



Summer's Simmer Begins

Spoon your way through June with this anything-but-ordinary array of hot possibilities.

Dennis Schaffer, Westways
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Points North

Suzanne's Cuisine – along with the Ranch House and Wheeler Hot Springs restaurants – has become part of the culinary mystique of Ojai. Established almost four years ago, Suzanne's is headed by chef Suzanne Roll, who combines influences of her Italian-American background with her French training to produce contemporary European cuisine.

Set back from Ojai's main thoroughfare, the restaurant beckons you with large trees shading a rustic front porch. Inside, a small bar fronts a warm dining room dressed with recessed lighting, dark woods, sand-colored walls, and tables adequately spaced for private conversations.

In the back separated by French doors, is a beautiful patio and garden setting that typifies the Ojai vibe. At lunch it's a sunny, airy retreat; at night it's a moody, romantic spot.

The menu is very much a seasonal affair. During our visit, a dozen specials were available in addition to the regular offerings. The soup of the day was a mellow cream of roasted garlic spiked with smoked scallops. The house salad was a nice mix of greens with peppers, green beans, green onions, and tomatoes. The Caesar salad was exemplary (it can be ordered with or without grilled shrimp). Mussels bathed in a sauce of tomatoes, onions, shallots, and garlic were as good as shellfish get.

The Italian influence can clearly be seen in the half-dozen pastas, ranging from linguine with rock shrimp in a spicy tomato sauce to bucatini pasta with marinara sauce and “Uncle Angelo’s favorite” meatballs. Fresh salmon, sea bass, and escolar were paired with sauces such as ginger-lime or dill beurre blanc and were set off by herbed jasmine rice or homemade sauerkraut.

The substantial rosemary rack of lamb – set in its own pan juices – was nicely encrusted on the outside, while perfectly medium rare on the inside. It was satisfyingly presented with corn and sweet peppers crisscrossed with al dente asparagus and snap peas. A superb piece of filet mignon was prepared exactly as requested, backed by a halo of lightly fried potato strings set in garlic mashed potatoes and surrounded by a panoply of fresh garden vegetables.

For dessert, the sorbets – olallieberry, kiwi, and strawberry – were an intense and refreshing ending to the repast.

Suzanne’s Cuisine, 502 W. Ojai Ave., Ojai: (805) 640-1961. Open daily (except Tuesday) for lunch and dinner 11:30 a.m. – 9:30 p.m. Full bar. Wheelchair accessible. Self-parking. Most major credit cards accepted. Reservations recommended. Dinner for two, food only: \$45 - \$85.