

# IN PEAK SEASON

FIG KEEPS IT FRESH



Santa Monica locals are learning to look beyond the Third Street Promenade. Ever since MSD Capital launched a seasonal bistro called FIG in February, Executive Chef Ray Garcia has been luring Angelenos to the core of the Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows with his market-fresh meals.

Garcia is an LA native who graduated from UCLA with dual degrees in political science and economics. He was intent on becoming a lawyer, but his fondest memories always involved his family's dinner table, so he enrolled at Le Cordon Bleu in Pasadena instead. After completing the culinary program, he landed at The Belvedere, working under Chefs Sean Hardy and Bill Bracken for almost seven years, learning "fundamentals, structure and discipline." He also staged with Douglas Keene at Cyrus and Thomas Keller at The French Laundry, which inspired him to "celebrate the ingredient." Even after working with such culinary heavyweights, he still draws inspiration from his grandmother's kitchen at FIG, braising beef tongue, which arrives thin-sliced, garnished with diced tomatillos and breakfast radish.

In his cooking, Garcia emphasizes sustainable, local ingredients, all prepared at the peak of freshness. Several herbs and lettuces come directly from the hotel's garden, which supplement the bistro's garnishes and sauces. He visits the Santa Monica Farmers' Market on Wednesdays and Saturdays, but takes his seasonal approach a step further, employing a professional food forager — Kerry Clasby — to find premium produce between San Diego and San Francisco. He changes at least a couple menu items weekly and implements widespread changes twice a season.

Garcia says people shouldn't assume a season involves winter, spring, summer and fall. "Vegetables and fruit don't have a calendar," he says. To track FIG's seasonal produce, look to the bottom of the menu, where you'll find "Just Arrived," "In Peak Season" and "Coming Soon" designations.

To source pork, Chef Garcia is participating in La Quercia's prestigious Acorn Edition program, which incrementally delivers every part of the rich, acorn-fed Berkshire pigs. So far, Garcia has utilized the tongue, head, trotters and tails, and has big plans for the salami, dried sausages and prosciutto once it arrives. Mussels, clams and oysters are all aqua-farmed in Carlsbad.

The dinner-only menu features options like Maine Diver Scallops with butter beans, leeks and chorizo and venison with cavalo nero and kohlrabi. A separate Steak Frites section showcases three different cuts of Nebraska corn-fed beef, all dry-aged for 28 days. For dessert, Pastry Chef Nicole Palmer lavishes guests with options like the signature FIG Bars with Greek yogurt ice cream and balsamic.

Tim Zebrowski designed the space, which features a bright tiled porch with views of the hotel's pool. A circular pewter bar hosts the cheese boards. The interior of the space hosts banquette seating with orange and brown striped cushions, walls with assorted sunbursts, dark wood floors and potted pots.

Garcia equates the overall concept to the restaurant's namesake fruit, emphasizing FIG's simplicity, beauty and personality. "It can be dressed up or dressed down, and just on its own, it can be luxurious," he says.

101 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica | 310.319.3111 | [www.figsantamonica.com](http://www.figsantamonica.com)