

805 LIVING



Food & Wine



Danny Grant (opposite, bottom), chef-partner of Marisella (above, left), the new fine-dining restaurant at The Ritz-Carlton Bacara, Santa Barbara, serves Italian cuisine with a focus on seafood. The Festa del Mar (above, right), for example, is a platter of roasted lobster, prawns, Pacific clams, Calabrian chiles, handmade fettuccine, and tomato *sugo* (sauce) that's made to be shared.

A Grant Gesture

A NEW WATERFRONT RESTAURANT AT THE RITZ-CARLTON BACARA, SANTA BARBARA, TAKES CUES FROM LOCAL BOUNTY AND A RENOWNED CHEF'S ITALIAN HERITAGE.

Perched on a seaside bluff at The Ritz-Carlton Bacara, Santa Barbara, the new **Marisella** (marisellarestaurant.com) restaurant takes full advantage of its setting with expansive windows, flowing outdoor patios, and a seafood-centric coastal Italian menu. The fine-dining restaurant from chef-partner Danny Grant opened in June, offering a selection of local catch, handmade pastas, seasonal produce, and wood-fired meats.

The dining room, anchored by a central marble

bar, hits the sweet spot of elegant yet upbeat and convivial. Interiors by Chicago-based Studio K design firm combine soft neutral tones, natural textures, oversized booths, and plush pillows with lush potted plants and dark wood accents for a luxurious look that invites lingering.

The eatery is the newest project from Grant, the chef behind restaurants including Maple & Ash in Chicago, Scottsdale, and Miami; and Monarch and Kessaku in Dallas. The classically trained French chef earned two Michelin stars in 2011 and in 2012



Celebrating Amalfi Coast traditions with local ingredients (clockwise from above): An Ursula's Garden cocktail—Haku Vodka, rhubarb juice, lavender syrup, lemon juice, and jasmine water—gets topped off with a pinot noir float. For Littleneck Clam Vongole, executive chef Samuel Garcia nestles clams into a mound of *chitarra* (spaghettilike pasta with a square cross-section) in white wine sauce with shaved garlic and parsley. An outdoor seating area overlooks the ocean. Bluefin Tuna Crudo is bathed in burnt tomato oil–buttermilk vinaigrette and accented with tomato *sott'olio* (marinated tomatoes), pickled shallot rings, basil leaves, and a sprinkle of Espelette pepper.

and was named *Food & Wine's* 2012 Best New Chef.

An Italian-leaning menu, a collaboration between Grant and executive chef Samuel Garcia, highlights ingredients from local sources. “We’re enjoying developing relationships with guests, farmers, fishermen, and winemakers,” says Grant. “As a chef, you have to practice restraint. You get these beautiful ingredients, and your

job is to not mess them up. Let the tomato be the star. Let the rockfish be the star.” A lovely case in point is a recent amuse-bouche, a small bowl of perfect Sungold cherry tomatoes grown just down the street at John Givens Farm, served with fresh basil, olive oil, and a mixture of house sea salt and herbs.

Grant, who grew up in a large Italian family on Long Island, looks to his heritage for culinary inspiration. A starter of crispy-crusted

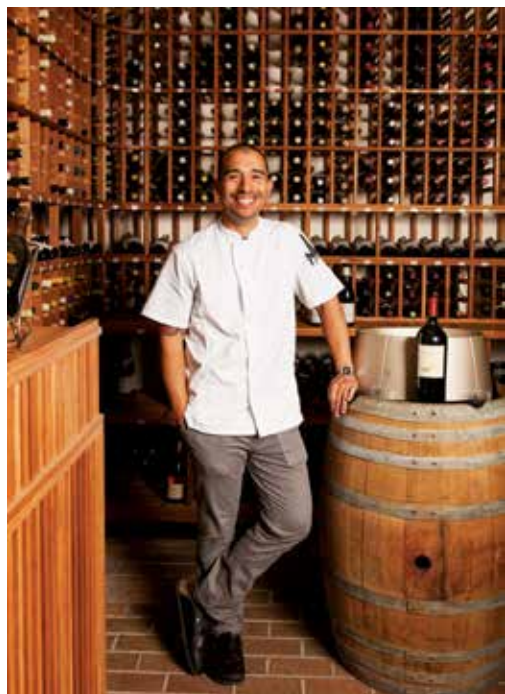


house-made focaccia is “a fun nod to my childhood,” he says. It comes with optional accompaniments—prosciutto and buffalo mozzarella; whipped ricotta with truffle, honey, and black pepper; and fresh tomato sauce with roasted garlic, chili, and basil. “My mom and grandmother always had pasta sauce cooking over the weekend,” says Grant. “They gave me a hard time about dipping bread in the sauce.”

Also among the starters is Red Snapper Crudo with bright notes of local citrus, red onion, and green olive; and crispy deep-fried squash blossoms filled with whipped ricotta, Parmesan, a hint of fresh mint, and lemon. House-made pasta is featured in dishes like Littleneck Clam Vongole. Made with spaghetti, white wine, garlic, and parsley, it gets a spicy kick from >



BOTTOM: STAN LEE



Upscale food and drink in a relaxed atmosphere (from top): Freed from a salt and egg white-based cooking encasement, Salt-Baked Whole Branzino is presented in brown butter and lemon juice with a smattering of capers. Garcia retrieves a bottle from the expansive collection in the wine cellar. A section of the cocktail menu is dedicated to martinis; among them are (from left) the Espresso and the Tomato. In the dining room, tropical plants and informal earth-tone seating meet white tablecloths and ocean views.



chili flakes. “It’s one of those dishes I’ve been eating my whole life,” says Grant. “It felt perfect in this setting.” In another nostalgic nod, the chef uses his mother’s recipe for spicy rigatoni alla vodka, for the menus at both Marisella and Monarch.

A dazzler from the For the Table section of the menu is the very shareable Salt-Baked Whole Branzino. The fish remains moist and juicy

as it roasts encased in a mixture of salt, lavender, egg white, and black pepper, which is removed before the dish is served. Top-notch ingredients also shine in meat offerings like the charcoal-grilled Masami Cattle Ranch American Wagyu Strip, which gets a finishing touch of smoked olive oil with garlic, oregano, and pepper flakes.

Desserts from pastry chef Mariella Bueza extend the Italian focus with inventive twists. A shareable tiramisu is assembled tableside: coffee-soaked house-made ladyfingers are layered with a mascarpone mousse that’s spiked with Kahlúa and Baileys Original Irish Cream. The result is then dusted with cocoa powder and topped with chocolate shavings. Also on the treats roster are a delicate *panna cotta* with vanilla-infused strawberries; a silky chocolate mousse; and baba au rhum with roasted peaches. Seasonal sorbet and gelato are also made in-house.

The restaurant launched with a wine cellar of more than 700 bottles of classic Italian varietals, rare vintages, and emerging labels. Amy Mundwiler, national director of wine and beverage for the restaurant’s parent company Maple Hospitality Group, looks forward to adding to the evolving collection.

“We want to honor the amazing Santa Barbara County wineries, build out the Italian section since we are a coastal Italian restaurant, and continue to expand the California offerings, specifically Napa and Sonoma,” she says. “But at the same time, I will be listening closely to what guests are asking for.” Mundwiler also plans to take advantage of the expansive cellar area with its bar and fireplace. “I have so many fun things planned for that space, including cellar dinners, tastings, and casual wine classes,” she says.

Cocktails by Christina Demas include spritzes and a robust martini program. The popular Savory Martini combines Hendrick’s Gin, Haku Japanese vodka, caper brine, and lemon verbena.

“We’re excited to continue to evolve the experience,” says chef Grant. “This is such a special place, and we’re so lucky to be part of the community.” ♦

