



**MUSIC** Folsom Youth's inspiring feminine force is growing. 40

# MONTEREY COUNTY WEEKLY



**FEAST** Jerkyville does antelope, alpaca, rattlesnake, kangaroo. 44

# NADER RIDES AGAIN!

Real estate mogul Nader Agha swears his Moss Landing desal project will be the greatest thing since sliced bread. And it might be—if he can avoid foreclosure. 18

By David Schmalz



Send Etc. submissions to etcphoto@mcweekly.com; please include caption and camera info.



Wave riders catch the final rays at Asilomar State Beach.

**By Wolf Bukowski** (Canon Powershot SD, 6.2mm, ISO 80, f/2.8, 1/320 sec)

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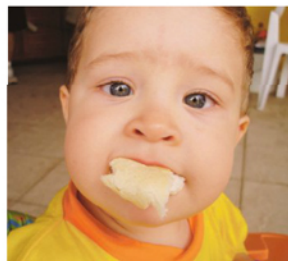
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When adults scream at babies in restaurants.



[www.mcweekly.com/news](http://www.mcweekly.com/news)  
The outcome of Nader Agha's July 24 foreclosure hearing.

**On the Cover**  
Photo by Nic Coury

## Fresh Feeling

Carmel Valley Ranch's new Valley Kitchen opens Friday.

By Mark C. Anderson

The lobster-corn pudding pizza captures eaters' imaginations with its unconventional combination of crustacean, summer starch and sharp pecorino. The dance of smoky, salty, sweet, creamy, crusty and earthy holds that attention tight. Then word of the execution behind it—including piercing each corn kernel top to bottom and pushing the milk out with the back of the knife—set it free, chasing what tasty creation might come next. Which all works as a metaphor for what's happening at the freshly made-over **Carmel Valley Ranch** and its new restaurant **Valley Kitchen** (626-2599), formerly The Lodge.

Exec Chef **Tim Wood**, Sous Chef **Gustavo Trejo**, Restaurant Director **Taft Hart** and company are clearly enjoying the chance to update the comely space and earnest food, or maybe they're just giddy construction's about to conclude.

As reported here before, Wood does impressive impressions. His version of **Cal Stamenov**, the same California cuisine master with whom Wood apprenticed at **Bernardus**, is spot on. His **Christopher Walken** happens when he's in trouble with the GM. ("Why? Because I make gold records," he says.) But locals in the know will be excited to hear that the reinvention of the restaurant, opening softly Friday, July 24, will see him embrace his own identity more.

That's a good thing, because as I wrote when *Weekly* readers voted him 2014's Best Chef in Monterey County, his "combination of sophistication and humility makes dishes like the line-caught big-eye tuna poke—with jalapeño and citrus ponzu, avocado, garden crisps and wakame seaweed salad—revelatory. Call it an irreverent, blue-collar approach to a high-class, white-jacket life. Like him, his food is simultaneously intense and relaxed, and always original."

The focus remains on Carmel Valley and CV-adjacent ingredients. They



Thomas Keller says, "Judge a kitchen by its chicken." At Valley Kitchen, it's the Pitman Family farm chicken breast with cracked-corn polenta and sweet onion madeira jus.

express themselves through new and oft-changing dishes like fried green tomatoes (\$10 tentative, as are all prices here), braised beet-fennel salads (\$12) and Big Sur vermilion rock cod ceviche (\$14). The valley garden soup (\$8-\$12) centers around the day's hyper-fresh harvest from **Swank Farms**. When I went this week it was asparagus bisque deepened by more sharp execution—patient sweating of leeks and onions and zero cream (just a little sweet butter) to allow the asparagus an elevated center stage.

On-property inputs like the spicy chive blossom on the soup often work as garnishes, along with completely on-property-produced sea salts, lavender, olive oil, honey and hen eggs.

Wood hasn't completely divorced himself from the power of impressions. Several new menu items are homages to the different cultures and talents of the kitchen crew. Think *bun cha* Vietnamese grilled pork-veal meatballs (\$12) and Moroccan-spiced beef carpaccio (\$16).

**"I imagine my friends are hanging. You want all the things you can taste."**

"It lets us create the items we love and represent the people who work for the restaurant," Hart says.

Wood's rustic-organic-creative-Cali fare now includes a constantly changing "crouton" (\$10) with different rich rillettes served in a Ball jar with olive oil baguette; this week's stars California Kurobuta pork. Other standouts include a peach-artichoke heart-burrata salad (\$12), candy cap mushroom-crust Colorado lamb (\$32), and "off the butcher block" special (\$39), at the moment pork loin stuffed with rainbow chard, feta, cauliflower, pine nuts and dijon marjoram.

"Give guests what they want in a way

they don't expect it," Hart says.

The plates are presented with a trending format designed to encourage sharing. Sections include "taste" (like **Kent Torrey/Cheese Shop**-curated "piece o' cheese," \$9; "share" (like farro salads, \$10, and PEI mussels, \$18); "eat" (think day boat sea scallops with sea salt roasted rainbow chard, \$36); and a few pizzas.

A new room has been added off the main space, providing around 1,000 square feet. New patios off the back dining rooms mark the most inviting upgrade given the vineyard views and valley climate. The wine vault now has windows on both sides. The updated island at the bar boasts multiple levels where jars of property honey and lavender will go.

"More of a welcome-to-our-kitchen feel," lead barkeep **Megan Wilson** says. "Something new and good for the times."

The vineyards have been tended for five years by local grower and winemaker **Peter Figge**—the perfect guy for the job since he has worked the same fog line across the valley at **Pelio Vineyards** for years—and now the first vintages are flowing. I tried a delicate Rosé. The Chardonnay and 777 clone Pinot arrive next week. Reserve Pinot this fall. (Bottles run \$48-\$72.) A Figge-Ranch wine dinner hits Thursday, July 30 (\$105).

The new wines weave into a list beverage manager/sommelier **Dave Eriksen** can be proud of, with rare allocated labels and strong local showings alike, with Monterey County prizes both known (**Morgan**) and up-and-coming (**Wrath**). It all proves enough to earn a **Wine Spectator** award of excellence.

In short, it's already summer camp-style heaven in the hills above the valley, where hotel guests and local visitors alike can tend bees, do yoga, ride horses, cuddle chickens, learn to make honey cookies and roast s'mores by the poolside fire. Come to think of it, having the restaurant looking and tasting its best feels like a nice melty marshmallow on top. ✨

## QUICK BITES

→ The former **Chateau Julien**, newly renamed **Folktales Winery**, hosts **Kaleo** for a free show Tuesday, July 28, for those who join **KRML's** Listener Advisory Board (LAB) at [www.krml.com](http://www.krml.com).

→ A restaurant owner yelled at a screaming baby and her customers and staff loved her for it. Very **Chris Shake**-esque, minus the screaming. More on the blog.

→ Bad news: **Oslo Cinemas** is going away. Good news: co-habiting **Cafe Lumiere** isn't going anywhere.

→ The nice elevated patios at the former **Callejon** and **Oldtown Bar & Grill** are back in action after **Salinas Brickhouse** opened last week.

→ A slideshow of just about the coolest backyard farm I've ever seen, by inspiring **Both Co.**, is up on the blog.

→ **Gilroy Garlic Festival** happens Saturday-Sunday, July 25-26.

→ **Namaste India Bistro** has filed for a fictitious business license at 538 Lighthouse Ave. in Pacific Grove.

→ Oh, Carmel. I remember when residents smacked the panic button because the fanciest burger joint around, **400 Degrees Gourmet Burgers** and Fries, land of the \$24 double buffalo burger combo, was going to send the hamlet into a fast food spiral. Now residents believe acoustic guitar in tasting rooms will turn them into bars and next thing you know, chaos. Fortunately the planning commission voted 4-1 to allow **Alexander-Smith** a guitarist two afternoons a month.

**ONLINE EXTRA**  
Ranking the Best Restaurant Block in Monterey County finals.  
[www.mcweekly.com/edible](http://www.mcweekly.com/edible)

→ Ran into **Michael** and **Linda Scanlon** of **Rombi's mia cucina** getting fish tacos in town at **Taqueria Zarape**. They tell me the lobster ravioli and housemade sweet Italian sausage are selling well on 17th Street in Pacific Grove.

→ Tickets getting gobbled up for Aug. 27-30's **Los Angeles Food & Wine**, founded and run by Monterey-based Coastal Luxury Management.

→ **Heller Estate** hosts a summer garden party in the sculpture garden 3:30-5pm Sunday, July 26, with summer wines and small bites and winemaker Rich Tanguay talking "What you don't know about organically grown grapes." (\$20/general; \$15/wine club members; 659-6220)

→ Cartoonist **Scott Adams**: "Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep."

Send a nibble to [edible@mcweekly.com](mailto:edible@mcweekly.com)

By Mark C. Anderson

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