



BEST IN THE WEST Clockwise from left: The sweet and sticky spare ribs; the rustic setting; the signature popovers; the Baja stone crab gazpacho; chef Michael Rossi

King of the Cowboys

Who would have thought that Western dancing and fine dining would make such a fine pairing? We'll tell you who.

| By Jamie Gwen | Photography by Andrea Bricco |

Go to The Ranch Restaurant & Saloon on any given night, and you'll see proof that the old adage "build it and they will come" bears some truth. Who would think up a concept where you can dance the two-step in one room and dine on confit of Muscovy duck leg in another? Andrew Edwards—that's who. This new eclectic destination for entertainment is a dream come true for Edwards, a tech mogul and founder of Extron Electronics. He wanted to open a place where he could country dance. And, naturally, when you dance, you get hungry and thirsty. And if you have mega moola, you hire the best in the business to quench your thirst and please your palate. So he took the first floor of his headquarters and turned it into a restaurant and saloon, and he hired two Michaels (surnames Jordan and Rossi) to keep the dream alive. They're doing that, and making it thrive—a testament to Edwards'

business acumen. Jordan, the VP of food and beverage, is a master sommelier (one of only 190 in the world) and a skilled GM whose resume boasts a 10-plus-year legacy at Disney's Napa Rose. You'll see him pouring wine and sprinkling pixie dust in his dining room. Chef Rossi, also a Napa Rose alum, creates dishes inspired by the seasons and seldom misses the mark.

Simply put, it's a wine-centric steak and seafood spot—and it houses a 5,000-bottle collection that will grow to 18,000 when the private dining rooms, cellar, classroom kitchen and party spaces on the sixth floor are completed. The stone-accented patio is perfect for dining under the stars—or catching a free viewing of the nightly fireworks at Disneyland. There's a farm, too. (What would you expect from a place called The Ranch?) It's home to more than 400 heirloom tomato vines, and orange and fig trees—all organically grown. Soon to come: grape vines.

During the day, the building (about three miles from the "Happiest Place on Earth") bustles. But at 5:30PM, guests—dressed in their Western best—flock to the saloon, and a line quickly forms **CONTINUED...**

The Ranch Restaurant & Saloon

1025 E. Ball Road, Anaheim, 714.817.4200, theranch.com

Hours

Restaurant is open Sun.-Sat., 5:30-10PM. Saloon is open Wed.-Sat., 5:30PM-2AM; Sun., 5:30-10PM

What it Costs

Appetizers, \$6-\$20; entrées, \$19-\$35; desserts, \$7-\$9

Who Goes There

Culinary enthusiasts, wine lovers, cowboys and cowgirls

Best Seat in the House

Everywhere

You Simply Must Order

The onion soup and the Skuna Bay salmon





Do not miss the cured and hot Skuna Bay salmon, with its buttery texture and subtle flavor—it will leave you wanting more after you scrape the last drop of horseradish sauce from the ramekin.

...CONTINUED outside the door. Enter the restaurant, and the pleasant fragrance of fine leather (from the booths and bar) tickles your nose. The vastness of the space overwhelms you for a moment, but intimate lighting and a warm welcome instill a sense of comfort. The bar beckons, but you're whisked to the table you reserved a week in advance (if there's a convention in town). Then the wine list arrives. There's the Williams Selyem 2007 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir... by the glass? No way! At that point the menu lands, and you can't choose because it all sounds so good.

Now, I do not believe that any restaurant is without room for improvement. Could the popovers have baked a minute less? Yes. Or could the Maplewood smoked free-range chicken have had a more dynamic counterpart of flavor than just "smolder"? Yes. But it's the other dozen dishes that have tickled my fancy—



SADDLE UP
From top: The Ranch's well-appointed dining area; the blueberry crostata with Meyer lemon curd

and those of my friends—on multiple visits.

The meal begins with a pinwheel of freshly baked breads: jalapeño cheddar, squaw, brioche and cranberry. Order a cocktail, and you'll be treated to a properly made mojito, bursting with minty zing and a refreshing acidity that cleans your palate. Peruse the wine list, and you'll find that the prices are surprisingly reasonable, but the selection is ultra-impressive. If you find it daunting, ask for help and a manager, well-versed in the selections, will help you. Or, even better, the "Master" will stop by your table to describe the "forest floor and mossy notes, with sassafras creaminess in the nose" of the particular wine you inquired about.

In the way of food, I recommend starting with the deviled eggs, laden with sweet pickle relish in old-fashioned style, topped with a bite of bacon for a salty tang. Do not miss the cured and hot Skuna Bay salmon (the newest source for this fish among top chefs), with its buttery texture and subtle flavor—it will leave you wanting more after you scrape the last drop of horseradish sauce from the ramekin. The sweet potato gnocchi with *maitake* mushrooms and braised Petaluma rabbit will take you to a place of wonder. The rich mouthfeel of long-cooked game is made only better by pillowy potato dumplings. And you absolutely must order the onion soup. A spectacularly rich beef broth accented with Guinness is joined by five varieties of caramelized onions and topped with a generous helping of molten aged Gruyère.

The special appetizer on one visit was a crab gazpacho that wowed my whole table, with a bite of pepper vinegar and sweet mango to round it all out. (Chef, you nailed it.) The Caesar salad disappointed, with too much heat and salt, and the wrong greens to capture the best essence of garlic and anchovies. But the Colorado grass-fed lamb chops more than made up for it. Pecan-spotted spätzle complemented with macerated dried figs is a rustic counterpart to the chef's impressive touch; medium-rare perfection of well-seasoned meat—some of the best lamb I've ever had. On another visit, the petite filet of beef was a cowboy's dream dish—the plate dressed with sun-dried cherries and shavings of Tennessee truffles. Yeehaw!

Homestyle sides are an unnecessary evil, but I'm a sucker for creamed corn, and it's delicious—properly thick and creamy, and perfumed with fresh thyme. Lobster mac and cheese is a picture of the chef's pride: homemade pasta, Vermont cheddar. Enough said.

As if you weren't already compelled to get your heels to The Ranch, its pastry chef David Rossi (Michael's brother) is the next rising star coming to a network about food near you. For dessert, it's all about the popcorn ice cream, laden with the movie-theater flavor we all crave. David deserves an Oscar for this, but his other desserts impress, too: a blueberry crostata with Meyer lemon curd and a peanut butter masterpiece that highlights David's oh-so-sweet ice cream skills.

After your big meal, head next door (when you dine, the cover charge for the saloon is waived) to dance off those calories. Live country-music concerts. A sound system that plays all the current hits. And wall-to-wall cowboys with their ladies. A good time. 🍷