

INSIDE TRADE FOOD HALL

FALL MUSIC PREVIEW

COUNTY ELECTIONS

IRVINE

# WEEKLY

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## RENEGADE HIGH ART CUISINE

TWO CHEFS FROM THE MONTAGE  
IN LAGUNA BEACH CREATE A DARING  
NEW FINE DINING EXPERIENCE



THE ADIA CREW (L-R) BEVERAGE DIRECTOR BRAD FRY, CHEF JARED VENTURA, CHEF KARLO EVARISTO, FRONT OF HOUSE OPERATOR IAN WHITNEY

# Renegade high art cuisine

POP-UP DINNERS IN O.C. AND L.A. BY ADIA

by Karolyn Kay

Nowadays, in the age of social media, the art of creative audacity has never been more vital in order to be seen, heard and relevant. The line between crafted photo opps and #IRL experience is blurring, as the global digital ecosystem ups the collective standard of what makes the cut as fresh and interesting, online or off

**Chefs Karlo Evaristo and Jared Ventura** are at the top of their game – set on pushing the boundaries between what is and what is possible. Using a medium that encompasses the sensory spectra of taste, smell, touch and sight, they – alongside beverage director **Brad Fry** and front of house operator **Ian Whitney** – are the forces behind brand new Orange County-based, Los Angeles-foraying pop-up restaurant concept Adia, aunched in August.

High cuisine enthusiasts outside of Orange County might have seen Evaristo's work displayed prominently on the 772k+ follower Instagram showcase account The Art of Plating, which as the name suggests, is a visual feast of intricately crafted high-definition food porn, from cutting edge fine dining chefs from around the world.

While the sense of taste is incommunicable through a phone screen, @ArtofPlating brings visual presentation to the forefront for museum-like observation; thankfully unhindered by the real life constraints of not being able to stare at something for an extended period of time before eating it.

In sublime detail, every post is a celebration of food as a multisensory art form, labor of love, and the result of countless hours of training from world class talents who treat the plating experience as an exploration of composition and craft. What's striking is the bold exposition of colors, textures and shapes – not only studies in aesthetic innovation, but also enticing the evocation of taste and smell that occupies the realm somewhere between idealism and fantasy.

Such a high-end area of the food spectrum occupies a relatively small niche in the grand scheme of things, but it's just another one of those sectors where interest runs deep at a visceral, real level. It's no surprise then, that over the span of three years, [@karloevaristo](#) has built a cult following of over 55k who are undeniably captivated by his expressions of art, regardless of if they've ever stepped foot in Orange County.

"The kind of style (Jared and I) have is that we like new flavors," Evaristo says. "The best thing about an item or dish is if I haven't tried it before, if it surprises me – like, wow I've never had this before. So the dishes we do, we don't really base it off of anything. We get some influences here





and there from classical dishes and techniques, but to make our own thing is very interesting to me. That's where we flow well together because we have that type of approach."

"We kind of just imagine the flavors," Ventura adds. "We look at the season, what's at its peak, what (ingredients are) really good right now."

Locally, Evaristo and Ventura's pop-up concept Adia is a culmination of four years of mentorship and R&D from their time at Studio at Montage Laguna Beach, an oceanfront restaurant situated on the lawns of a cliffside destination resort overlooking miles of palm tree-lined coastline.

Under the guidance of Michelin-starred former executive chef Craig Strong and former sous chef Scott Livingston, the amuse bouche station essentially became an experimental lab where Evaristo and Ventura were given the support and freedom to refine their craft, bounce their creative synergies off each other, and develop the kind of vibrant culinary experience that only happens when artists are given free reign with their passions. This is also where Evaristo and Ventura met Adia's front of house operator Whitney, who was at Studio as a server's assistant before leaving for Nobu in San Diego.

**So why leave that behind to set out on their own?**

**Ventura:** At Studio we had creative freedom to put stuff on the menu, but when it's busy and you're doing 180 covers, you can't plate things or think about dishes the same way in that kind of setting, and we wanted to do something a little more focused. If it's just the two of us, doing 30 or 50 covers (in a day) it is way more focused.

**Evaristo:** We're into super long tasting menus (with small individual portion sizes), which is our passion. But there the most we could do for a guest was something like 7

courses. (Editor's Note: The upcoming L.A. seatings have 17. No, that's not a typo. We recommend taking an Uber or Lyft.)

**Ventura:** And then you have different dishes on there (from other chefs). For Karlo and I to work on these together because we think so similar, it just makes a better experience, more fluidity throughout the menu.

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**- CHEF JARED VENTURA**



Glimpses of this intensely refined freeforming style can now be found at Adia's Orange County and Los Angeles supper clubs – a sort of R&D in itself for its vision of becoming a brick and mortar location that showcases a chef-driven experience, sans the formality that is sometimes attributed to fine dining. Currently, there are four upcoming dates for dinners in the next two months – two in Orange County and two in Los Angeles.

As it stands now, Adia is held in Orange County at The Hood Kitchen Space (@thehoodkitchen), a commercial culinary facility that provides food entrepreneurs a space for classes, events and workshops.

Adia's current dining room and kitchen is about the size of a typical residential space, comfortably holding a dozen or so people at a long candlelit table just steps away from where the chefs work their magic. The atmosphere is relaxed and cordial; guests are free to roam and check out what's cooking, chat and enjoy their tastings of drinks specially created by beverage director Brad Fry, who Ventura met while he was sous chef at Chianina Steakhouse in Long Beach.

Formerly the beverage director of Michael's Restaurant Group, which includes Chianina in its portfolio, Fry was a 2016 finalist in the United States Bartenders Guild's (USBC) World Class South West competition, and before that was the bar manager of venues within the Elysian Hotel in Chicago, now a Waldorf Astoria.

Upon arrival, guests are greeted with a fluted Spritz cocktail to wake the palate.

"I start with ginger beer and add orange bitters and champagne to a flute garnished with tricolor sage and amaranth," Fry says. "Once the guests are seated, I'll top them off with champagne, and then we get the first snacks served to the table. The first snack is a play on a classic 'Fish and Chip.' I take porthole cocktail flask #1, which I call 'Citrus' (filled with vodka, simple syrup, lemon wheels, cardamon and juniper), and I pour half an ounce over the Spritz that the guest is enjoying. So, now they have a bubbly glass with a bit of spice from the ginger beer and juniper, and citrus from the lemon and cardamom. All this pairs beautifully with the 'Fish and Chip.'

"For that first snack, since the chefs use the blue butterfly-pea flower to dye an element of the dish blue, I use that in my 'Terroir' porthole flask to infuse in the guests' Spritz, which has a yellow tint to it from the 'Citrus' porthole. When I pour the 'Terroir' over the 'Citrus,' it immediately infuses into a vibrant purple. So now the guests have a visual experience on top of palate."

Adia's remarkably cohesive execution between food, beverage and hospitality runs as a well-oiled machine, drawing on the creative



functional synergy and world class backgrounds between all four partners. The result is a spectacularly crafted dining experience that seems to actually be a celebration of food and drink in itself, a testament to pure creative liberty.

The end goal, currently in stages of exploration with potential investors, is to secure a space where food, drink and service can be delivered with a level of focused execution only possible with small seatings and individualized attention.

"One thing that's really important to us is that we, as the chefs, touch each table multiple times, kind of like how (at our pop-ups) we're going out and explaining each course," Ventura says. "We just have a strong desire to feed people and make them happy."

*Tickets for upcoming seatings can be purchased at*  
[exploretock.com/adia](http://exploretock.com/adia)

*Follow Adia on instagram*  
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