

# Industry Experts Name Top Restaurant Newcomers of 2016

As is tradition at Eater, we close out the year by surveying local food writers and our own staff on various restaurant-related topics, and we'll be publishing their responses throughout the week. Readers, please feel free to share your thoughts below.

by [Candice Woo](#) Dec 27, 2016,



**Michele Parente, [San Diego Union-Tribune](#):** Herb & Wood. Brian Malarkey reached new heights at this sexy, sprawling and stunning Little Italy spot. The

food is the finest and most focused he's ever served and the scene, is just that – a scene. Herb & Wood is making some of the most delicious pasta in Little Italy and the adjacent Herb & Eatery is hands-down the best lunch spot in town.

It's fitting to note here that my comment in Eater's 2014 Year in Food – my headline for 2015 was that with (the delayed) Herb & Wood, Malarkey would show San Diego he could still cook – poked at him so much, he mentioned it twice in an interview. So in this same space, let's just say that yes, the man can still cook.

**Candice Woo, Eater:** This year, **Trust Restaurant** proved that you don't necessarily need a giant budget, celebrity chef, and big name hospitality group to generate a hit. Those restaurants can certainly be wonderful, but it's heartening to see that independent projects can still survive, and thrive, in San Diego.

**Erin Jackson, Thrillist:** **BIGA**. Quality casual places like this are paving the way for a new era in the San Diego food scene and the affordable prices mean everyone can be a part of it. I'm amazed by the creativity of the culinary team and how the restaurant continues to evolve.

**Keri Bridgwater, Eater:** Herb & Wood has it all - sophisticated food, drinks, elegant ambience - but **Campfire** has to be my pick for 2016. Love the open-fire element and direction of the menu and drinks list with its offbeat flavor profiles and combinations, not to mention superb design/styling by Bells & Whistles.

**Michael Gardiner, San Diego CityBeat:** It would be tempting to say Herb & Wood and, if "top restaurant newcomer" means "most likely to be a fixture for years to come," then that might be the best answer. But my answer is **608** in Oceanside. Chef Willy Eick is young, creative and definitely one to watch for the future.

**Michelle Dederko, PACIFIC Magazine:** Herb & Wood's debut was a smashing success that actually delivered in proportion to its incoming buzz, which is honestly not that common. Every bite was memorable and euphoric.

**Frank Sabatini, Jr., San Diego Community News Network:** It's a tie between Trust Restaurant, which has shown remarkable consistency since opening early this year, and **Royal Stone**, where some of the finest bistro meals in town are served with little marketing hype.

**Darlene Horn, Zagat:** Trust Restaurant.

**Troy Johnson, [San Diego Magazine](#): Herb & Wood.** Jaded folk like to bag on chef Brian Malarkey because he's on TV and has a big personality and can be cocky and humble and brash and sweet. Opinionated people tend to loathe success. But anyone claiming that he or chef de cuisine Shane McIntyre can't cook must have lost their taste buds in a tragic taste bud incident. It's also a hell of a beautiful restaurant. There are beer goggles, and there are Herb & Wood goggles. Everyone looks prettier and more worthy of producing offspring with when sitting in H&W. That oxtail gnocchi is up for dish of the year.

**Josh Kopelman, [DiningOut](#): Trust Restaurant.**