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Food for thought

ARROYO TRABUCO CHEF JEFF PLATT HAS A NUMBER OF NEW IDEAS TO SPICE UP THE FARE AND ATMOSPHERE IN THE COURSE'S RESTAURANT. BY CATHERINE RISLING

Five months ago, Arroyo Trabuco's clubhouse welcomed a new chef. Last month the restaurant got a whole new menu.

Executive chef Jeff Platt has wasted no time re-vamping the offerings at O'Neill's Bar and Grill, relying on his decade of experience at some of Orange County's top restaurants. His focus is on fresh, organic ingredients, and if it's not made with wine, Platt, who's also sommelier certified, is adept at pairing an Italian varietal or a California favorite.

The evolving menu still offers lunch favorites like lobster salad BLT and hickory smoked barbecue pork sandwiches.

Platt, 37, also has plans for two small gardens that will enable him to apply a "from the farm to the table" approach to his signature dishes.

Just back from the lumberyard with the wood used in his smokers, Platt took time to talk about his favorite foods, the most overused item in the kitchen and why he became a chef.



Platt is an Orange County culinary veteran.

You've worked in some pretty prestigious kitchens — Oysters in Corona del Mar, Roy's in Newport Beach and Tabu Grill in Laguna Beach. Where did you perfect your craft?

I worked at the Napa Rose restaurant in Anaheim for three-and-a-half years. That's where I really learned to cook. Andrew Sutton, the executive chef, is phenomenal. He taught me how to layer food flavors.

What made you want to be a chef?

I really like food. I love to eat. For many chefs, it's not just a job. Some of us do it because we love it and that translates onto the plate itself — from the presentation to the flavors of the food.

How does a clubhouse kitchen differ from a stand-alone restaurant?

The golf course restaurant is more laid back. Lunch is the priority and the food tends to be simpler, but I'm chang-

ing that with a more upscale menu that's not fine dining. I try to offer high-quality food that has an elegant presentation yet still has the ranch feel of the club.

Favorite item at O'Neill's?

The New Zealand king salmon served with farro, a whole grain with a nutty flavor and a nice texture, sauteed with shallots and pancetta and served with a pomegranate sauce.

Favorite bottle on the wine list?

We have amazing wines at a great value. My favorite right now is the Elio Perrone d'Asti, a Barbera varietal from northern Italy.

What would you pair it with?

O'Neill's lamb shoulder chop with smoked tomato risotto and cabernet sauce.

What are your must-have ingredients?

Definitely bacon. Also, I like to cook with mushrooms, lemon juice, kosher salt, fruity olive oil and fresh veal and chicken stock.

What's the most common item in most kitchens that should be banned?

Frozen vegetables.

After playing 18 holes, what do you order for lunch?

The pulled pork sandwich and french fries.

Care to share your handicap?

It's too embarrassing to mention. **SG**