

MINGLE OR CO-MINGLE

SALUTÉ BRINGS THE PARTY TO SANTA MONICA

by JOSHUA LURIE

College football analysts repeatedly advise against replacing a coaching legend. They often point to Ron Zook, who crashed and burned after replacing coach Steve Spurrier at the University of Florida. Urban Meyer promptly replaced Zook and won two national titles. Better to replace the legend's replacement.

Business partners Tony [last name withheld by request] and Marco [name withheld by request] certainly hope that same logic applies in Santa Monica. Last December, they opened Salut  Wine Bar in the former home of R ckenwagner, hoping to wipe away memories of the former occupant, the short-lived Yose.

Tony designed the contemporary space in the back of Frank contemporary Edgemar Center. The interior features an exposed wood roof, a polished concrete floor, low-slung purple and grey lounge chairs and a sleek bar with orange hoop stools. "We originally set out not to do a traditional restaurant," says Tony. "We want to create an atmosphere that was a large cocktail party. Everyone has a chance to mingle or commingle with everybody else." For decoration, Tony enlisted downtown artist Miguel Osuna, who delivered stylized paintings that resemble photographs.

Chef Cindy came from the Little Nell in Aspen, where she rose to the rank of executive sous chef. The New Orleans native grew up in several high profile Louisiana kitchens, including Emeril Lagasse's NOLA and Paul Prudhomme's K-Paul. Crosbie's cooking philosophy is to "keep it simple, fresh and tasty." At Salut , she's specializing in Italian small plates known as *piattini*, including options like herb-poached lobster with black truffle risotto and mini Kobe burgers with balsamic onions, Gruy re and herbed chips. Crosbie adds a new item to the menu every two weeks, based on seasonality, but one dish won't leave the menu any time soon: crispy braised duck leg with Taleggio polenta and Tuscan kale.

Tony and Marco imported a pizza oven from Italy, which cooks at 650-degrees. The City of Santa Monica wouldn't allow wood fire, but Tony promises "true Neapolitan-style pizza." Diners will find a traditional margherita pie with tomato, mozzarella, basil and extra virgin olive oil, plus more potent pairings like Gorgonzola and Bartlett pears.

Tony wrote the wine list, which he considers "pretty progressive."

Instead of identifying wines by regions, countries or grape varietal, he organized the list from lightest to heaviest. White wines range from "nudes" to "opulent." "Succulent" reds are the lightest and "decadent" wines are Salut 's most full-bodied. In all, Salut  stocks 300 wines and delivers 65 by the glass. They also house gleaming silver Enomatics that dispense 2-ounce pours of 40 different wines. Tony adds a new wine to the Enomatic every week "to keep it fresh."

As the temperature rises this summer, Tony and Marco plan to open during the day to capitalize on Salut 's industrial-chic outdoor patio. In the meantime, they're counting on Salut 's cocktail party vibe to keep things hot inside.

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