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A TASTE OF THE SEASON



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AT MARISELLA, SANTA BARBARA BOUNTY MEETS THE SPIRIT OF THE AMALFI COAST

BY Maddy Sims

The bluffs fall away into a sweep of blue, where the ocean moves with the unhurried grace of early evening. It’s just past seven, and the sun pours across the horizon, over the waves, and into the glass panels framing the outdoor dining area. Everything in the restaurant is touched by gold: the crisp white linens, the gleaming wine glasses, and the soft leather menus.

The air is cool and faintly scented with the sea. Craft cocktails circulate with plates of fresh focaccia and handmade pasta. For a minute, you feel like you’re in a sunlit trattoria high above the Tyrrhenian Sea. Except this isn’t the Amalfi Coast. This is Marisella at The Ritz-Carlton Bacara.

Beyond The Ritz’s lobby—fragrant with blooming lilies and adorned with local art—a beige stone path leads to a tall tower nestled among palm trees. I pass through the archway, walk beside a wood-paneled wall softly lit by glowing pendant lights, and step into the restaurant. The bar is at the center of the space, surrounded by cozy pink loveseats, lush greenery, and floor-to-ceiling windows facing the horizon.



CHEF DANNY GRANT

“Marisella’s sweeping views, sun-soaked terrace, and coastal palette speak to Santa Barbara’s natural beauty, and Chef Danny Grant brings it all to the plate.”



FESTA DI MARE

Step outside and you'll find yourself at what feels like a private beach club in Positano—only it's perched above the Pacific. Marisella's sweeping views, sun-soaked terrace, and coastal palette speak to Santa Barbara's natural beauty, and Chef Danny Grant brings it all to the plate. The two-Michelin-star chef behind Maple & Ash, Monarch, Kessaku, and Eight Bar has crafted a menu rooted in the Central Coast's landscape. Take the opening dish: Sungold cherry tomatoes from John Givens Farm, dipped in local olive oil and dusted with a house blend of sea salt and garlic. Our waiter calls it a burst of Santa Barbara in your mouth.

After perusing the inspired cocktail menu, I land on the Set In Stone, a sweet peach margarita topped with foam and rimmed with house spice salt. It pairs perfectly with our warm, airy focaccia, served alongside whipped ricotta with truffle, honey, and a touch of black pepper. The pairing is rich and decadent, just shy of dessert. The other dipping options—tomato sauce with roasted garlic, chili, and basil, and prosciutto with buffalo mozzarella—are reason enough for me to return.

The squash blossoms arrive crisp and golden, filled with warm, creamy ricotta. The tuna crudo—silky, fresh, and dressed in a subtly spicy sauce—is a standout, its heat balanced by the natural sweetness of the fish. Ahead of our entrées, I order the Intermezzo cocktail. It's a bright, citrusy blend of Hendrick's, St. Germain, aloe, passionfruit, and lime cordial. As the sun dips behind the bluffs, the sky fades to a light pink hue. The patio heaters hum to life, casting a soft glow over the terrace.

Just as the sky turns dark, our main dishes arrive. The California Rockfish is perfectly cooked, plated with greens and topped with a zesty citrus sauce.

The Orecchiette, handmade and satisfyingly chewy, is served with spicy sausage, rapini, crushed Sungolds, and fennel pollen. Each bite transports me to Southern Italy. We also enjoy a side of the pan-roasted wild mushrooms, cooked in brown butter.

Then comes the star: a 40-ounce, slow-roasted bone-in short rib for the table to share. The meat lifts effortlessly from the bone. The outside is crisp, the inside buttery-soft. It's served alongside homemade hearth bread and fresh mint and dill, allowing diners to build their own short rib sandwiches. The concept strikes a fun balance between fine dining and family dinner. It's the kind of dish that invites passing plates and sharing stories.

Though tempted by the tableside tiramisu (an experience worth the visit alone), we opt for the panna cotta. It's topped with vanilla-infused strawberries and features an almond pastry in the center for an extra-sweet touch.

As the night stretches on, the patio buzzes. Conversation floats in the air while trays of wine weave between tables. Marisella's extensive wine list features California, Italian, Austrian, and French producers, all stored in the property's 700-bottle wine cellar. The curated martini program—with inventive house infusions and adorable illustrations—makes it clear that the bar is as considered as the kitchen.

A meal here feels like an Italian holiday, but it's only a short drive up the 101 to Goleta's coast. *Marisella* means "star of the sea," and the restaurant lives up to its name. You leave feeling nourished by more than just the food. You carry a deep sense of connection—to the land and to each other—long after you've left.*