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## GO DINE: El Bizcocho bids farewell with alumni chef menu



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RANCHO BERNARDO ---- A capacity crowd of 125 diners bid a fond farewell to the Rancho Bernardo Inn's El Bizcocho restaurant Thursday evening at a \$225-a-plate dinner prepared by chefs past and present.

The 44-year-old Spanish-style "El Biz," one of North County's oldest fine-dining restaurants and a longtime leader in French and modern cuisine, will close in August for a \$2 million renovation (it will reopen at year-end with a new name, look and concept). To celebrate the restaurant's history, three of its chefs ---- current chef of outlets Nicolas Bour, former JC Resorts chef Tom Dowling and famed former chef de cuisine Gavin Kaysen, now of New York's Cafe Boulud ---- teamed up June 7 for the El Bizcocho Epilogue, a five-course, gourmet "farewell" dinner for longtime friends and fans.

El Biz opened in 1968 when the Inn grew from 30 to 150 rooms. Inn general manager John Gates said the restaurant was known as one of the few places in North County where diners could dress up for dinner. R.B. resident Mike Stelman ---- who attended Thursday's dinner with his wife, Karen ---- has been eating at El Biz two to three times a week since 1969, when he remembers it as one of only two dining options in the area.

"Back then, there was Colony Kitchen, which is now Hooters, and that was \$2 for dinner, and El Bizcocho, which was \$10," said the tuxedo-clad Stelman, who sold homes for R.B. developer AVCO back in the '60s and '70s. "It was a big deal to eat here. I'd save for several weeks and then ride over on my golf cart for dinner. I've known all of the staff over the years and they've always treated me like family. It's a really special place."

Also there Thursday were some of the Inn's longest-serving employees: food and

beverage manager John Sullivan (30 years), dining room pianist Jim Malone (25 years) and bartender Tom Ho (40 years). Ho said he has treasured his time at El Bizcocho, but he ---- like Stelman and many others there Thursday ---- said he is looking forward to the renovation.

"It's time," said Ho, an Escondido resident. "Times have changed and some people like to dress down for dinner. We had people coming in all dressed up and they were upset about people sitting next to them in shorts. A new restaurant could have an area where people can dress and eat casually and a formal dining room for people who still want to dress up."

Gates said he's most proud of El Bizcocho's consistency over the years. The Triple A four-diamond restaurant has been top-ranked in the Zagat diner guides for the past 21 years and its wine list has been honored by Wine Spectator for 19 years. The restaurant developed the state restaurant industry's first winemaker dinners (with Jack Cakebread and Robert Mondavi) back in the '70s, and it brought a tradition of French cuisine and modern culinary technique to San Diego.

The Epilogue dinner featured five courses. Bour, with Jason Roberts, prepared a George's Bank scallop served on the half-shell with shaved black truffle; Dowling served roasted quail breast with chanterelle mushrooms and polenta cake; and Kaysen created two courses, a Jamison Farms lamb crepinette with grilled romaine and hummus, and a starter of marinated cuttlefish sliced into microthin pasta-like strips and topped with fried squid chicharrone (which many diners picked as their favorite dish of the evening). Pastry chef Margaret Nolan topped off the meal with a Meyer Lemon Genoise sponge cake with wild blueberry sorbet, creme fraiche sauce, fried parsnips and mint gremolata.

Afterward, Kaysen ---- who brought the Inn global attention in 2007 when he competed in the international Bocuse d'Or chef contest in France ---- ceremonially passed the torch to Bour with the gift of a framed spoon from L.A.'s Patina Restaurant (Kaysen admits he has swiped hundreds of spoons from the best restaurants in the world to commemorate his favorite meals), and Bour returned the favor with a jar of gourmet mustard hand-drawn from a spigot at the famed Maille mustard shop in Paris.

From now until El Bizcocho closes later this summer, at least one of the dishes from Thursday's Epilogue dinner will be available on the menu (Bour and Roberts' scallop dish). Also added to the menu for the summer are some of diners' favorite dishes from over the years, including Guinea hen, lobster, Magret duck breast and terrine of suckling pig. Because some of the revived entrees from the past were heavier in fat and calories than today's diners prefer, Bour is updating and supplementing them with seasonal vegetables grown on the property.

The Epilogue dinner raised more than \$6,000 for Olivewood Gardens and Learning Center in National City.

## El Bizcocho

**Hours:** 6-9 p.m. Tuesdays-Saturdays; 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Sundays; through August (closing date undetermined)

**Location:** Rancho Bernardo Inn, 17550 Bernardo Oaks Drive, Rancho Bernardo

**Reservations:** 858-675-8550

<http://www.ranchobernardoinn.com/el-bizcocho-restaurant/>



[Top of Page](#)   [Home](#)   [Full Site](#)

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