

Carole LaRoche: 25 Years of Iconic Art // Art + Love: Three Santa Fe Artist Couples Who Make It Work

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romantic santa fe

by John Vollertsen

WHEN CUPID DRAWS back his amorous bow and takes aim at unsuspecting lovers, where you find yourself (and where the arrow strikes) will determine the outcome of the spell he casts. My choice for this lovely, loving time of year is right in the heart of Santa Fe. Whether you are celebrating an old or new love, or perhaps wooing that somebody you hope will keep you warm for the rest of this winter and winters to come, the allure of our romantic city can assist you in your ardent quest: a magical inn, a soothing massage, and a fabulous dinner in a recently reenergized popular restaurant. All you need to bring is your heart, emotions, and sentiment.

Start your romantic night by checking into the charming Inn of the Five Graces. The Plaza is only blocks away, and the area's packed with restaurants and cafés to ensure you won't have to wander far from your love nest for sustenance. A member of the heralded Relais & Chateaux hotel group, the Five Graces, with its 22 suites, is made up of a small cluster of buildings and lodgings each with a unique décor, held together by gardens and patios that give

it a secluded hideaway feel. Opened in 1996 by the Seret family, internationally known importers of Oriental rugs and antiques, the distinctive accommodations will assist you in your seduction; this is no ordinary hotel.

The fabulous factor of the Five Graces begins a week prior to your visit, when the concierge team contacts you to offer assistance in planning your stay: restaurant reservations, tour information, or any special need you might require. A gorgeous bouquet of red roses greets us in our suite and boosts our feeling of welcome. The rooms are adorned with silken fabrics, and the bathrooms gilded with custom inlaid tile—each room with a different motif, and every room a beauty. After a bracing latte from the lobby espresso room, my date for the night and I head off to our reserved massage at the Inn and Spa at Loretto, just steps away.

Though there are a plethora of unusual and exotic treatment options to choose from, the Couples Massage seems to be in order at this luxurious spa, set deep in the historic hotel situated in the shadow of the soaring Loretto Chapel. Our massage room is replete with full bathroom for pre- and post-showering if required, and side-by-side massage tables ready to unwind us. The masseuse team works wonders on my knotted shoulders while my date implores extra manipulation on a tender lower back. Conversation is allowed, or you can simply lie back and lose yourselves in the music and hot-towel wraps that accent the work. I inquire as to whether couples ever get over-amorous as the massage ensues, to which my attendant replies, "Not a lot, and conversely one time a wife barked at her hubby to stop snoring." Ah, the joys of marriage!

Couples can choose an optional ritual bath finale: a double tub rich with aromatic herbs and floating rose petals. As we dress, we gobble up our tray of nutty truffles and chocolate-dipped strawberries, saving room for the romantic dinner ahead.

I joke to my date that our dinner destination, 315 Restaurant and Wine Bar, is just crawling distance away (should the wine and champagne get the best of us), but I choose it not only for its proximity but because to me 315 is Santa Fe's most romantic eatery. Candlelight, lace curtains, and excellent service enhance the wondrous menu, which has been invigorated by newcomers Executive Chef Ryan Mann and Chef du Cuisine Michael Easton. Though 315 opened in 1995, a new culinary direction (under the guidance of proprietor and Chef Louis Moskow), along with the recent expansion of the dining rooms (which gives the cozy bistro added clout for private dining and bigger groups), have turned an old favorite into my favorite "new" restaurant in town.

New Mexico's bubbly Gruet goes perfect with the pristine West Coast Sister Point oysters. (I'm only a little delighted that my date doesn't eat them and happily gobble up the whole dozen!) Silken duck liver pâté with grilled bread is the perfect appetizer with which to feed each other—all of the charcuterie here is made in-house by wizard Easton. The award-winning wine list boasts over



KATE RUSSELL

One of the many delish dishes at 315—Santa Fe's best "new" restaurant

50 half-bottles, and a crisp, clean Robert Sinskey pinot blanc is a delightful change from my usual choice of sauvignon blanc.

Pork belly, to many foodies the new aphrodisiac, thrills us here, all crispy-skinned and glazed with a cider reduction. Delish! Nothing speaks sensuality to me more than a buttery béarnaise sauce, especially when ladled over a medium-rare steak au poivre sided with crispy frites. Our half-bottle of Landmark pinot noir pairs elegantly with our main courses—gazing through its inkiness into the shimmering candle is positively hypnotic.

We save the last sips for a decadent flourless chocolate cake sexed up with Grand Marnier

syrup and homemade vanilla ice cream.

Upon returning to our suite, we are thrilled to discover that the fire is lit and rose petals have been scattered across the bed and set adrift in the deep tub, which is filled with steaming bath-salt-seasoned water. Two nips of the luscious dessert wine the Inn has set by the hearth alerts us that it's bedtime. A marvelous day and night in Santa Fe—Cupid strikes a bulls-eye.

Inn of the Five Graces: 505-992-0957, fivegraces.com

The Spa at Loretto, 505-984-7997, innatloretto.com

315 Restaurant and Wine Bar, 505-986-9190, 315santafe.com

cheap(er) eats

by John Vollertsen

WHO DOESN'T LOVE a bargain? Whether the economy is booming or floundering, whether rich or poor, on your way up the ladder of success or on your way down, the attraction of getting a deal remains the same. Way back in 1992, New York City restaurants banded together and created the first Restaurant Week, where lunches in participating high-end restaurants were a mere \$19.92 (get it?). The promotion, aimed at stimulating business in the quieter off-season winter months, allowed everyone to experience the delights of Big Apple temples of cuisine—such as the Four Seasons, Lutèce, and 21.

The gimmick paid off, and soon the clever spending motivator was popping up in cities across the country—San Diego, Boston, Seattle, Dallas, Chicago, and more. Now, New Mexico is finally getting on-board with its very own version: “Savor the Flavor—Relish the Price” in Santa Fe from February 28–March 5 and in Albuquerque March 7–13.

Designed to showcase the extraordinary talent and variety of local restaurants, Restaurant Week NM participants will feature three-course, prix fixe dinners for just \$25 (\$25 for two in some restaurants and \$40 per diner in some of the swankier joints), from Sunday to Saturday. Menus for each restaurant will be posted in January on the Restaurant Week NM website, restau-

rantweeknm.com. Several area hotels will offer reduced room rates as well.

“For many years we in Santa Fe have looked for a midwinter program to bring diners in from the cold,” says Michael O’Reilly, proprietor of both Pranzo Italian Grill and the O’Keeffe Café. “With Restaurant Week I think we have found it.”

The Compound’s Mark Kiffin concurs. “Our goal is to build Santa Fe’s Restaurant Week in March into what our Santa Fe Wine & Chile festival built up for the last week of September. As Kevin Costner said in *Fields of Dreams*, if you build it—and support it—they will come!”

“My enthusiasm for Restaurant Week knows no bounds,” raves Rio Chama chef Tom Kerpon. “Even though Santa Fe is a tourist-driven town, the locals are the base upon which successful businesses are built. I think Restaurant Week is an excellent opportunity to reconnect with our local clientele, to invite them back into our restaurants and let them know how much we appreciate them.”

Foodies and gourmards, come celebrate, and remember, it's months and months before you have to squeeze into those swimsuits!—JV



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