

Made in the Shade

The popular boutique hotel finds a long-awaited encore in Redondo Beach.

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If you're reading this piece, there are several things that I know about you already. One is that you likely have Havaiana tan lines permanently tattooed on your feet. Another is that you respectfully decline to eat "tacos" outside California. A third is that you've likely enjoyed more than a few cocktails on the patio at Shade in Manhattan Beach.

My intuition therefore leads me to lead you south—down to the new Shade in Redondo Beach, which opened in November. Mike Zislis' second boutique hotel is the crown jewel of the Redondo Beach Waterfront Revitalization Project, and while it's been a rocky road from inception to completion, this gorgeous property is finally ready to rock.

Situated between The Strand and the marina, the new Shade is a beautifully realized example of indoor/outdoor flow with mixed-use spaces designed to accommodate hotel guests and locals equally. I think that is the essential ingredient in Zislis' recipe for success. Too many small hotels view locals as a threat—one that might overwhelm their ability to service in-house guests.

At Shade Manhattan Beach, the vibe has always been exactly the opposite. The hospitality team there works hard to make sure that the family from around the corner is treated with the same attention to detail as the tourists who just drove down from LAX. It's a winning formula that makes those tourists feel as if they stumbled into a friend's block party in Manhattan Beach, where everyone is welcomed with a cold drink and a sunny SoCal smile.



A word on drinks (and food): Shade Redondo Beach will doubtlessly have the same commitment to fine wine and cocktail culture as demonstrated by its older hotel sibling and by other Zislis outlets like Strand House and Rock & Brews. (Does anyone sell more beer than this company? Unlikely.)

What is most exciting about Shade Redondo Beach is its chef. Aaron Robbins, most recently the director of ops for Culinary Lab (Hinoki & the Bird, Pizzeria Ortica, 33 Taps, Lost Property), has signed on with the Zislis Group to open Shade's signature restaurant, Sea Level. I think getting a chef of Aaron's caliber to open a "hotel restaurant" indicates that the term itself is outdated.

Gone are the days of the corporate journeyman chef who does hard time with a company like Hyatt or Marriott, churning out anonymous food to a captive audience that is too tired to leave the property. That's been the model that too many small hotels have also followed, one in which a low-level chef is trusted to simply churn out the room service and feed the forlorn business travelers and cranky families a decent piece of chicken.

Investing instead in a "real" chef—and empowering that chef to run a real restaurant—means that all boats rise in this marina. Hotel guests get more than industrial French toast sticks, and locals in turn gain a fantastic dining destination ... one to which many lucky Redondo residents can walk. Cue cocktails?

Sea Level will incorporate Chef Aaron's commitment to farm-to-table cooking, with an emphasis on market produce and fish, which he considers to be his favorite protein. Unique in a chef is his background as an artist working in both clay and paint. Many chefs can cook but lack the ability to plate artfully. I imagine we'll see both talents on display at Sea Level.

Aaron also cites Grant Achatz of Alinea as a formative influence, so we can expect a strain of detailed perfectionism. No messy line-cook plates will likely make it out of the pass at this restaurant—hotel or otherwise.

Opening just in time for the holidays, Shade Redondo Beach will be busy-busy-busy out of the gate. Walk on over, or park your bike on The Strand, or dock your boat in the marina if that's how you roll, and pop in. The tourists seeking sunshine will flock to the gorgeous AquaDeck and rooftop pool, but in true Zislis form you'll be just as welcome there. Be sure to take in that amazing view that sweeps from PV all the way up to Malibu, find yourself some shade and order up.

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