

Newport Beach Independent "The Beach by Sea"

Harvest at The Ranch: Laguna's Hidden Culinary Gem Rooted in Farm-to-Table Flavors

By **Christopher Trela** - September 24, 2025



Harvest dining room. Courtesy of Harvest Restaurant.

A culinary hidden gem is sometimes hiding in plain sight. Not Harvest Restaurant. This gastronomic jewel is truly hidden down a short road that leads to The Ranch at Laguna Beach, an 87-acre hideaway that features 97 cottage inspired rooms, a nine-hole golf course, a boutique spa, biodynamic farm and countless amenities and activities.

The resort's Harvest Restaurant is as farm-to-table as it gets: many of the menu's ingredients are often harvested from the restaurant's on-site farm.

Harvest embodies the spirit of Coastal California; it's both rustic and refined. The seasonally driven menu items include a Harvest Farm Salad with lettuce, quinoa, seasonal farm vegetables, pickled red onions, roasted sweet corn, ricotta salata, and chipotle lime vinaigrette.

A notable item is the Honey Harissa Roasted Peaches (yes, still in season) with fresh mozzarella, wild arugula, mint, vincotto, and toasted almonds, served with a petite seeded baguette.



Chef Kyle St. John. Courtesy of Harvest Restaurant.

Heading the kitchen is Executive Chef Kyle St. John, who worked with the opening team at Selanne Steak Tavern in 2013 for Hockey Hall of famer Teemu Selanne. Kyle then moved onto the private world of Club Corp where he became sous chef at The Center Club of Orange County. It was at the private club where he helped develop tailored culinary experiences for its members with paired wine dinners and beer dinners.

Kyle joined The Ranch in 2016, bringing his passion for farming to table cooking and fresh and local sourced cuisine.

It had been several years since my last visit to Harvest, and the summer dishes that Chef Kyle had added sounded wonderful, so earlier this month I had lunch with a view of the golf course for my backdrop.

The lunch menu features nine starters and several salads, plus 10 entrees and four sides. Everything sounded wonderful, but I was on a mission to try dishes with ingredients from the Ranch farm, which I learned is about an acre in size—plenty of room to grow all sorts of produce.



Honey Harissa Roasted Peaches at Harvest Restaurant. Photo by Chris Trela

I began with the Honey Harissa Roasted Peaches, a beautiful dish with flavors that popped with brightness. The combination of peaches and mozzarella worked perfectly together, with the other ingredients – including edible flowers – adding depth of flavor. This is a dish I'd order every time, except stone fruit season has a limited lifespan.

My second dish was the Harvest Farm Salad. Among the seasonal ingredients were pickled cauliflower and roasted sweet corn. Every forkful offered new flavors, and the chipotle lime vinaigrette offered a mildly tangy taste—perfect for this salad.



Key lime cheesecake. Photo by Chris Trela

I completed my lunch with a slice of another seasonal dish: Key Lime Cheesecake with dragon fruit, prickly pear and toasted coconut. This is a sensational dish, thankfully lighter than some cheesecakes I've had and absolutely delicious.

After lunch Chef Kyle sat with me to discuss his menu, and the farm, but I began by praising the peach salad.

"We recently got connected with an amazing local farm here called Sunny Cow, and they've been doing amazing stuff in supplying to the community for a long time," said Chef Kyle. "Stone fruit is kind of their forte right now, but they also do a ton of other stuff depending on the season. Their yellow peaches are some of the best I've ever had. So my thing always, especially that dish with the stone fruit and the mozzarella, is really just keep it simple and let the fresh local ingredients take care of themselves. We're getting them in, we're lightly grilling them, and then we're tossing them in a honey harissa glaze. Then you get the fresh mozzarella, the seeded baguette. It's a light Alfresco type of cooking, and eating."

I also praised the Harvest Salad, which Chef Kyle said was a great way to showcase their farm.



Harvest Farm Salad. Photo by Chris Trela

"For any chef, that's like a dream to have your own kind of farm so you know where the ingredients are coming from, who's growing them, who's harvesting them, how they are actually being produced," said Chef Kyle. "And that is a real kind of identity and driving force to the kind of cuisine that we're doing and the menus that we're offering. That's been a way to connect our farm to our guests."

Chef Kyle noted that he also has good relationships with local fishermen.

"I have a group of guys that fish right out of Dana Point, they do single line rod and reel. We've been working with them for almost eight or nine years. We'll get tuna, rock fish, sea bass, when they're in season."

Another remarkable quality of Harvest Restaurant, and The Ranch, is that the entire property is sustainably driven.

"We are very conscious of our footprint," explained Chef Kyle. "It's what we're doing day in and day out, and that's from our rooms to the restaurant to our events. It's a collective understanding that we want to try to be as responsible as possible and support the community as best as possible. We want to be good stewards of the environment in our area, and just kind of do the right thing. We compost everything—we track it, we weigh it, we document all of it. It's part of our Beyond Green initiative that we're doing. We have no single use plastic anywhere on property."

Chef Kyle said all of the glass bottles on property are crushed and run it through a devise similar to a rice sifter that will sift the different coarseness of the glass. Those glass fragments are used to fill bunkers in their golf course.

"Once again, we are trying to really kind of limit our fingerprint on any type of potential waste. It's really a labor of love."

And that labor of love is creating lovely dishes, and a lovely dining environment. For more information including menus, visit <https://www.theranchlb.com/dine/harvest>.