

2010 **BEST** RESTAURANTS
SAN DIEGO[®]
MAGAZINE

120 Readers' Picks

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IS BACK

THE FINAL
CHAPTER IN
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MURDER

EXCELLENCE
IN INTERIOR
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What's better than a delicious meal at a great restaurant? One enhanced by a view, of course—and made even tastier by the pleasures of dining outdoors in San Diego.

By David Nelson

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN DOLE
AND COLLIN ERIE

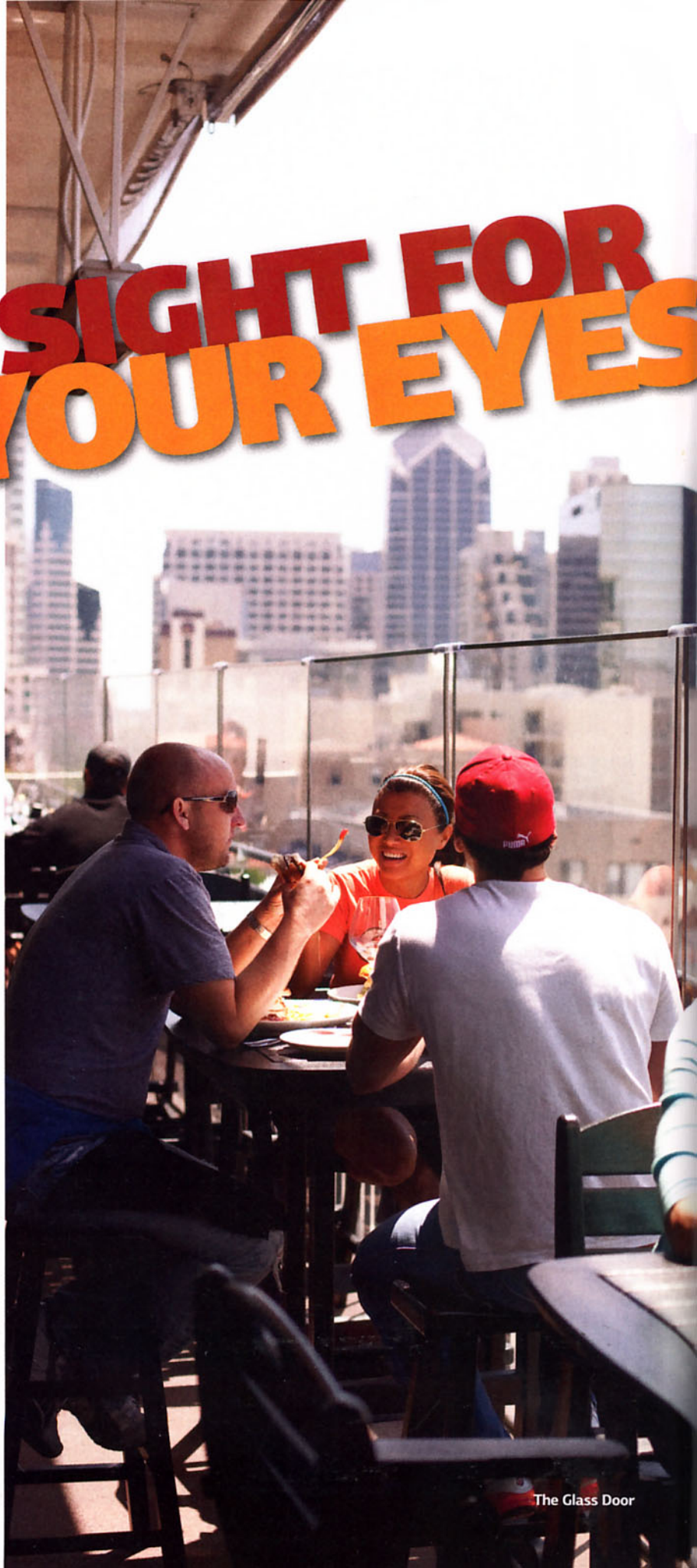
A.R. Valentien

Even though the ocean rolls well below the height from which The Lodge at Torrey Pines surveys the world, the blue band at the horizon's edge seems precisely at eye level to guests on the shady terrace of A.R. Valentien, the outstanding dining room overseen by chef Jeff Jackson. The famed golf course and the Torrey pines in the foreground make the view different from other ocean vistas. The terrace is a seductive setting for a market-driven meal, perhaps featuring a vegetable minestra with green garlic flan, coriander-crust swordfish riding on a crest of butter-drenched green beans, and a blood-orange upside-down polenta cake whose colors prefigure the sunset. **11480 North Torrey Pines Road, La Jolla, 858-777-6635, arvalentien.com**

C Level Lounge

Just a few feet above sea level, the view is absolutely A-list from the bayside terrace of C Level Lounge, the casual side of the Island Prime restaurant duplex on Harbor Island. It encompasses such landmarks as the Coronado Bridge and the *U.S.S. Midway* Museum, cruise ships moored at the Embarcadero, sailboats on the bay, downtown's towers and, behind it all, the hillsides of Tijuana framed by the bridge. Popular chef Deborah Scott's lengthy menu taps into the sunshine with Thai steak salad, a tangy pulled-pork sandwich and a rock shrimp quesadilla with a slew of Baja-style gamishes. **880 Harbor Island Drive, Harbor Island, 619-298-6802, islandprime.com**

SIGHT FOR YOUR EYES



The Glass Door

George's Ocean Terrace

Don't think of visiting the top-of-the-world aerie above George's California Modern without reservations, because disappointment likely will be all you'll taste. With a call ahead and some persuasive charm, you may snare a table on the southwest corner, an outdoor alcove with priceless views of waves hurtling against the bulwarks of La Jolla Cove, a watery tableau dotted with kayakers and snorkelers, the coast stretching north past the limits of vision and clouds dramatizing the azure sky. Ocean Terrace chef Martin Frayre serves a sunny cocktail of Mexican shrimp, spaghetti deliciously tumbled with clams and roasted tomatoes, and a sticky toffee pudding cake that sweetens the entire day.

1250 Prospect Street, La Jolla,
858-454-4244, georgesatthecove.com

The Glass Door

Late-breaking news that Amy DiBiase, formerly chef at Point Loma's Roseville, has taken on the toque at this room floating above Little Italy makes The Glass Door's prospects all the brighter. They were pretty bright to begin with, given that this perch on the fourth floor of the boutiquey Porto Vista Hotel is edged with a building-length terrace that faces west over the bay to Point Loma. The view of Little Italy is particularly picturesque. Stand on your tiptoes to glimpse the Pacific on the other side of Coronado, and enjoy the planes soaring (noiselessly, from this vantage point) from Lindbergh Field. DiBiase doubtless will write her own menus, but count on meals here as occasions on which to enjoy special cuisine in a superb setting.

1835 Columbia Street, Little Italy,
619-564-3755, glassdoorsd.com

JRDN

Nothing rivals the boardwalk-level ocean view at the trendy Tower 23 hotel in Pacific Beach. Framed to the south by Crystal Pier and enlivened by strollers, surfers bearing boards, cyclists on every sort of wheeled vehicle, skateboarders and the occasional exhibitionist (it's the beach, after all), the view is active even when the sea is quiet. A wonderful choice for weekend brunch, the sunny terrace is separated from the wider world by glass windscreens. Enjoy a delicious blood-orange mimosa as preface to such pleasures as chef David Warner's crab cakes Benedict with citrus hollandaise, chilaquiles mounded with chorizo scrambled eggs, or a plush lobster BLT. Nighttime is steak time, and the selection is superb.

723 Felspar Street, Pacific Beach,
858-270-5736, jrdn.com

Pacifica Del Mar

The land and seascape viewed from the terrace at the long-beloved Pacifica Del Mar atop Del Mar Plaza famously has earned the epithet "the American Riviera" — although the half-timbered Stratford Square in the left foreground is Elizabethan English. Straight ahead, over the quaint mix of establishments, the broad Pacific sometimes broods under mists; other times it glistens brilliantly. Should there be a chill in the air (see-through barricades block most breezes), chef Thomas DiMella seasons seared ahi with feisty ginger-scallion vinaigrette, adds hints of spice to a rich seafood stew and serves baked-to-order date-pear cakes straight from the oven.

1555 Camino del Mar, Del Mar,
858-792-0476, pacificadelmar.com

The Restaurant at Rancho Valencia

Early in its 20-year (and counting) history, the Rancho Valencia Resort & Spa dining room was named the county's most romantic by *San Diego Magazine*. The terraced outdoor area has a romance of its own, created by planters bursting with pink and crimson blooms,



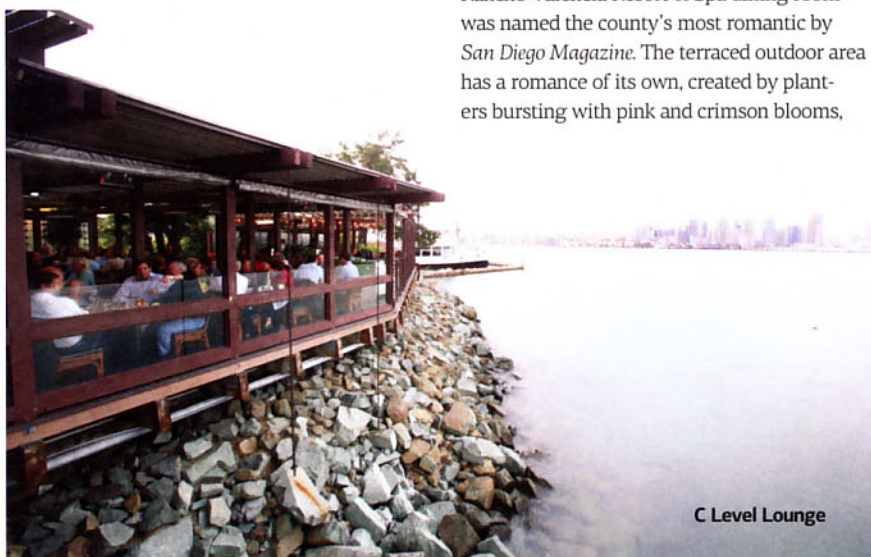
and a hillside vista sprinkled with luxury homes glimpsed through a screen of magnificent trees. Birds sing just out of sight, so sweetly that you wonder if they're hired by the hour. Chef C. Barclay Dodge puts in many hours supervising a fine menu highlighted by asparagus and morels paired with prosciutto and goat cheese gnocchi, glazed black cod with ginger-lime emulsion, and suckling pig confit garnished, most unusually, with stinging nettles.

5921 Valencia Circle, Rancho Santa Fe,
858-759-6216, ranchovalencia.com

The Tin Fish

Is the plaza at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and L Street San Diego's answer to St. Mark's Square in Venice? Probably not, but even with the shooting-from-the-sidewalk fountain out of commission, this triangle at the entrance to the Gaslamp Quarter serves up the liveliest urban vista in the city. The trolley runs along one side, and automobile traffic and pedestrians hasten up Fifth and along Harbor Drive. The skyline, both low- and high-rise, is especially varied, including a nice slice of Petco Park. In the midst of it all, The Tin Fish serves reliable seafood specialties on a broad terrace where guests sometimes find themselves serenaded by musicians. On sunny days, the chowders, seafood tacos, sandwiches with grilled fish and big platters of fried seafood pack 'em in like sardines.

170 Sixth Avenue, Gaslamp Quarter,
619-238-8100, thetinfish.net



C Level Lounge