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 Robin's Restaurant Feature

a food experience

ROBIN'S of cambria

Restaurants are bound to come and go as the Central Coast changes. What is popular one year may seem tired the next when a new hotspot takes away the limelight. When a restaurant does manage to remain viable for more than a few years, it is often due to a certain kind of consistency that borders on mediocrity – food that's reliable and steady, never too surprising.

Once in a while, though, a restaurateur captures the magical combination of superior food that doesn't waver, a compelling menu that begs to be sampled from top to bottom, dishes prepared with never-out-of-style fresh ingredients, good service, and an appealing setting. Customers return time and time again to feast on their favorites or confidently experiment with a special, and keep the establishment on a short list of restaurants to recommend to friends.

Robin's in Cambria is such a place. For more than two decades, they have secured their customers' loyalty by offering up the powerful trinity of great food, great service, great location.

The menu is best described as eclectic international. Asian dishes – inspired by owner Shanney Covey's heritage – such as Thai green coconut curry and a Malaysian yellow curry, share the menu with a Mongolian pork chop, Tandoori Chicken, Shellfish Tagliatelle, and Lobster Enchiladas. Such variety could be dangerous from a less experienced kitchen, but each dish is deftly prepared from scratch under the direction of Chef Chris Waller, who works with the proven Robin's menu, while also contributing his own nightly specials. Waller has recently taken over the helm, adding a few of his own touches, such as the perfect Summer Vine-Ripened Tomato Salad with goat cheese in a pistachio crust. It's not often that we go nuts over a dressing, but here an outstanding white balsamic vinaigrette draws out the flavors of the lively greens and ripe tomatoes, elevating this simple salad to exquisite.

Thrice-weekly trips to the farmers' market are evident in every dish and continue a tradition of using fresh local produce that began even prior to the existence of the restaurant, back in the days when Covey and then-husband Robin owned a health-food store in Cambria.



(Robin Covey now owns and operates Novo and Chow Novo in San Luis Obispo.) The spinach salad is made from dark leafy Bloomsdale spinach; crab cakes are served on a fresh sprout salad; even the curries are full of crisp green beans that taste just-picked and add a freshness not typical of a curry dish.

Dining out should be an opportunity to try something you wouldn't normally make at home – and exotic flavors and ingredients are menu cornerstones at Robin's. Crispy Tempeh is served with sautéed snowpeas and shitake mushrooms, garlic rice, and topped with a tangy katsu sauce. Roghan Josh, a North Indian lamb curry, is served with fruit and mint chutneys, chapatti, and brown basmati rice.

But, if one of you is culinarily bold, and the other more reserved, you'll also find excellent California cuisine, such as the Herb Roasted Free Range Chicken served with fingerling potatoes and sage au jus, and a grilled New York steak with summer corn and cherry tomato ragout.

Ideally located in Cambria's east village, in a charming old house with an enclosed vine-wrapped patio, Robin's epitomizes that paradox we're always looking for in a restaurant: serving constantly evolving, consistently delicious cuisine. Robin's has been around forever, yet is always new.

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