

# SLO LIFE

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| TASTE

# *I Brunch, You Brunch, We Brunch*

Remember when brunch only happened on holidays or for the occasional family get-together? Not anymore. Welcome to Brunch's Gilded Age.

BY JAIME LEWIS

**B**runch used to be such a basic and only-sometimes affair. You got your bloody mary, a cup of coffee, two eggs, and maybe some french toast. Brunch was a noun then.

But if you were born sometime between 1981 and 1996, it's very possible that brunch is a verb to you. After all, "brunching" is now a lifestyle.

The concept of brunch originated in 1895 when Englishman Guy Beringer wrote an essay for *Hunter's Weekly* titled "Brunch: A Plea." In it, he made the case for a Sunday morning meal that prolonged the fun, frivolity, and

buzz of Saturday night. That idea caught, but brunch didn't become a national obsession, particularly among young adults, until within the last ten years. Some social scientists point to its rising popularity as evidence of declining church attendance; others cite increasing acceptance of daily alcohol consumption.

If you ask me, there's no reason church-goers and teetotalers can't hang with brunch, especially here in San Luis Obispo County, where the brunching is so good. I visited three local spots that give brunch pride of place on their menus. So, roll out of bed, don your yoga pants and "Resting Brunch Face" tee, twist your hair into the perfect messy bun, and head out for a #sundayfunday to remember. >>



**JAIME LEWIS** writes about food, drink, and the good life from her home in San Luis Obispo. Find her on Instagram/Twitter @jaimelewis.





## PICTURESQUE PATIO

On a warm morning, I meet up with my friend Bettina Swigger for brunch at Novo Restaurant & Lounge in San Luis Obispo. We sit outside on the patio overlooking SLO Creek, catching up and enjoying the golden light filtering through the trees.

"Every Sunday, we treat brunch like a special event," says owner Robin Covey, and indeed, Swigger and I dig into the three-course brunch package like it's our birthday. I go for the meze starter, an abundant platter of Mediterranean lavash and hummus, dukkah, and olives. I also order the Capocollo Benedict, decadent with Capocollo salume, poached eggs, and house-made hollandaise on English muffins—paired with a mimosa, naturally. Swigger tackles the avocado-shrimp spring rolls, Wagyu Top Sirloin Tartine, and chocolate torte. All is fresh, expertly cooked, and gorgeous to look at, though the Capocollo Benedict takes our prize for favorite dish. Apparently, we're not alone: Covey tells me it's the restaurant's best-selling brunch item. >>





## HOUSE-MADE EVERYTHING

I walk into The Spoon Trade, the cheery modern eatery in Grover Beach, and am greeted by owners Brooke Town and Chef Jacob Town. The Towns boast major pedigree in the hospitality industry, having worked front- and back-of-house in San Francisco's Nopa, RN74, and Spruce restaurants. Their brunch menu reflects their fine dining values as applied to American comfort food.

"Brunch is our most consistent clientele," says Jacob, pushing a plate of The Spoon Trade's Eggs Benedict in front of me. "It's recovery mode for Monday; brunch is like therapy."

I taste the Eggs Benedict and dissolve into oohs and ahhs. Perfectly poached eggs sit atop toast from Grover Beach Sourdough (their bakery across the street), smothered in béarnaise. This is The Spoon Trade's pièce de résistance, but my heart belongs to the potatoes served on the side. I've never tasted anything so craggy, crispy, and soft, all at once.

The Towns scratch-make nearly everything on their à la carte brunch menu, from the American cheese, bologna, pickles, and bun for their House Bologna Sandwich, to hot sauce and biscuits—even kimchi. >>







## A TASTE FOR SAVORY

At Thomas Hill Organics in Paso Robles, I walk to the restaurant's quiet central patio for brunch with my kids, who take breakfast very seriously. Perhaps intuiting this, Chef Libby Darusman immediately brings out the brunch menu. Darusman just joined the THO team four months ago after ten years in Beverly Hills fine dining. The brunch menu is brand new and reflects his taste, which skews savory over sweet, and light over heavy. "I like eating like this," he says. "It's fun and light."

The menu is indeed playful. Darusman brings us hazelnut granola on a pool of mint yogurt, with caramelized bananas, persimmons, and smoked maple syrup. He also shares a sourdough pancake with bacon, cacao nibs, crème fraîche, and chili-spiced nuts. Everything we taste nudges more toward salt than sugar, an impulse I appreciate. Our favorite dish is the Pumpkin and Pork Belly Hash, whose tender meat falls apart at a glance, with charred scallion vinaigrette, a tangy counterpoint.

At one point, my daughter noshes a house-made biscuit and declares its texture reminiscent of cheesecake. I taste it and agree. Pillowy biscuits would make a brunching convert out of anyone, I think. Even a curmudgeonly Gen Xer like me. **SLO LIFE**

