



Michael Muirhead, Brian Gorman and Jim Foley toast to the Safire Grill while a succulent sea bass awaits (opposite).

By MONIKA EVANS
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FAMILY TIES

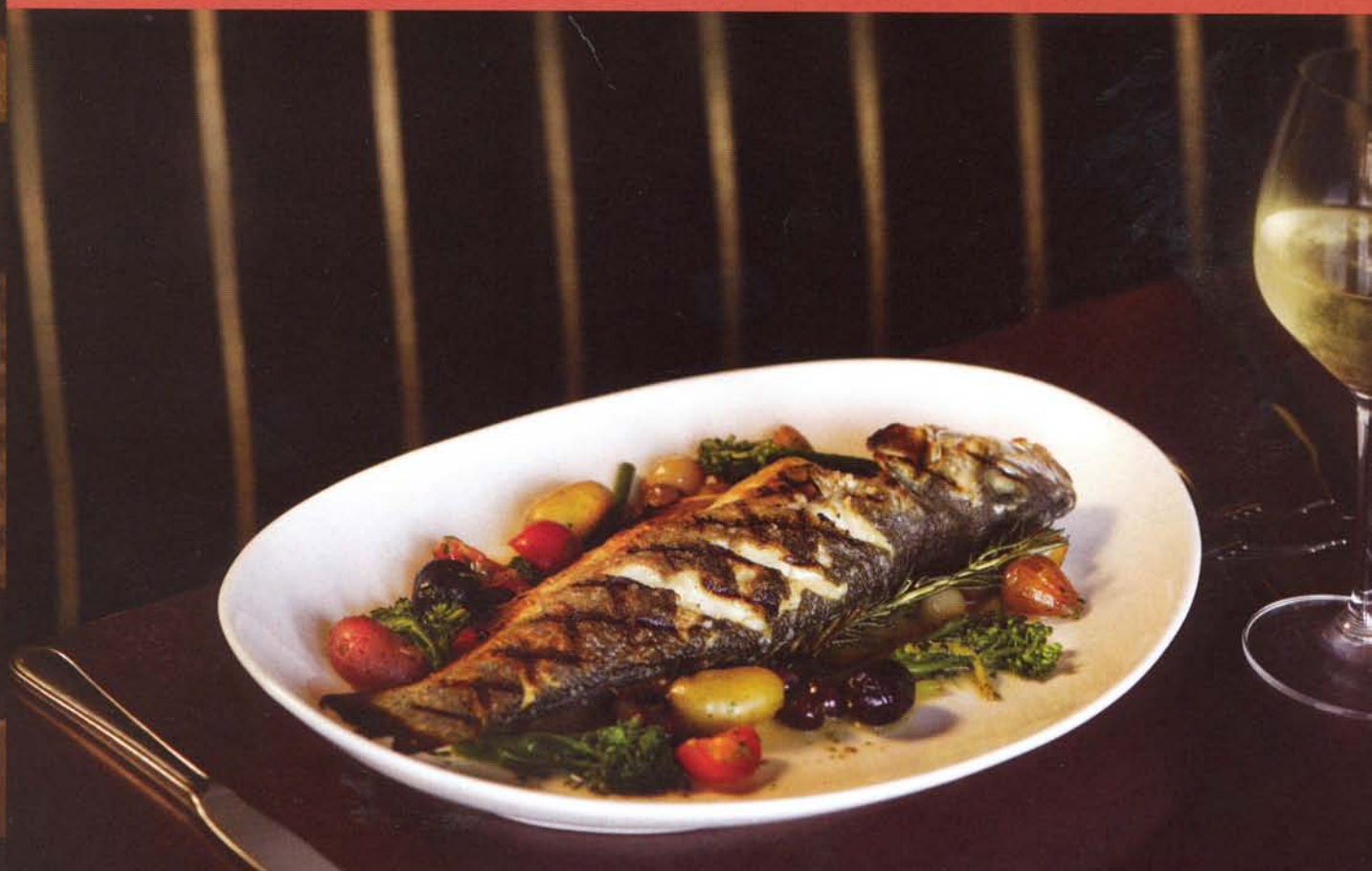
Chef Michael Muirhead comes full circle at the Safire Grill

Safire's Jim Foley and Michael Muirhead have a very special partnership, one that goes way back. "I changed his diapers," Foley says, and they both crack up. Foley is Muirhead's uncle, and from the crib to crab cakes, the two lives have intertwined around the restaurant business.

At 15-years-old, Muirhead took a bus from Woodland Hills to his uncle's famous L.A. restaurant, the Redwood House, to bus tables. When Foley opened the California Grill in Camarillo, Muirhead worked nights shucking oysters. Muirhead's resume then grew to read like a restaurant road map across the world. He hop scotched to Northern California, to Santa Barbara where he worked at

Norbert's under master chef Norbert Schulz who "truly inspired" him, to the East Coast as a pastry chef at Café Brioche, to Italy where he worked in three different restaurants in Florence, and then to Sacramento working the kitchen at the River City Brewing Company and Beeba's. But, it was back in Southern California, after a dinner at Spago in Beverly Hills, when Muirhead's career solidified. "I had an amazing dinner at Spago, an amazing experience, and I went to work there." Under Executive Chef Lee Hefner (and Wolfgang Puck), Muirhead worked as a line cook, caterer (for all the huge Hollywood events), and sous chef, all of which he describes as an eye opening experience. "You work so many dinners, so many events, with

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ON THE COVER

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so many ingredients. I learned more there in three years than I could in ten years somewhere else.”

With Muirhead’s extensive background, and Foley’s very successful restaurant operations, the two put the wheels in motion to open a restaurant together. From a field of dirt, Foley, Muirhead and a number of investors, including major league umpire Brian Gorman (he has his own reserved parking spot Ump 9), transformed the property into a spectacular restaurant - Safire. Under the design direction of Eddy Bitton, the unique interior uses rich mahogany, warm fabrics, sleek lighting and a bustling open kitchen. “The kitchen is entertaining. It’s like a show.” Muirhead says. The granite kitchen counter wraps around to a 6000 - pound wood burning pizza oven presenting, among other pies, a fantastic San Bambino pizza with spicy Italian sausage. The lively bar is the place to be especially between 4:00–7:00 when everything is \$4.00–\$7.00 including a “build your own shellfish platter.” The bar design is a Jim Foley original. “I drew it on a napkin.” It is a showcase with back-lighted column tubes fitted with semi-circle glass shelves offering up premium liquor.

The main menu is outstanding, as expected from Mike Muirhead; offering exceptional meat dishes, seafood, pasta and more. The Miso Broiled Black Cod is marinated for two days in a soy-based brown sugar sake mix and served with caramelized white corn and wild mushroom ragout. Tapping into his Italian training, Muirhead prepares a Tuscan Branzino - a Mediterranean Sea Bass (flown in from the Mediterranean) finished off in the wood-fired oven. The Pan Seared Filet is fantastic and served with everyone’s favorite – shoestring fries. “It’s a dream come true.” Muirhead says about opening the restaurant and working alongside Jim Foley and the remarkable kitchen crew. “We’re one big happy family.”

The relationship between Foley and Muirhead, uncle and nephew, partner and partner, is a special one. It’s evident in the smooth running restaurant, friendly kitchen atmosphere and outstanding service and dining experience.

SAFIRE GRILL is located at 4850 Santa Rosa Road in Camarillo, (805) 389-1227.