

LOOK WHO'S TALKING

BY KERSTEN WEBER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAL OWEN



HARBOR MASTER: Chef Nick Weber is banking on Blanca in Lido Village.

CRUDO DUDE *After years of doing fine dining by the books, Nick Weber is giving Lido Village a shot of raw energy and white heat, straight up*

Sure, Nick Weber has tattoos, surf skills and the coveted exec chef position at Blanca, Lido's sleek new restaurant overlooking Newport Harbor. But this renegade's coolness takes a turn for the literal when it comes to the signature cocktails at his Euro-Med eatery, a few of which employ—wait for it—liquid nitrogen. “Pinot Provence had a great crowd,” says Weber of his erstwhile gig, “but they didn’t understand some of what I wanted to do.” Lido, consider yourself warned—and lucky! At just 30 years old, Weber’s résumé reads like a seasoned vet’s, with the connections to back it up. He even boasts his own Irvine-based spice wrangler, Fany Setiyo of famed Santa Monica gastro-wonderland Le Sanctuaire. Setiyo’s specialty spices, vinegars and oils provide the five-star DIY dressing to Blanca’s coup de grâce dish: Crudo prepped tableside. Garnishes for the Italian/Spanish take on raw fish include five different sea salts and several olive oils, for starters.

“Crudo as a cooking trend is getting bigger, but no one else is doing it tableside,” he promises. After a gig as a Temecula winemaker’s assistant gave way to a job on the line (“The kitchen guys were always having more fun than the rest of us—they’d go out and party after work, they were more rock ‘n’ roll”), Weber spent the next decade methodically climbing the ranks of the Patina Group, pinballing around Vegas and SoCal eateries like Downtown Disney’s Catal and Pinot Provence. “I have a great relationship with Joachim,” says Weber of Patina’s founding chef/owner, Joachim Splichal. “He told me to call him as soon as Blanca opens, so he can come in and critique.” Based on Blanca’s Miami-mod appeal—albino alligator leather banquets, a Le Deux-esque courtyard, a who’s-who clientele of moguls and models, and a cutting-edge chef with serious moxie—we’re betting criticisms will be few. **R**

PORTRAIT TAKEN AT PINOT PROVENCE

HOTS: Anjin’s Japanese barbecue (“there’s always an hour wait, but it’s open till 2AM”), band edition Vans slip-ons, sous vide cooking, spice blends from Le Sanctuaire, chef-inspired cocktails, ‘80s punk rock T-shirts, vadouvan, surfing at Church, triple espresso breakfasts **NOTS:** House of Blues Anaheim, \$400 sunglasses, MTV, sequined Ed Hardy T-shirts, overpriced Mexican food, parking at San Onofre on the weekend