

BRAD A. JOHNSON'S

75  
*best*

PLACES TO EAT

THE ORANGE COUNTY  
**REGISTER**  
*May 2019*

## Hana re

2018 RANKING: 5

**1** Atsushi Yokoyama welcomes 10 to 12 diners a night to a chef's counter hidden behind The Lab in Costa Mesa in what appears at first glance to be an abandoned tool shed with corrugated siding and one small window. From the moment you walk through the door, the Japanese hospitality is warm and personal, verging on clairvoyant.

Loosely based on the Japanese concept of kaiseki, each menu weaves a tale of textures, temperatures, techniques and flavors that usually starts with something cold and slippery — a chilled, viscous broth made from squash, for example, or a salad of translucent baby eels. This is often followed with something even more exotic and warm, like steamed baby conch and goose barnacles, fried hairy crab or poached cod milt. Each unique journey culminates with a spectacular parade of sushi: snow crab, grunt fish, wild sea bream, blue snapper, belt fish, barracuda, gizzard shad ...

• **MUST ORDER:** Go for the top-tier "Chef's Omakase," which starts around \$180.

• 2930 BRISTOL ST., COSTA MESA  
714-545-2800, HANARESUSHI.COM



## Bourbon Steak

2018 RANKING: 1

**2** Last year, celebrity chef Michael Mina flipped his one-of-a-kind Stonehill Tavern into yet another branch of his Bourbon Steak chain, but don't for a second think of this as a chain restaurant. This branch of Bourbon Steak is still very much its own thing. Yes, there's an emphasis on steak now — including a truly massive five-pound ribeye carved tableside — but regulars will recognize the same whole duck-fat-fried chicken and lobster pot pie that were Stonehill staples from the beginning. This is probably the only place in the region with a roving martini cart. Service is superb. So, too, the sunset views.

• **MUST ORDER:** When it comes to seafood platters in steakhouses, the cast iron-broiled crab legs and lobster here are in a league of their own.

• 1 MONARCH BEACH RESORT  
DANA POINT, 949-234-3900  
BOURBONSTEAK.COM



MARK RIGHTMIRE - STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**HANA RE** • An assortment of delicacies from Atsushi Yokoyama's Chef's Omakase: baby squid, sea urchin, lobster, crab flan and salmon roe.

## Marché Moderne

2018 RANKING: 4

**3** The best French restaurant in California? This is it. Two years after moving their glamorous French bistro from South Coast Plaza to the Shops at Crystal Cove, Florent and Amelia Marneau's Marché Moderne is still one of the toughest reservations in the county. The steak au poivre, the moules frites, the stewed rabbit, the escargot... this is quintessential French cuisine. And the desserts are always a special treat here.

• **MUST ORDER:** Amelia's Napoleon dessert, served on Fridays and Saturdays only. Also, the ever-changing house wines served by the carafe are always an incredible bargain.

• 7862 E. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY,  
NEWPORT BEACH, 714-434-7900  
MARCHEMODERNE.NET



## Taco Maria

2018 RANKING: 10

**4** Six years into Carlos Salgado's rediscovery of Mexican cuisine, Taco María is approaching culinary parity with the likes of Pujol or Quintonil in Mexico City. Forget everything you think you know about Mexican food and come here for the four-course prix fixe dinner and splurge for the wine pairings. (Tuesday nights and weekday lunches are à la carte.) They fret the details here.

Sit at the counter and watch how the cooks obsess over something as simple as the enfrijolada.

Watch them roast fresh scallops in their shells. Feel the heat of the wood-fueled grill as the arrachera practically catches fire. Beans are never just beans. And tacos are never just tacos.

• **MUST ORDER:** The smoked sturgeon taco with salsa de chile morita is one of the greatest fish tacos ever conceived.

• 3313 HYLAND AVE., COSTA MESA  
714-538-8444, TACOMARIA.COM



## Arc

2018 RANKING: 3

**5** Across America right now, wood-fire kitchens are all the rage. Chef Noah Blom's Arc in Costa Mesa was ground zero for that trend. Arc's kitchen is fueled 100 percent by wood. No gas. No electric appliances. Under the dim glow of crystal chandeliers, everything on the menu here is touched by fire and smoke: inch-thick-and-foot-long slabs of bacon, chicken and broccoli casserole (seriously, try it), crab cakes, meatballs and whole fish. Calamari is cooked on red-hot cast-iron, sending flames to the ceiling!

• **MUST ORDER:** The sirloin steak with duck-fat potatoes is easily the best steak you will find for \$25.

• 3321 HYLAND AVE., COSTA MESA  
49-500-5561, ARCRESTAURANT.COM