

LAGUNA BEACH

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Magazine

EAT & DRINK I S S U E



SPECIAL SECTION

HEAT IT UP
SPICY SERVINGS ON LOCAL MENUS

NEW CHEFS ON THE BLOCK
MEET LAGUNA'S LATEST
LINEUP OF CULINARY MASTERS

THE SANDPIPER SERVES UP HISTO
ART: MAKING CANVASES BLOOM
ACTIVE: PADDLING WITH PURPOS

Leo Bongarra

SALINE

Prior to bringing his culinary prowess to Saline as executive chef of Hotel Joaquin's guests-only restaurant, Leo Bongarra was an executive chef at the famed Sunset Tower Hotel in West Hollywood. In 2018, he oversaw catering for the awards season and the culinary aspects of the Golden Globes and the Grammys.



Black truffle ahi

"My father owned a restaurant, so I basically grew up in the kitchen and was always involved in the family culinary businesses," Bongarra explains. "Additionally, my grandmother was a chef and had a large influence on my honest approach to fine dining. She

consistently inspired me to create fresh and innovative dishes that celebrate the pure flavors of my ingredients, while also weaving in flavorful spices and techniques from our Argentinian heritage."

With more than 18 years of industry clout, Bongarra has mastered many culinary styles, but says that Saline's menu represents his simplistic, powerful approach to food. Open since October, Saline's explorative seasonal menus are inspired by the ocean and designed to be savored leisurely. Dishes range from steaks and lamb chops to scallops, oysters with absinthe jelly, octopus carpaccio and crab gnocchi.

"I believe that I have crafted a menu that is innovative, yet simplistic, and I have done so with a keen eye for detail by only using the freshest ingredients," he says. "When coming up with new items, I really try to stay true to myself and my style of cooking, as well as my South American and European background."

Since dining at Saline is available only for Hotel Joaquin guests, locals are encouraged to book a room to enjoy Bongarra's creations and the hotel's amenities.

