



# Pasta Perfection at Andrea Ristorante

## For Pastries, Think Puesto in Irvine

When I'm asked to name my favorite restaurants in Orange County, one that always comes up is **Andrea** at Pelican Hill Resort.

The setting is exquisite, starting with the entrance to the Newport Coast resort and continuing to the Andrea restaurant, where you can dine inside or on the cozy patio with endless views of the resort and ocean.

The superb North Italian cuisine more than matches the view.

I was excited to be invited last month to meet its new chef, **Chris Simons**. Chef Simons has been the sous chef at Andrea since 2017, and has now taken the helm of its kitchen.

He prepared a three-course lunch and talked about his career and cuisine.

Young, personable and knowledgeable, Simons is a perfect fit for the restaurant.

He began his culinary career at age 15 with an apprenticeship at **Antonello Ristorante** under the tutelage of Chef **Franco Barone**, who went on to open his own noteworthy restaurant, **Il Barone** in Newport Beach. That experience affirmed his aspirations toward a culinary career, so Simons eventually attended the **Culinary Institute of America** in New York. He took chef roles with restaurants in Seattle, Washington, and New York before joining the Andrea team.

"I like to use what we have available to us and let the ingredients speak for them-

selves," Simons said. "I look at cooking as a craft, and I want to be a good craftsman. It takes a long time to perfect the techniques."

My first course was the classic dish of risotto with porcini and black truffles, with risotto dumped inside a hollowed parmesan wheel. The parmesan is scraped into the risotto and then scooped into ramekins.

Our next course was tortelletti afumicato with walnut passata, ricotta salata and hand-cured pancetta. The pasta was perfect, and the walnuts added texture. The sauce was divine.

The last course was carved saddle of lamb with lamb jus, served table-side. Again, perfectly prepared, simple yet full of flavor.

I returned to Andrea the following week to take a pasta-making class from Simons. This class can accommodate up to three people and is offered Wednesdays and Thursdays at 4:30 p.m., and Fridays through Sundays at 11 a.m.

During the one-hour class, I learned to make two different pastas from scratch. After class, we took a seat in the restaurant and savored the pasta we just made.

Simons included a tour of his kitchen and explained the nuances of cooking pasta.

"Pasta is the real balancing act of the whole kitchen," he explained. "Pasta can be on every course ... the driving force of the entire line."

He said they use imported Italian sea salt, which adds "a taste of the sea that we want in our pasta water. This shows our passion for the pasta program here and our love for



New Andrea Chef Simons

product."

If you're looking for a fun Valentine's Day gift, this is it.

22701 Pelican Hill Road S., Newport Coast 92657, (844) 445-2183, [andrea.nb.com](http://andrea.nb.com)

## Pre-Theatre Dining

Coincidentally, the day after I talked with Chef Simons about his experiences at Antonello, my friend **Della Lisi** and I enjoyed dinner there prior to seeing "Sweeney Todd" at **South Coast Repertory**.

It had been a while since I had dined there. I was impressed with their remodel, which added intricate brickwork and wood beams to the interior.

And of course, the dinner was also impressive. Antonello is featuring a special

black truffle menu, so we began our meal with beef carpaccio with shaved black truffles, followed by a sea bass special for Lisi and the signature Ravioli di Mamma Pina for me—homemade miniature ravioli filled with braised beef served in bolognese sauce. We shared the *Torta della Nonna* for dessert—Italian sponge cake soaked with Grand Marnier, layered with mascarpone and espresso mousse.

From food to service, it was a perfect experience.

3800 South Plaza Drive, Santa Ana 92704, (714) 751-7153, [antonello.com](http://antonello.com)

## Puesto Pastry

Last year, I raved about the creative taco menu at **Puesto**, which has two locations in Irvine—Los Olivos and Park Place.

This year, I'm raving about their desserts. I recently attended a tasting event at the Park Place location in the AC Marriott Hotel to meet its new Pastry Chef **Erik Aronow**. He guided me through most of his new menu items, including Tres Leches de Café, Coconut Crema Trifle, pineapple upside-down cake, and key lime pie.

Aronow comes to Puesto with more than 15 years of experience, starting with a stint at **Thomas Keller's Bouchon Bistro** in Beverly Hills, followed by Red Medicine, **Republique**, and Ink. He made the move to Puesto last fall to lead the pastry program as its executive pastry chef.

Aronow said he is focused on traditional techniques utilizing indigenous Mexican ingredients, but based on the desserts we sampled, he is mixing tradition with creativity to make the desserts unique and delicious.

The coconut trifle expertly combined



EXECUTIVE DINING

Christopher Trella