



ASIAN INSPIRED: On the menu at the Brothers Restaurant at the Red Barn is Chinese chicken salad with spicy mustard vinaigrette topped with crispy wontons.

PHOTO BY WENDY THIES SELL



SEASONAL SOUP: A scrumptious cup of cream-decorated Kabocha squash soup is now available for lunch or dinner at the new Brothers Restaurant at the Red Barn.

Welcome home

The Red Barn in Santa Ynez reopens under new ownership—the Nichols Brothers

BY WENDY THIES SELL

It cannot be overstated; the people of the Santa Ynez Valley eagerly anticipated the opening of the latest venture by “The Brothers,” Matt and Jeff Nichols.

The Nichols brothers, who are experts at homemade, fine comfort cuisine, earned a loyal following with their Brothers Restaurant in Solvang in the '90s and during their decade of running Brothers at Mattei's Tavern.

In 2012, they opened the innovative wine country restaurant, Sides Hardware and Shoes, in Los Olivos, which they still operate.

On Nov. 22, Matt and Jeff opened the doors of their newest restaurant, Brothers Restaurant at the Red Barn, in yet another historic building in the village of Santa Ynez.

The Red Barn was a popular steakhouse for 50 years, a dance hall, and a home before that.

The sibling duo is eager to welcome back the community to a

longtime gathering spot steeped in history. “Welcome Home” is printed inside the menu.

The exterior of the building now has a new coat of red paint, and the inside underwent a year of extensive remodeling and restoration; the ceilings were raised, there is a new kitchen, larger windows, a new glass-enclosed wine room. Historic photographs of Los Rancheros Visitores hang on the walls, and the Red Barn's original western wallpaper was salvaged and framed.

The feel is clean, rustic, and homey.

On the menu there are new items and many of the classic favorites that The Brothers served at Mattei's: seasonal risotto; tuna tartare; horseradish-dill crusted Scottish salmon; slow-roasted prime rib; grilled Iowa pork rib chop with applewood-smoked bacon mashed potatoes; pan-seared Idaho rainbow trout; and

Red Barn redux

The new Brothers Restaurant at the Red Barn is located at 3539 Sagunto St., Santa Ynez, and is open daily for lunch from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and for dinner from 5 to 9 p.m. Reservations are recommended. Call 688-4142 or go to the website, brothersredbarn.com.



THE BROTHERS: On Nov. 22, chefs Matt and Jeff Nichols opened the doors of their new Brothers Restaurant at the Red Barn in Santa Ynez after a yearlong renovation and reinvention.

grilled prime filet with caramelized onion potato gratin.

During a recent lunchtime visit, I started my meal with a cup of creamy, dreamy Kabocha squash soup (\$6). I also enjoyed the flavorful Chinese chicken salad with spicy mustard vinaigrette topped with crispy wontons (\$14).

My family also liked the well-portioned “Classic Burger” and french fries (\$14), and the Alaskan cod fish and chips (\$18).

I had my two young children in tow, and the Red Barn's capable staff was more than accommodating, especially Cassie, our server. There is no children's menu, per se, but my

kids devoured their entrees nonetheless.

Matt Nichols curated a list of about 80 wines, nearly all from Santa Barbara County, featuring such fine wineries as Palmina, Bonaccorsi, Beckmen, Clos Pepe, Foxen, and Longoria.

During my visit, I observed Flying Goat Cellars' winemaker/owner Norm Yost personally delivering a case of his wine to the Red Barn wine room.

The Brothers' longtime pastry chef Stephanie Jackson is on board at the Red Barn, preparing her seasonal desserts such as olallieberry pie with white chocolate olallieberry swirl ice cream; sweet potato cheesecake with marshmallow fluff and maple pecan sauce; and mud pie with Kahlua caramel sauce.

The Brothers also brought over longtime bar manager J.C. Carricaburu, naming the Red Barn's well “J.C.'s Bar.” It offers a drink menu throughout the day. They plan to reprise Filet Mignon Taco Thursdays there when operations settle in.

Matt is also developing a list of local signature craft cocktails to be named after his drinking buddies.

Last year, when the Nichols brothers told me about their acquisition of the Red Barn, they discussed the dynamic of working so closely, for so many years, with a sibling.

“We get along really well and we know what the other one's thinking,” Matt said. “It just works.”

“The whole restaurant business, or doing what I love to do, is the dream come true,” Jeff said. “Being able to operate and work with my brother and have a great team of people that we work with is just awesome!”

Added Matt, “We both don't like to do the same thing, so it works perfect.”

It clearly is working for them with a huge following and positive buzz at any restaurant they run.

Matt replied: “We work hard at it. It doesn't just happen, that's for sure.” ○

Sun wine and food columnist Wendy Thies Sell is going back soon for more of that squash soup! Contact her at wthies@santamariasun.com.