

[The Valleys]

Laurel Point

12050 VENTURA BOULEVARD, STUDIO CITY
(818) 769-6336; THEPOINTSEAFOOD.COM

Laurel Point, which replaced the Daily Grill in the mall at Laurel Canyon and Ventura boulevards, is a well-designed new seafood restaurant with something-for-everyone appeal. There is a kids' menu, as well as a generously discounted happy hour (3:30–6:30 p.m. weekdays). They have sushi and a raw bar. For the healthful-eating crowd, there are salads and plenty of grilled and pan-seared seafood; for folks less concerned about waistlines, there are deep-fried fish and waffle chips with rémoulade. With its clean, modern take on nautical decor, Laurel Point is special enough for a date night or for a business dinner, but it's also a spot where you can grab a burger and fries. Plus, you can hear yourself talk, a relative rarity in these parts.

A New England accent is discernable in the seafood specialties ("chowda!"), but West Coast favorites abound as well. I've been known to make a lunch out of the spicy tuna on crispy rice, a sweet-spicy version of the Southern California sushi-bar mainstay. The cast-iron mussels, the grilled artichoke with rémoulade, and the rich, oversize crab deviled eggs topped with salmon caviar are great appetizers to share.

Laurel Point offers six entrées, including a succulent pan-seared Faroe Island salmon served with artichoke hearts and tomatoes in a lemon beurre blanc. But if you don't want a main course, you'll find plenty of salads and sandwiches on the menu. The New England-style lobster roll is loaded with lobster meat and paired with fries or waffle-sliced potato chips sprinkled with fresh dill, but at \$28, it's not for the faint of wallet. In keeping with the something-for-everyone approach, three meat and poultry options round out the menu. To cap off the feast, the towering coconut cake is the best choice of the dessert options. —Jean T. Barrett

CAST-IRON MUSSELS

CUISINE

Seafood

BEST DISHES

Spicy tuna on crispy rice, crab deviled eggs, cast-iron mussels, grilled artichoke, Faroe Island salmon, lobster roll

DINNER PRICES

Starters: \$7–\$17

Entrées: \$16–\$49

Desserts: \$8

COCONUT CAKE



LOBSTER ROLL



[Points North]

SLO Brew

736 HIGUERA STREET, SAN LUIS OBISPO
(805) 543-1843; SLOBREW.COM



Even though it's one of the granddaddies of Central Coast craft breweries, SLO Brew is hipper than ever. It recently moved to a newly renovated industrial-

chic space in downtown San Luis Obispo and reinvented itself with an elevated gastropub menu. The reliable and reasonably priced lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch, and the friendly, casual vibe draw residents, students, and visitors. Even if you're not a beer nut, there's a lot to like. Burgers, pizzas, and sandwiches such as the buttermilk fried chicken with Nashville hot rub (inset) are all good bets. Finish with a decadent beer-on-beer brownie sundae—a chocolate brownie made with a splash of stout, with SLO Brew beer gelato and gooey IPA caramel sauce. —Nancy Ransohoff

[Inland Empire & the Desert]

The State

7900 KEW AVENUE, RANCHO CUCAMONGA
(909) 317-2397; THESTATERESTAURANT.COM

The State's sprawling new digs at Victoria Gardens accommodate demand for creative interpretations of American comfort foods, including a collection of imaginative, over-the-top burgers and a well-stocked bar. Among the gastropub's shareable starters are poutine, the French-Canadian specialty of fries topped with braised meat, gravy, and cheese curds; portobello fries; and a refreshing apple salad. The Drunken Pig burger features stout-bacon jam, applewood-smoked bacon, white cheddar, and frisée, with its bun slathered with coffee-flavored aioli. Crowned with a runny fried egg, this is a messy but memorable burger. A cast-iron skillet of mac-and-cheese (with optional bacon, of course) features cavatappi pasta bound by a luxurious four-cheese sauce. And for a finish, there is a sweet grilled sandwich layered with Nutella, strawberries, and mascarpone cheese. —Roger Grody

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FROM LEFT: VANESSA STUMP (3); CHUCK PLACE