

# DINING

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Jordan's chocolate box with hazelnut crust and dark chocolate.

> PHOTOGRAPH BY  
BREVIN BLACH

AS SEEN IN  
**SAN DIEGO**  
magazine

# REVIEW

> BY DAVID NELSON

## Jordan

**location** > 4551 Ocean Boulevard,  
Pacific Beach

**number** > 858-270-5736

**chef** > Victor Jimenez

**VICTOR JIMENEZ STOOPED**, lifted a coin from the pavement and straightened himself. “A lucky penny!” he exclaimed. “This is the first money I’ve made here.”

It won’t be the last. Earning the title of executive chef at the sizzling new Tower 23 hotel on the Pacific Beach boardwalk equates with bucks in the bank for the 34-year-old, who grew up a mile inland and has proven a gifted learner since he began cooking in better San Diego kitchens in the 1980s. Now a gifted innovator, he spent the past couple of years around the corner at Gringo’s, which, like Tower 23, is the creation of young La Jolla entrepreneur Brett Miller. Having proven himself at that busy place—which draws tourists with quality Cal-Mex fare and aficionados with regional Mexican cuisine—Jimenez some months ago began designing breakfast, lunch, dinner and room service lists for the new hotel.

The three-story, 44-room Tower 23 opened July 11. At first, the 400-seat Jordan restaurant and lounge seemed the tail that wagged the dog, with crowds pouring in like rogue waves spilling over the sea wall. For trendoid reasons, the hotel mostly spells the name JRDN, but from early on, the public has spelled it “LET ME IN.” It’s easy to see why. Miller insisted on spectacular design elements, like a remarkable glass-walled wine room and the “Dune Wall,” a 70-foot long, 9-foot-high sculpture washed in endlessly changing colors generated by computer.

Jordan makes exceptional use of the setting, with a building-length dining terrace, partitioned from the boardwalk by head-high glass panels and soaked with sun when the weather smiles. Cyclists use this stretch of boardwalk to practice popping wheelies that may cause passersby to jump but seem not to bother board-carrying surfers.

The food is terrific all day long, and while the general thrust is Pacific Rim, the emphasis really seems on expert presentations of quality ingredients, such as produce from local specialty growers and Meyer Ranch meats. On the breakfast list, Jimenez went



BREVIN BLACH

Miso-marinated Alaskan halibut in a lemon grass, soy and ginger sauce with shiitake mushrooms and sticky rice.

overboard with items like chocolate French toast with cinnamon whipped cream (\$7)—it’s good, but indistinguishable from dessert. Ricotta cheese stuffs the equally rich brioche French toast with blueberry “crema” (\$8).

The terrace draws crowds for lunch. The still-sizzling bacon on the lobster club (\$12) makes this sandwich a minor work of art, and a daring slice of red onion brings punch to creamy lobster salad layered between slices of Connelly Farms tomato and rich brioche bread. Crisp *pommes frites* tossed with snipped herbs are so slender they actually slip through the tines of the fork, which makes them tricky to eat, if worth the effort.

The sizable cider-glazed pork chop with celery-root purée (\$13) is another excellent, substantial lunch entrée. Jimenez invented an interesting way of dressing salads; instead of tossing the greens for the JRDN salad in a bowl (\$6), staffers brush them with vinaigrette.

**AT NIGHT**, thick white cloths soften tables set with Rosenthal wineglasses for a very pleasant wine list drawn from the Pacific

Rim. Even Japan is represented, although the California and Oregon bottles suit the selections best. The menu opens enjoyably with grilled asparagus with marinated shiitake mushrooms (\$7), ahi tartare with ginger vinaigrette (\$9) and a handsome carpaccio of mustard-crusting beef fillet with crisp capers and Parmesan shavings (\$10). The lead sushi chef, Hugo, presents creative rolls that share well—among diners with open minds.

“They’re bizarre looking, very strange,” said a guest at first sight of the spicy lobster JRDN rolls (\$14), wrapped with tataki beef, avocado and black Japanese caviar. The artisan cheese plate (\$15) entertained with savors and names (California cheese-makers evidently double as word-smiths). Five varieties are stationed around a rectangle that may include Surfing Goat, Rouge et Noir and Midnight Moon.

The first entrée page reveals Jordan as a steakhouse with a difference. The list of eight steaks, 12-ounce pork chop, free-range chicken breast and seafood choices is accompanied by lists of rubs (seasoning mixtures), sauces and many side dishes, such as crisp Maui onion rings (yes!), pan-roasted asparagus, creamless creamed corn and Swiss chard with almonds. One successful approach rubbed a 6-ounce tenderloin (\$28) with maître d’hotel butter, then added an expert sauce Béarnaise, roasted purple potatoes and garlic-scented wild mushrooms.

Steaks range up to a 32-ounce rib-eye for two (\$78), and there are line-caught swordfish (\$23), ahi (\$24) and wild salmon (\$19). Those disinclined to create entrées might choose miso-marinated halibut with a lemon grass-ginger sauce (\$18) or a really wonderful cioppino that erupts with garlic (\$17). Pastry master Beryl Bird caters sweet knockouts such as the crunchy chocolate brownie (\$8).

Jordan serves breakfast, lunch and dinner daily at Tower 23 hotel, 4551 Ocean Boulevard, San Diego. Reservations are advised; telephone 858-270-5736. ■