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ciudad: Ultima Find

South Bay restaurateur Michael Zislis's Mexican eatery is a hit

ByCarolynn Carreno

Michael Zislis has made a name for himself by banking on what South Bay residents want when they go out. He's the owner of popular local spots Rockn' Fish, the Manhattan Beach Brewing Company, the Shade Hotel and its Zinc Lounge, and now Mucho Ultima Mexicana restaurant.

Mucho was packed the day Zislis opened its big wooden doors last November, and the pace has been nonstop ever since. The owner says the restaurant operates on a formula of offering the best: Fresh fish is delivered daily from the Santa Monica Seafood Company, and everything—from the sauces to and desserts to both the corn and flour tortillas—is made in-house. The menu is a blend of refined versions of classic Mexican favorites such as guacamole, shrimp cocktails, tacos, enchiladas, and carne asada, and more unusual offerings—poblano style mole with lamb. Chilean sea bass served with fresh fruit salsa, and halibut encrusted in pumpkin seeds and served in chile guajillo emulsion. All are well executed, thanks to chefs Rueben Rodriguez and John Butler.

But let's get serious. The real reason to go to Mucho is the drinks. Zislis is a noted oenophile, and at Mucho you'll find plenty of Argentine and Chilean wines, as well as bottles by Latino winemakers from Napa Valley, such as Ceja Vineyards. In addition to high-end sipping tequilas (which can be ordered in flights of three), there's a long list of specialty margaritas made with fresh lime juice, house made sweet-and-sour mix, and Hawaiian cane syrup,. Yet as good as the drinks are, Mucho's success will rest on the fact that, as Zislis says, "Everybody loves Mexican food."