

# California Savoir Faire

Executive Chef Craig Strong brings French flavor with California flair to Studio at Montage Laguna Beach. BY LISA MATTE

**K**nown for his modern French cuisine with California influences, Executive Chef Craig Strong cultivated his culinary career as a child, growing tomatoes and zucchini in his San Diego family's vegetable garden.

Strong studied at L'Academie de Cuisine near Washington, D.C., learning from some of the region's culinary luminaries including chefs Françoise and Pascal Dinot. His roster of accomplishments includes stints at La Caille in Little Cottonwood Canyon, Utah; Capitol Club at Hyatt Regency in Washington, D.C.; Glitretind at Stein Erikson Lodge in Deer Valley, Utah; Adams Mark Hotel in Philadelphia, Pa.; The Ritz-Carlton Philadelphia; The Ritz-Carlton Buckhead in Atlanta, Ga.; and the Newport Room at Hotel Arts in Barcelona, where he incorporated a Mediterranean accent into his cooking.

Prior to signing on at Studio in 2009, Strong was chef de cuisine at The The Ritz-Carlton, Huntington (now The Langham Huntington) in Pasadena, Calif. During his tenure, the restaurant earned one Michelin star each in 2007 and 2008.



## SQUASH BLOSSOM TEMPURA *Serves 6*

### For the squash blossoms:

24 squash blossoms

### For the Romesco sauce:

1 large white onion  
2 heads garlic  
10 Roma tomatoes  
½ cup olive oil  
2 ounces hazelnuts, whole, toasted  
2 ounces almonds, whole, toasted

1 tablespoon Nyora pepper  
3 tablespoons sherry vinegar  
Salt and pepper, to taste

Rub 2 tablespoons of the olive oil on garlic, onion and tomato. Roast in oven at 400 degrees until nicely roasted, about 30 minutes. Remove skin from the roasted tomatoes, garlic and onion. In a blender, combine the roasted tomatoes, garlic, onion, hazelnuts, almonds and Nyora pepper. Purée the mixture while adding sherry vinegar and remaining olive oil. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

### For the tempura batter:

½ cup flour  
¼ cup rice flour  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
½ teaspoon salt  
1 cup soda water

Mix all ingredients together. Set aside until the squash blossoms are filled.

### For the brandade:

½ pound cod fish  
2 cups milk  
1 medium russet potato, peeled  
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
½ cup olive oil  
Salt and pepper, to taste

Combine the cod and milk in a medium saucepan. Bring to a simmer and cook for 10 minutes. Strain the cod. Discard the milk. In a separate saucepan, boil the potato in water until it is tender. Rice the cooked potato and cod. Heat the olive oil in a sauté pan. Add the garlic and cook about 10 seconds; do not brown. Remove garlic and olive oil from heat. Place all ingredients into a stand mixer with paddle attachment and mix until smooth. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Pipe the cod-potato mixture into the squash blossoms. Dip the stuffed blossoms into the tempura batter and fry at 375 degrees until golden brown.

**PRESENTATION:** Drizzle Romesco sauce onto each of 6 plates; arrange 4 blossoms on top of sauce. Garnish with micro greens, as desired.

## CRAB AND MELON SALAD *Serves 4*

### For the crab and melon:

2 egg yolks  
Juice of ½ lemon  
1 vanilla bean, scraped, reserve seeds  
½ cup grapeseed oil  
½ pound crabmeat  
1 cantaloupe, peeled and quartered

Mix the egg yolks, lemon juice and vanilla bean seeds in a small bowl. While whisking constantly, drizzle the grapeseed oil into the mixture to make a mayonnaise. Add the crab to the mayonnaise and mix thoroughly.



Trim the quartered melon into rectangles. (Reserve excess melon to purée for a plating sauce.) Use a Japanese mandolin to slice the melon into very thin portions. You will need 16 melon slices to serve 4 rolls per person. Place 1 teaspoon of the crab salad onto each slice of melon and roll.

**For the dressing:**

- ¼ cup honey*
- ¼ cup sherry vinegar*
- ¼ cup grapeseed oil*

In a small saucepan, heat the vinegar and honey. Transfer to a blender and process while slowly adding the oil.

**For plating:**

- 2 cups micro greens*

PRESENTATION: Decorate each plate with melon purée. Toss the micro greens with the dressing. Place 4 rolls onto the center of each plate. Top with micro greens.

**SCALLOPS WITH SPINACH RISOTTO, WILD MUSHROOMS AND TRUFFLE SAUCE** *Serves 4*

**For the scallops:**

- 8 U10 scallops*
- 2 teaspoons olive oil*

Pat the scallops dry. Heat oil in a sauté pan over medium heat. Place scallops in the pan for 3 minutes per side. Remove from heat.

**For the risotto:**

- 1 onion, finely diced*
- 2 tablespoons butter, separated*
- 1 cup risotto rice*
- 1 cup white wine*
- 4 cups chicken stock*
- 3 tablespoons Parmesan cheese*
- Salt, to taste*

Sauté the onion in 1 tablespoon of butter until tender. Add rice and stir for 2 minutes. Add the wine, continuing to stir until it is reduced. Add the stock,

2 ounces at a time, until it is completely incorporated. Finish with 1 tablespoon of butter, salt, Parmesan and spinach purée (recipe follows).

**For the spinach purée:**

- 2 cups spinach*
- 4 quarts water*
- 1 tablespoon salt*

Bring water and salt to a boil. Cook spinach in boiling water for 20 seconds. Drain and cool in ice water bath. Squeeze out excess water and purée the spinach.

**For the Port wine truffle sauce:**

- 1 bottle Port wine*
- 1 can truffle juice*
- 1 quart heavy cream*

Heat the Port in a saucepan until it is reduced by half. Add the truffle juice and continue heating until the mixture is reduced by half again. Add the cream and continue heating until the mixture is reduced by half again. Use an immersion blender to froth the mixture.

**For the garnish:**

- 2 cups wild mushrooms*
- 1 tablespoon butter*
- Sea salt, to taste*

Sauté the mushrooms in butter and season to taste with sea salt.

PRESENTATION: Place a serving of risotto in the center of each plate. Place 2 scallops next to the risotto and drizzle with the Port wine truffle sauce. Garnish with sautéed mushrooms.

