what dessert will be dreamed up for you, I think you'll agree that this kind of creativity makes Harlow's a true community gem, and you'll love what it's putting on the table. **R**



**Harlow's Kitchen & Craft Bar**  
31111 Rancho Viejo Road, San Juan Capistrano,  
949.240.8100, harlowskitchen.com

Shared plates and starters: \$8-\$16  
Entrees: \$19-\$37  
Sides: \$5-\$9  
Desserts: \$8-\$9

Mon.-Thu.: 3-10PM, Fri.-Sat.: 3-11PM

**TOP CHEF** Clockwise from top:  
culinarian Aaron Anderson; the  
Tijuana Tempest cocktail; the  
glamorous, swanky bar.