

PALM SPRINGS LIFE®

OCTOBER 2016 BY EMILY CHAVOUS

Valley entertainment is re-evolving, and Sinatra-esque supper clubs are having another moment.

This time around, though, it's a new breed of dinner show.

Nostalgia, Meet Haute Cuisine

PHOTO BY NEIL HUSVAR



VICKY'S OF SANTA FE, INDIAN WELLS - As I step through the grand 16-foot cedar doors at Vicky's of Santa Fe (which, logically, is in Indian Wells), I'm hit with a rush of chatter and the sound of bottles clinking behind the entryway bar. General Manager Marc Lodovico whisks my beau and me to our table, a high-top by the stage; there's hardly an empty seat in the house. I'm close enough to rest my drink on the 68-year-old Baldwin piano's wraparound bar, glimmering red under the warm glow of sunset seeping through the window pane. Local jazzman John Stanley King takes the mic as my wasabi-drizzled ahi tuna tower arrives. A man in a white fedora swirls a frosted dirty martini in the front row. King grew up playing Dixieland tunes in his grandfather's band.

Now music director at Vicky's, the 57-year-old valley native revels in blending the classics with funkier beats fit to woo a younger audience. "Palm Springs is all about that cool daddio vibe," he says. "[But old-school entertainment] has to be delivered in a way that younger generations can understand." It's all about making something old seem new again. "My presentation, or my look, or the words that I use might inspire the younger generation to hang out for a little bit. Like, wow ... this guy's kind of a trip." He is a trip, with a rhythmic beatnik drawl and shaggy hair. He and the band don crisp three-piece suits. As King says, "We look real Tony Bennett, you know what I mean?" I dig it. And I see why Sinatra dug the scene. King engages the crowd, spouting stoner jokes and dropping a few expletives despite his mother's attendance tonight. She's shaking her head, palm to forehead with a rosy grin plastered across her face. King's contemporary jams might fly under the radar unless you know what you're listening for. "Sometimes I sit up there and rap a little bit with the standup bassist doing his thing and the drummer doing his thing," King explains. "If you're young, you'll go: Wait a minute! That dude's rapping 'Rapper's Delight' on top of 'I've Got You Under My Skin.'"



I pile as much ahi as I can onto a sesame-speckled cracker. The crowd's into King's rendition of "Moon dance" by Van Morrison. And then he busts into some surprisingly soulful spoken word: Dr. Seuss' Green Eggs and Ham.

Vicky's opened in 1989 as a piano bar across the street from the Indian Wells Resort Hotel, which was founded by Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz. Still family-owned, its founder Vicky (whose real name is Vanesse) passed the torch to her nephew Marc Laliberte, who's been running the restaurant for 11 years. Vicky's offers nightly entertainment, including its Jazz Supper Club Series, a philanthropic effort promoting music education in schools with dates in December, February, and March. "We're going into the eighth season [of the series]," Lodovico says. "The supper club's a good way to be a little nostalgic and marry food trends with [bygone] music."

Tonight, the sounds are served up with pan-seared scallops and a plump gorgonzola-buttered prime filet, raising the culinary bar on Vicky's of Santa Fe original five-entrée menu. When sumptuous eats meet quality entertainment, it draws a crowd...



TOP PHOTO BY EMILY CHAVOUS
Preprandial jumbo scallops and prime filet.

RIGHT PHOTO COURTESY OF VICKY'S OF SANTA FE
Flickering lights set a sultry mood around the stage in the Music Lounge at Vicky's of Santa Fe in Indian Wells.