

Now Serving: Long-awaited 333 Pacific opens on Oceanside coast

By PAM KRAGEN - Staff Writer | Wednesday, January 14, 2009 10:24 PM PST [∞](#)

OCEANSIDE ---- It may have taken two years to bring 333 Pacific Steak & Seafood to life, and the seaside dinnerhouse may have opened during the worst economic downturn since the Depression, but owner David Cohn is pretty optimistic about the upscale restaurant's chances. And if the crowds that have been growing every night at the 3-week-old eatery are any indication, he just might be right.

The 250-seat 333 Pacific is the 13th jewel in the Cohn Restaurant Group crown (that David Cohn owns and operates with his wife, Lesley), which also includes four restaurants in the Gaslamp Quarter, two in Hillcrest, two in Balboa Park and one in Hawaii. The new 333 Pacific is the company's first restaurant in North County, and Cohn said that distinction alone gives it a good fighting chance in troubled times.



"Choosing Coastal North County was easy," Cohn said. "It's not like opening in the Gaslamp where there are 100 restaurants in four blocks. If we're going to open anywhere, we're better off in an under-served market than in an area that is over-restauranted like the rest of the county."

Located on the ground floor of the new Wyndham Resort at the corner of North Pacific Street and Pier View Way (with a 180-degree coastal view, right above the Oceanside Pier), 333 Pacific is a high-end, a la carte dinnerhouse with an extensive menu of steaks and chops and seafood and shellfish, with a bit of sushi and oysters thrown in. Entrees range from \$19 to \$34.

The Cohns created the 7,000-square-foot 333 Pacific as a destination restaurant with big-wow features, including a lavish lounge that offers more than 100 types of vodka, a choice of more than 200 wines (red wines are kept in the "red room," a temperature-controlled, glass room near the entrance), and even bathroom mirrors with embedded LCD TV monitors (that can broadcast beach scenes in the women's room, sports in the men's). There's also a luxurious 24-seat private dining room and a 16-seat board room.

Cohn said the restaurant's ambience and service are designed to be elegant but unpretentious.

"We wanted to make a statement that North County Coastal deserves better, newer restaurants. Nothing new has opened along the coast for a very long time," Cohn said. "We wanted a look that was high-style but not trendy; with white tablecloths but not stuffy; where people can have a nice dinner but feel comfortable in jeans and a button-down shirt. We want it to be a gathering place."

Thanks to the bad economy, Cohn had more than 600 applicants for the 75 positions at 333 Pacific, so he was able to choose his staff wisely. And he's thrilled to have snared a top L.A. chef, Randy Miller, to run the kitchen as executive chef.



"He had an impressive background but he also had the right personality," Cohn said. "We have a sixth sense filter that is important to us. We're not looking to hire extra-large egos. I like a chef who is down to earth and all about pleasing the guest. It was serendipity that we found each other."

Miller, a 33-year-old native of San Luis Obispo, has cooked for the likes of Hillary Clinton and John McCain as the former private chef for Platinum Equity and Paradigm Records. But he, too, became a victim of the economy when his last job, as head chef for pricey Savannah Steak & Chop House in L.A., ended abruptly, when the restaurant closed just six weeks after he was hired.

Miller said he was happy to join the Cohn group because the company has a 23-year history of stability and he was excited to create his own menu from scratch. Trained at the Cordon Bleu academies in Paris and London (with stints in his 20-year cooking career at French, seafood, Cajun, Japanese restaurants), Miller describes his style as grounded in the classic techniques with a contemporary touch.

"It's a bit of the old and the new with a twist," Miller said. "There's French style in everything I do, with everything sauced and garnished properly. I'm not a center-of-the-plate presentation type of cook. I'm more about textures and depths of flavors."

One of Miller's favorite dishes on the menu (and an early favorite with diners, too) is the Sweet Chili Calamari appetizer (\$9.95), which instead of being served the traditional way (with a heavy fried batter and marinara sauce) is lightly crisp-fried and tossed in a sweet-and-sour chili sauce. Another dish with a twist is his crab cake (\$12.95) that's half crab and half lobster/shrimp and served with ancho aioli and mango salsa.

Before the menu could be finalized, Miller's dishes had to pass muster with a tough jury --- the Cohns and eight of their restaurants' executive chefs. He said some dishes, like the

calamari, took 20 tries before he got the recipe the way he wanted it.

While 333 Pacific's signature is its prime Angus beef (flash seared in an 800-degree broiler), Cohn said he hopes the restaurant will also become known for its innovative, low-priced dinner and drink nightly specials designed to bring in local diners again and again.

"Getting people in one time is easy, but you won't be successful if they don't come back," Cohn said. "We're trying to consciously do all the things to make 333 Pacific successful for the long term."

On Sundays and Thursdays, 333 Pacific offers a three-course prix-fixe dinner for \$33. Wines are half-price on Wednesdays. Microbrew beers are \$4 on Mondays. And Tuesday's special pairs three vodkas with three seafood items for \$15. Cohn said he hopes the bar's vodka sampler specials and \$7 martinis (with names like Creole Watermelon, White Chocolate Zebra and Avocado Daiquiri-tini) will encourage people to try some of the more exotic Eastern European vodkas (which retail for up to \$80 a bottle).

The restaurant is also participating in San Diego Restaurant Week (through Friday), where diners can order a three-course prix-fixe menu for \$30. Down the road, Cohn said the restaurant will offer hosted wine nights, where winemakers will be offering samples in the dining room with food pairings. Eventually, hosted vodka and whiskey dinners will be added.



The restaurant is only open for dinner now, but Cohn and Miller said they hope to add a Sunday brunch and lunch service by the summer. Until then, Cohn said he wants to convince local diners that downtown Oceanside is the place to find an upscale seaside steakhouse, even in this economy.

"When we first started talking to the city, there was supposed to be a Westin next door and Citimark was going to be building condos behind us. We weren't supposed to be sitting out there all lonely like we are now," Cohn said. "The timing isn't perfect but we think there's a need for this in Oceanside and so far it has worked out well for us."

333 Pacific Steak & Seafood

Hours: Dinner from 5 p.m. nightly (lounge opens at 4)

Where: 333 N. Pacific St., Oceanside

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