

King of his Craft

*Andrea Chef de Cuisine
Chris Simons may be new
to his post, but it's a job he's
trained for all his life.*

Written by Allison Emery

*Photography by Ryan Haack
and Aaron Shintaku,
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At the age of 9, while most boys were being taught how to swing a baseball bat, Chris Simons was learning how to properly hold a butcher's knife. "Being really young with something potentially dangerous, it was almost like a feeling of responsibility and adulthood, and I always appreciated and respected that lesson," says Simons, who heads the kitchen at Andrea at The Resort at Pelican Hill, an award-winning restaurant known for its classic Northern Italian creations.

Simons, who previously held the post of sous chef, was promoted to the role of chef de cuisine in November. It's a title he feels honored to hold, and he's sharing his expertise in cutting-edge culinary techniques, as well as his deep knowledge of herbs, spices and high-end ingredients such as veal cheeks, monkfish liver and venison with his staff. "It's what keeps everything interesting," he notes.

This spring, he's crafting a menu that spotlights seasonal ingredients from local farmers markets. There's one dish, though, that guests can find year-round: the restaurant's signature risotto, made with arborio rice, forest mushrooms

and truffle, and finished tableside in a wheel of barrel-aged Parmesan cheese.

Simons first began nurturing his love for Italian food during those early years in the kitchen with family. "My mother is Italian, so we do a huge festa for Easter, and that's where it all really began," says Simons, an O.C. native. "I loved the idea of cooking delicious food for people, everyone laughing and happy, drinking wine and just enjoying themselves." He recalls tackling the art of making meatballs as one of his first culinary lessons at home, "learning that they're done when you can really smell the pecorino Romano and sizing them perfectly." Then, at 15 years old, he went to work at Costa Mesa's Antonello Ristorante. He moved to New York when he was 18 to attend culinary school. After graduating, he held posts in kitchens across the country.

With Simons at the helm, diners have much to look forward to at Andrea. "I have dedicated my life to this," Simons says. "And when guests eat my food, they will know it's coming from somebody who cares deeply about their experience." andreaanb.com



Garganelli Pasta With Spring Peas, Pearl Onions and Pancetta

Recipe by Chris Simons, chef de cuisine

Photography by Aaron Shintaku, Foxes & Wolves

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You'll Need:

PASTA

- ½ cup semolina
- 1½ cup "00" flour
- 1½ cup egg yolks
- 1 tbs. olive oil
- Pinch of salt

PEA VELOUTÉ

- 1 lb. fresh peas
- 1 quart chicken stock
- 1 shallot, thinly sliced
- 1 clove garlic, thinly sliced
- 1 mint sprig
- 2 tbs. olive oil

FINISHING TOUCHES

- ¼ cup pancetta, diced in ¼-inch pieces
- 3 to 4 pearl onions, blanched and halved
- Zest of one lemon
- Shaved Parmesan or pecorino

Directions:

1. Mix together flour and semolina in a bowl, then place mixture in a mound on a lightly floured wooden board. Make an indent in the middle of the mound and add salt and egg yolks. Gently mix flour into the liquid, slowly incorporating it, until dough becomes a smooth elastic ball. (A touch of water may be required, depending on the flour.) Cover dough tightly with plastic wrap, and let it sit for at least 20 minutes or overnight. (This dough freezes very well if you like to plan ahead.)
2. Spread the dough into a thin layer using a pasta roller or by hand, then cut it into 2-by-2 inch squares. With a square of dough positioned like a diamond on the work surface, use a wooden dowel to roll the pasta into tube-like shapes. (Chef uses a gnocchi paddle in the restaurant.)
3. For the pea velouté, heat 2 tbs. of olive oil in a pot over medium-high heat. Sweat the shallots and garlic together for 2 to 3 minutes without any color to give the sauce sweetness. Add the peas and stock to the pot, and simmer for 5 minutes. Reserve some of the peas for garnishing the dish with the pasta, and transfer the remaining peas to a blender. Blend until it has a very smooth and creamy consistency, adding stock as necessary.
4. Bring a pot of heavily salted water to a boil and blanch the garganelli. As the pasta is cooking, start rendering the diced pancetta over medium-high heat in a sauté pan (without olive oil, as there is plenty of fat in the pancetta). Sauté until it's golden brown and crispy. In the pot, sauté the onions and peas reserved from the sauce to bring the flavors together. Add some lemon zest for brightness. In a serving bowl, spoon about 2 ounces of the sauce into the center, then use the back of the spoon to widen the sauce area. Place the garganelli on top of the velouté and add shaved Parmesan or pecorino on top to serve.