

Zagat again ranks Laguna Beach Tabu tops

By [CLAUDIA KOERNER](#)

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LAGUNA BEACH – Tabu Grill proved for a second year that it's among the best restaurants in Orange County.

The Laguna Beach restaurant maintained its Zagat rating of 29 for the publication's 2010 edition. Nancy Wilhelm, the restaurant's managing partner, started Tabu six years ago to fill a gap she saw in local dining.

"We didn't have a decent place to get steak in this town," said Wilhelm, who's worked in restaurants for 30 years.

With that in mind, she started Tabu, decorating the small space with a Pacific Rim theme. To create the menu, Executive Chef Kevin Jerrold-Jones said he works with seasonal ingredients like an artist might approach a painting.

"I choose my paints, and then I start to make a picture," he said.

Wilhelm added more about the Zagat rating, what makes Tabu special and why she's stayed in the restaurant business:

Q. What's it been like since receiving your Zagat score last year? Where does it set the bar for Tabu Grill?

A. The first Zagat rating score came out in October of 2008 when the economy was a disaster. Thankfully it gave us a boost with the visiting tourists, as well as local diners. The timing was perfect as things had been very quiet for us; the Zagat rating helped us so much. We were so thankful.

Maintaining the great score was always a reminder that we needed to shine all the time. The public's expectations were constant; I made our staff aware of this on numerous occasions

throughout the year. I can hear myself saying "you never know who you're waiting on," "Don't bring a bad mood to work." When the new 2010 Zagat came out we were all elated to have maintained our score. We really did feel the pressure throughout the year.

Q. What continues to make Tabu stand out among restaurants in Southern California?

A. Tabu stands out for many reasons. Details, details! Our food is excellent and changes with seasons. Chef Kevin Jerrold-Jones is creative and cooks from his visions. He's not afraid to mix ingredients that are uncommon. Our menu benefits from his ideas; it's ever changing.

There are many elements that make Tabu special. Our staff is knowledgeable about our food and wines, and they are excited to educate our guests. Our ambience is warm, hip and comfortable, and the aromas have mouth-watering effects. I make myself available to our guests, many I have known for over 25 years. I love working and living here in Laguna, it's home and a very distinctive and beautiful place to reside.

Q. What dish would you recommend to diners?

A. I suggest our 16 oz. bone-in rib eye for our guests who are serious meat eaters. It has marbling in it that gives it an amazing flavor. We serve the steak with what we call "forbidden rice" risotto, caramelized onions, forest mushrooms, smoked ham, chanterelle cream. One of our signature dishes is our grilled Mexican diver scallops, served with potato puree, tangerine buerre blanc and citrus baby greens. These are my personal favorites so I suggest them; however it's hard for me to choose. I really do love everything on our menu.

Q. Anything else you'd like to add?

A. The restaurant business is difficult, that's what I hear from my guests. I laugh and say, "It's what I do, and to me work is work." Every day is different, so I look forward to seeing my staff and to who may show up that night to dine. I get to eat well, taste new wines and meet interesting people from down the street or across the country.



Nancy Wilhelm owns and operates Tabu.
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Executive Chef Kevin Jerrold-Jones has been with the restaurant for five years.
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This soup is a mushroom medley with jumbo shrimp, white wine and truffle butter at Tabu Grill in Laguna Beach.
SAM GANGWER, REGISTER FILE PHOTO



The seared foie gras served with grilled peach chutney and brioche french toast is one of the signature dishes at Tabu Grill in Laguna Beach.

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Tabu style Yellowfin "Poke", Mango, Celery, Avacado, Mint, with Taro Root chips.
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Mexican Diver Scallops come on a potato puree with tangerine beurre blanc and citrus salad.
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Jerrold-Jones said he creates dishes by thinking about what's in season, then determining what flavors would make interesting combinations.

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The appetizer is part of a seasonal menu that Jerrold-Jones is constantly updating.
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Lighted umbrellas color the ceiling in the restaurant's recently opened addition.
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This reproduction painting serves as the restaurant's logo. Wilhelm added the interior's color scheme was inspired by it as well.

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Flourless chocolate cake comes with a scoop of house-made Tahitian vanilla bean ice cream and white chocolate peanut puree with fresh berries.

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Sumac-rubbed lamb sits on huckleberry infused Israeli couscous braised fennel and a huckleberry syrah reduction.

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