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A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Piatti's Chef Edward Huante
creative seasonal cooking keeps
diners asking for more

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PIATTI'S CHEF
EDWARD HUANTE,
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cooking keeps diners
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BY LAURENCE HAUBEN
Photos by Eliot Crowley

You can tell a lot about a restaurant by walking in the kitchen door, something I get to do often at Piatti because I bring chef Edward Huante's specialty fruit harvested from a small Northern California orchard. "The pears have been great, thank you. Any way I can get more of those amazing melons next year?" he wants to know.

Tall and strikingly handsome in his whites, Huante flashes a movie star smile, but there is no oversized ego cluttering the kitchen here, just a really nice guy who loves to cook and does it extremely well. It is mid afternoon, and the kitchen is quiet. Huante's sous chef Salvino Salvador is busy hand making fresh spinach and ricotta ravioli. On the stove, a large pot of fragrant chicken stock is bubbling, made from scratch, the old-fashioned way. "It's a double stock," Huante explains, giving a stir to the rich broth filled with chicken bones, vegetable trimmings, and herbs. "I want it super concentrated to extract a lot of flavor."

In the cheerful dining room I run into a close friend and his mother, who are enjoying a late lunch of classic Caesar salad and handmade gnocchi. "We love this place," they say with a smile. "We come here all the time." In the adjacent bar, a couple of locals are enjoying a drink and conversation in a quiet corner.

The following week I find duck ragout simmering for that night's pasta special. We come back for dinner. I am embarrassed to say, I leave not one bite for my dinner companion. Still, I don't have to feel sorry for him, he is thoroughly enjoying a gorgeous branzino - pan



roasted seabass with wild mushrooms, leeks, and black truffle butter.

Piatti Montecito opened almost twenty years ago, the second in an expanded collection that now counts twelve restaurants in California, and a few other Western states. Unlike chain restaurants, where the food is the same at each venue, Piatti gives its chefs creative freedom, and menus vary seasonally. Last summer, Huante prepared a hand-pounded pesto over tender gnocchi and green beans that was absolutely perfect. Fall brought a harvest menu that topped sensuous ravioli di zucca with sautéed Mutsu apples and a mushroom celebration is coming for winter. "I like to keep introducing new things, without doing away with our customers' favorites," Huante says. "This is a homey kind of place. On rainy nights, we are always super busy. People like to sit on the covered patio near the fireplace and listen to the rain."

"We want people to think of us as their favorite neighborhood trattoria," adds general manager Sarah Rudd. "We like to keep it low key and then deliver more than we promise." Sounds like a recipe for success.

PIATTI RISTORANTE & BAR is located at: 516 San Ysidro Rd, Montecito, CA 93108, (805) 969-7520, www.piatti.com. Hours: 11:30 am to 9 pm Sunday to Thursday; 11:30 am to 10 pm Friday & Saturday.