

TABLE TALK

THE THRILLING FLAVORS OF SPRING

story and photos by
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From the first fragrant breeze of spring to the last glow of Indian summer, we'll seize any excuse to go off to the beach or woods, city or countryside to find something deliciously tempting once you find your favorite places. As a genuine and proud "foodie," I adore the people who make food come alive.

Our region from Coastal Georgia to Northeast Florida is flooded with a tidal wave of exceptional culinarians, talented chefs and restaurant professionals who design, sell, recommend and create food with great passion. We're in a hyper casual, eco-minded era where the hot restaurants don't require gowns, ties or jackets — and many don't even take reservations. Diners do their homework; they read everything available to find out where to go and who to worship.

Pictures tell a story, especially when it's gorgeous food and beaming chefs! Convivial entertaining on rooftops, guided adventures introducing you to a multitude of tasting venues, supper clubs with unforgettable shareables and jazz ... all are developing with rampant culinary excitement. Who doesn't love to experiment with new patterns of eating, revitalize our attitudes toward mealtimes, the central events of our day. Our free time, our leisure, is truly precious and we don't want to waste any of it.

Even if you must rearrange the schedule of meals, take a cue from other countries — like breakfast at midmorning, lunch in midafternoon or a light supper of tapas later in the evening. Don't forget that you can also enjoy springtime by taking a siesta after lunch, then dine later at night ... or perhaps making "high tea" at 4 in the afternoon as the main meal. Eating lighter at dinner is easy and fun ... by enjoying several small dishes as the entrée.

This season, let's visit a generous variety of flavors and textures — enjoyable for all appetites large and small. Our new style of eating leaves you feeling satisfied — not stuffed. Dining is a ceremony worth lingering over for its own sake. Food is naturally beautiful and

can be discovered as lovely works of art. And some you can even create yourself!



The Vilano Vixen Cocktail

PESCA by Michaels, nestled in the heart of Vilano Beach, is a culinary haven that offers a unique blend of local and coastal flavors created by Chef Michael Lugo. His menu is a celebration of the region's bounty, with a special spotlight on the handcrafted Vilano Vixen Cocktail. This signature drink, served in an iconic puffer fish glass, features St. Augustine vodka, passionfruit, orgeat, lemon and soda — embodying the vibrant spirit of Vilano Beach. Each sip promises a taste of the local essence, making PESCA Vilano not just a dining destination but a sensory journey through Florida's coastal delights. It's not eating out; it's an evening or lunch or happy hour out at PESCA! The dreamy rooftop is one of the most inviting outdoor dining and relaxing spots where you can sit by the firepit or watch the lighted skyline of historic St. Augustine with a perfect vista. www.pescavilano.com

Chez L' Amour offers "bites, bubbles and jazz at the house of love." A star-studded launch only months ago finds guests clamoring for Chef Ellie Schultze's exquisite small plates, the restaurant's calling card. Equally alluring is the perfect balance to anyone's romantic night out with great music



Bites, bubbles and jazz at the house of love

— internationally acclaimed musicians in the spotlight with the most talented local entertainers. Chef's dishes are meticulously crafted for guests who love exotic, locally sourced ingredients that deliver fresh unique flavors. The Garden Caprese is a masterpiece of fresh veggies over stracciatella with olive oil, citrus white balsamic reduction and basil. Lamb Boulettes served with smashed English peas, feta, mint, golden raisins, minced lamb and pork is delightfully shareable — but you might not want to part with a tiny taste! www.bitesbubbleandjazz.com

Italian Cooking Classes by Diana Testa is a unique and different way to enjoy spring's bounty of authentic Italian food that isn't served at your table. You can learn how to do it yourself at one of her cooking classes in-home, at breweries, coffee shops, retail gourmet markets, restaurants and private venues. With a true passion for teaching, and

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Italian Cooking Classes by Diana Testa

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raised in a small Northern Italy town between Como Lake and Milan, she brings a true understanding and zesty personality into her classes. Author of her new cookbook "Diana's Italian Recipes Like Nonna Used to Cook!" she shares an insight into the Italian culture that punctuates her love and passion for cooking. Do not miss learning how to make her Garden "laminated" Pasta with basil and edible florals that will wow you! www.ItalianCookingLessonsJax.com



L. Bee Boards

L Bee Boards — A newcomer to the Northeast Florida catering menu is Lizbeth Califf. She loves crafting charcuterie boards as it affords clients the opportunity to enjoy vibrant seasonal elements like fresh berries, local honeycomb and colorful flowers. These ingredients not only enhance the visual appeal but add a burst of flavor and aroma. Juicy strawberries, succulent raspberries and plump grapes infuse the board with sweetness, while the rich complexity of honeycomb provides a contrasting texture. Delicate flowers, such as orchids, contribute to the board's aesthetics and offers those spring vibes. Together, they create a symphony of colors and flavors, making the charcuterie experience notable. To Lizbeth, who loves creating charcuterie spreads, this is an opportunity to try new combinations of cheese, meats and even newly introduced ingredients that are popular this year. Additionally, her hand-crafted culinary adventure is a form of artistry that's rewarding and enjoyable! www.LBeeBoards.com

So if you're entertaining or dining out this spring, remember that good parties are a frame of mind. Start with the assumption that the whole point is for you and company to enjoy yourselves. Whenever I host a gathering, I know it's going to be memorable because of the secret ingredient: my friends and family!



Coastal Casual
AT ITS BEST



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