

THIS PHOTO The Hotel
Valencia Riverwalk.



San Antonio

WHERE ON EARTH

Treasuring The Pearl

by JESSICA KOBEL



THIS PHOTO Craft cocktails at Hotel Emma.

«THE PEARL, a gentrified warehouse district set into the northern end of San Antonio's fabled Riverwalk, is a luminous example of modern urban planning. The Hotel Emma, arguably the jewel of the former industrial quarter, opened in 2015 and remains one of the city's most imaginative boutique properties. The rest of the neighbourhood is strung together by independently-owned restaurants, bars, boutiques, manicured park spaces and a bustling branch of the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), opened in 2008. And as one would expect in a neighbourhood like this, there's a weekend farmers' market drawing people in from all over the city and suburbs.

The genesis of all of this is traced to billionaire-philanthropist Christopher "Kit" Goldsby (the one-time owner of Pace Foods made a sizable part of his fortune selling it to Campbell Soup in 1994), who saw the 22-acre expanse's potential and financed its transformation starting in 2003. However, one thing that makes the area's reinvention over the past decade even more compelling is its historic and colourful connection to beverage and food production dating back just over a century.

In 1883, City Brewery opened on the grounds, and in 1896, was renamed San Antonio Brewing Association (SABA). Otto Koehler, a German immigrant who mastered the ins-and-outs of the beer business in St Louis, took the helm in 1902 with the intention of building the brewery into one of the largest in America. Wife Emma helped him run it, and in the process, gained a command of the brewery's inner workings until a car accident nearly claimed her life in 1910. Four years and a scandalous love triangle later (involving Otto and two nurses named "Emma," who became his mistresses, with the second one shooting and killing him), Emma Koehler made a full recovery and wasted no time taking over the brewery by applying the knowledge she had absorbed.

While it was remarkable that Emma Koehler assumed leadership at the brewery before women were granted the right to vote, the fact that it became an even bigger success under her direction remains the stuff of local legend. When Prohibition hit, she changed the company's name to Alamo Food Corporation, and switched to producing a near-beer, soft drinks and other products. She



also invested a million dollars of her personal money around the start of the Depression to improve the brewery's equipment and facilities and ensure employees would keep their jobs. This also enabled beer production to pick up where it left off when Prohibition ended in 1933. Although nephew Otto Andrew Koehler eventually took over the company, she remained heavily involved until her death in 1943.

Hotel Emma amalgamates six buildings constructed at different times and for different purposes in the beer making process, and this ingenious feat of rethinking and repurposing would certainly do Emma Koehler proud. Sternwirth, the hotel's main bar and lounge, occupies a former storage room built in 1896. The massive room is lined with aging tanks converted into private enclaves that surround an expanse filled with several cozy seating areas. The front lobby was built in 1938 to serve as the brewery's engine house. The Library Bar, where guests can enjoy excellent locally roasted coffee and muffins every morning, was a fermentation cellar built in 1948. The hotel's top rooms and suites occupy the original 1894 brewhouse, and were each built around the building's original architectural attributes. The River Cellars rooms feature private terraces. The newest building, created in 2014 for additional rooms, blends seamlessly with the rest of the brewery.

Thanks to several restaurants that are part of the hotel or immediately adjoining it, Hotel Emma is now regarded by locals as San Antonio's 'living room' as well as the starting point for experiencing what is now recognized as an incubator for the city's culinary evolution. In addition to morning coffee in the library, Hotel Emma guests will find a macaron or another tasty morsel from Bakery Lorraine instead of a mint on the pillow. It's a sly incentive to visit the bakery to try its other classic and contemporary French pastries. The Larder at Emma, meanwhile, offers a mix of European and artisanal Texas-made foodstuffs and grab-and-go meals for a picnic along the Riverwalk, The Pearl's freestanding outdoor eating spaces or its own seating.

Supper, the hotel's official fine dining restaurant, is a showcase for executive Chef John Brand, who proves the familiar hotel dining formula of classic American-European menus weaving in seasonal ingredients stands the test of time. While Southerleigh (named for the prevailing gulf breeze wafting across that section»



SERVES 4

Lemon & Ricotta Pancakes with Buttermilk & Blueberries

A GLUTEN-FREE RECIPE FROM Chef John Brand, of Supper at Hotel Emma, San Antonio.

Ricotta 1 cup
Heavy Cream
 ½ cup
Egg Whites
 6 oz
Gluten-Free Flour
 2 cups
Sugar ¼ cup
Nutmeg ¼ tsp
Butter 4 oz
Buttermilk
 1 ½ cups
Whole Milk
 ½ cup
Baking Powder
 ½ Tbs

- 1 PLACE** the ricotta and cream in a blender and blend until smooth. Reserve and chill.
- 2 WHISK** the egg whites into frothy peaks and reserve.
- 3 MELT** the butter and add it to the buttermilk and milk.
- 4 MIX** the dry ingredients separately in a mixing bowl. Slowly stir in the milk mixture until incorporated.
- 5 GENTLY** fold in the whipped egg whites in three stages.
- 6 COOK** the pancakes on a lightly buttered flat top or griddle.
- 7 DUST** with powdered sugar and serve with blueberries and lemon curd.



SERVES 4 AS A SIDE

Roasted Green Beans & Mushrooms with Nori Remoulade

THIS RECIPE FROM CHEF Brand is simple but impressive and totally delicious. A perfect side for entertaining.

Green Beans
200 g, trimmed

Mushrooms
100 g, cleaned and quartered

Shallot
1, thinly sliced

Kecap Manis
2 Tbs

Freshly Squeezed Lemon Juice
of ¼ of a lemon

- 1 HEAT** a medium size cast iron skillet on medium to high heat.
- 2 ADD** the beans and mushrooms to pan and spread evenly, and allow to roast without oil until slightly charred or toasted.
- 3 SHAKE** the pan to loosen them up, add the shallot and remove from the heat.
- 4 ADD** the kecap manis to the pan and mix well, taste and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper if necessary then add the lemon juice.
- 5 SERVE** with nori remoulade on the side or in a bowl with the beans.

MAKES ABOUT ½ CUP

Nori Remoulade

THIS CONDIMENT CAN BE made one day in advance.

Mayonnaise ¼ cup

Crème Fraîche ¼ cup

Nori 1 sheet, crushed

Togorashi Spice 1 tsp

Dill Pickle 20 g, finely chopped

- 1 MIX** all the ingredients together and chill.

«of Texas) is not technically a part of the hotel, it takes full advantage of its colourful brewing history with its own on-premise brewery offering a rotating range of craft batch beers on tap. Chef Jeff Balfour's menus, appropriately, are packed with Southern classics such as fried chicken, meatloaf, mac-and-cheese, crawfish sandwiches and other items that blend comforting portions and heartiness with the right-sized punch of spice and pepper.

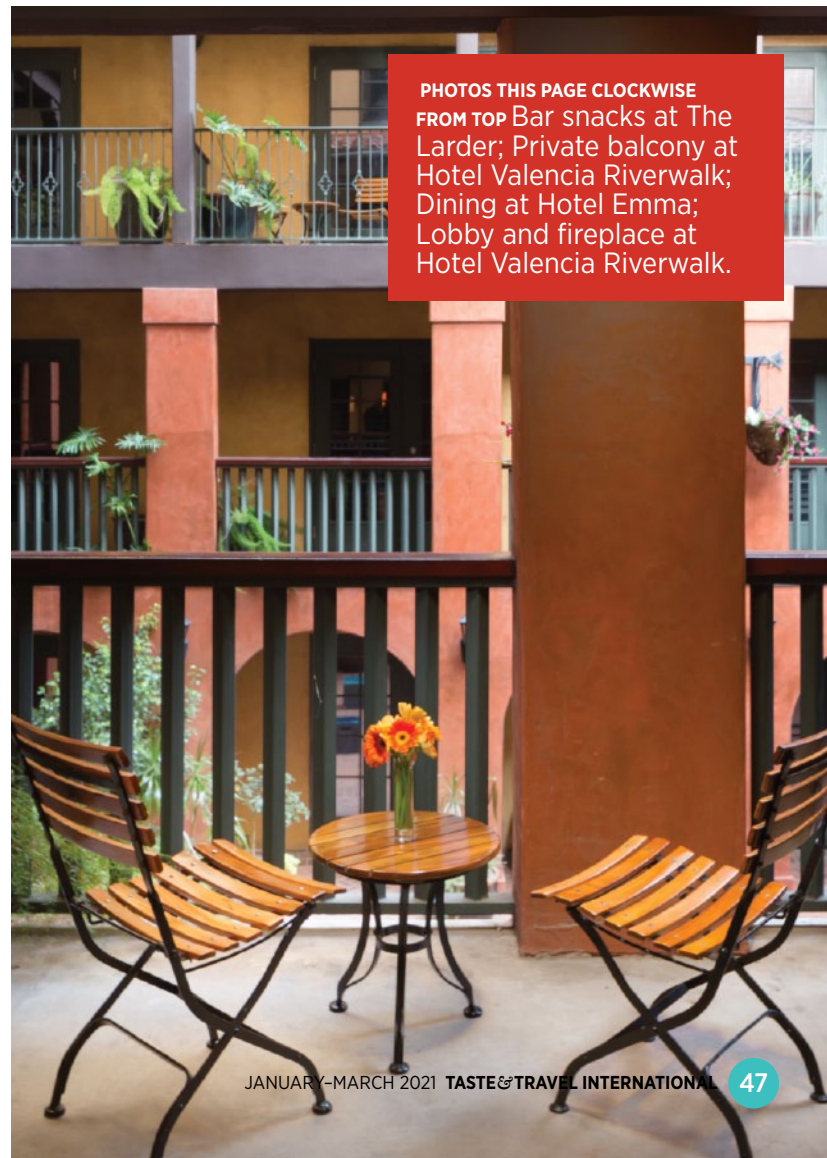
The perfect follow-up to Southerleigh's zesty appetizers and mains can be found a few steps away at Lick Honest Ice Creams, whose inventive flavours include Goat Cheese, Thyme & Honey, Roasted Beets & Fresh Mint, Texas Sheet Cake and Hill Country Honey & Vanilla Bean, all providing sensory shout-outs to the farms and local food producers providing the ingredients. Vegans never have to settle on sorbet, with such selections as Chewy Caramel Oat Bar, Vanilla Pear and Chocolate Chocolate.

A few feet from the hotel entrance, the San Antonio CIA-operated Savor not only offers diners a unique experience, but a glimpse into San Antonio's changing food landscape. Since its inception, San Antonio's CIA has turned out 1,000 professional chefs, several of whom still work at or have some form of ownership in The Pearl's restaurants. Visitors to Savor will get a taste of those CIA chef's in-depth education. The restaurant's ever-changing lineup of dishes and menus are created and presented by advanced CIA students under the guidance of the faculty. From there, diners can build their own three- or four-course meal in the space's intimate dining room. In the bar area, they can mix and mix and match menu items from the kitchen with classic cocktails, curated wines or local craft beers.

"What makes The Pearl special is that all the restaurants are owned and operated by the chefs," says Geronimo Lopez, owner of Botika, which deftly blends Japanese, Chinese and Latin American flavours that result in wholly original sushi rolls, bowl dishes, noodle plates and cocktails. "The way we blend Japanese flavours with Latin flavours is different because we developed the menu for a very different palate than what Americans are used to," Lopez explains. "My original goal was to (create recipes) reflecting my experience living and working with Latin American and Asians in South America and finding the resemblance between those food cultures."»



...All the The Pearl's restaurants are chef owned and operated...



PHOTOS THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE
FROM TOP Bar snacks at The
Larder; Private balcony at
Hotel Valencia Riverwalk;
Dining at Hotel Emma;
Lobby and fireplace at
Hotel Valencia Riverwalk.





PHOTOS THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT The bar area at Sternewirth; The Riverwalk; The Larder; Chef John Brand; Breakfast at Hotel Emma; Enjoying paella at Hotel Valencia Riverwalk.

«The Pearl's other higher-end restaurants also come with their own original spin. Boiler House is not just 6,000 square feet of Texas steakhouse, but Chef Jarrad Gwaltney's take on it, rooted in Texas Hill Country interpretations of steaks, chops, fresh seafood and wild game. Its prolifically stocked bar includes 120 wine labels, craft beers from across Texas, and a creative cocktail menu mostly dedicated to dark spirits, from whiskeys, traditional bourbons and scotches to powerful tequilas and mezcal. Cured, conceived by Chef Steve McHugh and located in the former Pearl Administration Building from 1904, is a perfect foil for local craft brews and the Pearl Brewery legacy, with its painstakingly hand-crafted charcuterie, pickles and other foods.

La Gloria, devised by the locally beloved chef-restaurateur Johnny Hernandez, is known for its menu curated over five years of travel throughout Mexico to find inspiration and regional recipes brought to life by the street vendors, taquerias and kitchens he encountered. While Hernandez has several restaurants in the San Antonio area as well as a Margarita truck that's kept spirits up during the past year, La Gloria's concept has given him permission to balance authenticity and creativity without compromise. Green, San Antonio's only 100-percent Kosher vegetarian restaurant, endeavours to not only provide a satisfying, option-filled night out for vegetarians and others with dietary restrictions but also surprise omnivores with how fresh ingredients can be stretched and enhanced without dairy or meat.

For those on a budget or dining out with kids, the Bottling Department Food Hall rattles and rolls with casual outlets offering dishes that are a little more familiar but equal in creativity and freshness to what's being served at the more expensive restaurants. Among them, Bud's Southern Rotisserie is

the creation of New Orleans transplant Pieter Sypesteyn, who taps into his Louisiana roots through tender rotisserie chicken and slow-cooked pork and sides such as jambalaya, mac n' cheese and braised greens. Tenko preps different styles of ramen, while Fletcher's satisfies a burger craving with colourful combinations of toppings and sides.

While The Pearl's assemblage of restaurants ensures you won't leave hungry, there are still many things worth discovering six miles along the river, in the downtown area of the Riverwalk. The Hotel Valencia Riverwalk, reworked and modernized by internationally acclaimed architect and designer Lauren Rottetby in 2017, has its location as well as upscale interiors going for it. The central location puts it within walking distance to the Alamo, the Spanish Governor's Palace, Historic Market Square. If you're up to going the distance, head over to the upmarket La Villita Historic Arts Village, Southtown and the King William Historic District, which share a similar indie vibe with The Pearl in terms of the one-off, concept-driven bars and restaurants thriving there.

Inside the Hotel Valencia, Dorrego's offers the city's only gastronomic trek into Argentina, while Ácenar, adjoining the hotel, offers fantastic river views and zesty, modern twists on the classic Mexican fare. While Bohanan's Prime Steaks and Seafood has long been an essential spot for a "splurge" meal, its bar is regarded by many to be the birthplace of San Antonio's modern craft cocktail scene via the San Antonio Cocktail Conference. Like the chefs coming out of San Antonio's Culinary Institute of America, its alumni have transformed and elevated local bar culture. As bartender Jake Corney holds court at Jazz, TX, one of the hottest bars at The Pearl, one can honestly say a river does run through it — a stream of creativity that makes San Antonio always unforgettable even as tastes and trends change. 



The Hotel Emma
www.thehotelemma.com

Bakery Lorraine
www.bakerylorraine.com

Boiler House
www.boilerhousesa.com

Botika
www.botikapearl.com

Green
www.eatatgreen.com

La Gloria
www.chefjohnnyhernandez.com/restaurants/la-gloria/la-gloria-pearl

Lick Honest Ice Cream
www.ilikelick.com

Savor — The Culinary Institute of America
www.savorcia.com

Southerleigh
www.southerleigh.com

Supper
www.supperatemma.com

The Weekend Farmers' Market At Pearl
www.atpearl.com/farmers-market

Bottling Department Food Hall
www.atpearl.com

Hotel Valencia Riverwalk
www.hotelvalencia-riverwalk.com

La Villita Historic Arts Village
www.lavillitasanantonio.com

Jazz Tx
www.jazztx.com

JESSICA KOBEL is an American freelance journalist who writes about food, drink and travel.



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