

## A huevos rancheros breakfast homage to Ben



Ben's Huevos Rancheros

Photos Susie Iventosch

### By Susie Iventosch

My husband's cousin Ben (Alameda born and raised) invited us over to brunch one Sunday and he and his wife, Amy, treated us to some absolutely delicious huevos rancheros! It's kind of funny, but I had never made them before, nor had I ever ordered them in a restaurant. I was always more of a chilaquiles girl. But, I was bowled over with how wonderful they were. Fast forward two years, and I've finally gotten around to making them and they are just as great as I remembered.

Ben used La Tortilla Factory

white corn and wheat tortillas, which are the perfect blend of corn and wheat. We love the hybrid tortillas too, but straight corn or flour would also be perfectly good if you can't find blended tortillas. He also used a combination of cheddar and asiago cheeses, which was amazing, but I think Cotija or feta would be great as well. We swapped out his raw green onions for cooked onion because we are just not raw onion people. Instead, we sautéed onions (or shallots) along with diced jalapeño and added these to the black beans. Other than that, this is his recipe and I'm sticking to it!

### Huevos Rancheros for Six

(If you have really hungry people, you may want to make two per person, but one is pretty filling!)

#### INGREDIENTS

6 corn and wheat tortillas (can also use either corn or flour)  
6 eggs  
2 tablespoons canola or olive oil  
1 medium yellow onion, chopped  
1 large or 2 small jalapeños, finely diced (can also use poblano or Anaheim chilies)  
1 can whole black beans (14-15 oz.), drained and rinsed  
1/2 teaspoon lemon pepper, lime pepper or Tajin  
1 cup grated sharp white cheddar cheese  
1 cup grated asiago cheese

#### Garnishes:

3 pitted Kalamata olives, halved  
1 cup of your favorite salsa (Ben's salsa of choice is Frontera Double Roasted Tomato Salsa)  
1/2 cup sour cream (we use plain nonfat Greek yogurt instead of sour cream for everything, but of course either will work)  
1 large or 2 small ripe (but firm) avocados, diced or sliced  
2 green onions, chopped  
6 sprigs cilantro

#### DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 300 F.
2. Heat oil in a skillet over medium heat and sauté onions and peppers until onions start to look translucent. Add black beans and stir together. (If you are inclined, add some Tajin, lemon pepper, lime pepper, or salt and pepper to the onion-pepper-bean mixture.) Continue to cook until the beans are heated through. Remove from heat.
3. Heat tortillas in a dry skillet until they just start to puff up. Transfer them to a baking sheet, lined with parchment paper.
4. Spoon a layer of the black bean mixture to cover each tortilla.
5. Cook 6 eggs, sunny side up, but not too well done, since you will be cooking the egg again in the oven.
6. Carefully transfer the cooked eggs and lay them over the beans on the tortillas.
7. Sprinkle a generous layer of the mixed grated cheeses over each egg and the beans.
8. Place the baking sheet in the preheated oven and cook for 6-8 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and egg yolks are cooked to desired doneness.
9. Garnish with diced avocado, salsa, sour cream and diced green onions.

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[www.lamorindaweekly.com](http://www.lamorindaweekly.com) If you would like to share your favorite recipe with Susie please contact her by email or call our office at (925) 377-0977. Or visit <https://treksandbites.com>



## The throwback appeal of the Santa Ynez Valley



Crown Point Vineyards

Photo courtesy Crown Point Vineyards

### By Fran Endicott Miller

The small and very charming towns that comprise the Santa Ynez Valley are clustered together as tightly as the wine grapes from which the region's wonderful varietals are derived. Los Olivos, Solvang, Buellton, Ballard, Santa Ynez, and Los Alamos are all within easy driving (and even biking) distance from each other, making it simple to experience each within a short visit. Two to three nights is optimal, and allows for ample sampling of delicious wines, gourmet meals, and delightful hospitality.

Just less than a five-hour drive from Lamorinda, the area is often overlooked in favor of the higher profile Paso Robles, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara. But the east and west detours off of Hwy 101 are worth a stop. Perhaps best known as home of Pea Soup Andersen's, Buellton is ready to move beyond its "Sideways" notoriety.

The brand new Zaca Creek Inn and Tavern provide good reason for an overnight stay.

Go expressly to experience one of the Inn's six distinctive stone-walled suites to which you can retire after a gourmet meal at The Tavern where executive chef Cullen Campbell showcases the best of the Central Coast's varied purveyors in an incredibly creative menu. Featured are local caught seafood including Purple Hotchi, abalone, Grassy Bar oysters, and local spiny lobster, as well as farm fresh produce and steaks.

The cocktail program preserves the allure of the site's historic Tavern Bar, and aims to highlight and enhance the old-style feel. From the most sought-after bourbons and ryes, to the most region-centric agave flavors of tequila and mezcal, guests can taste through a hand-picked selection. The highly curated and extensive wine list features local favorites as well as international selections.

Ballard is home to the charming Ballard Inn, across from which is one of the best reasons to awaken on any day: Bob's Well Bread. This French style bakery features a decadent and bountiful display of pastry in addition to hot dish items, to be enjoyed on its sunny patio. Drive around the corner to see the town's beloved and genuine Little Red Schoolhouse where, since 1883, young Ballard residents have received their elementary school education.

If wine is of interest, make Los Olivos your next destination. At least 30 wine tasting rooms are found within its walkable five blocks. Try Liquid Farm, where owner Jeff Nelson and winemaker James Sparks create Burgundian style chardonnay and elegant pinot noir. Enjoy lunch at Nella, adjacent to the Fess Parker Wine Country Inn, where Pinsas, Roman-style pizzas with flatbread-like crusts, are the starring attraction. And do not

miss fanciful and whimsical J. Woeste home and garden store where whirling wind ornaments, chimes, and every themed garden trinket imaginable can be found.

The main thoroughfare in Los Alamos, at the northern entry to the Valley, is only seven blocks long yet it reflects as much Old West heritage as any small town along California's Central Coast. Santa Ynez is at once equally as historic, yet also sophisticated, as illustrated by gorgeous Crown Point Vineyards where proprietor Roger Bower and winemaker Simon Fauray are making some of California's tastiest Cabernet Sauvignon. Make a wine tasting appointment and accept the offer of a jeep tour in order to experience expansive views from its hilltop vineyard. Back in town, the Santa Ynez Valley Historical Society Museum and Parks-Janeyway Carriage House offer a fascinating dose of Old West heritage.

Finally, a visit to the region is not complete without a Solvang stop for pastry. Long a favorite of visitors the world over, this Danish-settled town maintains traditions of language, folk dancing, music, and cuisine, while also keeping-up with hospitality and restaurant trends. Try the wildly off-theme Ramen Kotori and its decadent bowls of ramen, the Michelin level First & Oak, and coming soon, Coast Range & Vaquero Bar, from a star-studded team of chefs and renowned wine-maker/sommelier, Rajat Parr.

Perhaps what is most captivating about the region is the wide open and bucolic terrain. Vineyards and horse farms intermingle, presenting a distinct vibe of what California must have been like in 'the olden' days. It's relaxing, refreshing, and enchanting, and exactly what we all need right now as we start to venture out after a year of sheltering.



Zaca Creek

Photo Danielle Honea

## First of three Twilight events presented by John Muir Land Trust



Western Screech Owl

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### By Jennifer Wake

Nearly 60 bird enthusiasts joined the Zoom webinar, "Twilight – Meet a Screech Owl," May 20, sponsored

by the John Muir Land Trust – which protects and cares for open space with more than 3,500 acres and 17 properties under stewardship – and featuring Lindsay Wildlife Experience Youth Programs Coordinator Matee Manakitivipart, who facilitated the interactive discussion.

Lindsay Wildlife Experience is home to over 70 "Animal Ambassadors," including Cypress – a Western Screech Owl, which is one of the smallest owl species in North America. Cypress came to Lindsay at three days old in July 2018 and was raised with seven other screech owls, which have since been returned to the wild, but Manakitivipart said Cypress became accustomed to people and is therefore non-releasable. And while Cypress' name would suggest a loud screeching call, she makes soft hoots and is perfectly camouflaged against mature tree bark in her natural forest habitat. A cavity nester, screech owls wait for their food to come by and dine on small rodents, bats, insects, crayfish and even rabbits, Manakitivipart said.

"Most owls have very soft feathers to dampen sound as they fly," Manakitivipart added. "But [the feathers] break more easily than other birds."

Manakitivipart said Red Shouldered Hawks are nesting right now and you can find these hawks or White Tail Kites in Marsh areas, such as the Pacheco

Marsh on Suisun Bay and other bird species at the Point Reyes National Seashore. The Merlin Bird ID app is a great way to identify different species of birds, Manakitivipart said. "If you have a picture on your phone, you can upload the photo on the app and it will tell you the likely species of the bird." Xeno-Canto is also a great source for birdcalls, he added.

Manakitivipart reminded participants about how to help keep wildlife safe, such as reducing our environmental footprint by limiting consumption, reusing and recycling, and to leave only footprints when visiting parks. He also implored participants to not use garden netting and sticky traps to kill rodents, as he has seen hawks, owls and snakes get caught in them.

There are two more free JMLT Twilight events planned: The first on May 27, where participants can take a virtual visit to Family Harvest Farm in downtown Pittsburg, and the second on June 3 where folks can see what's up in the night sky and learn about the "Red Planet" Mars with the Astronomical Society of the Pacific. To register, visit <https://jmlt.org/calendar-events/twilight-2021/>. For information about Lindsay Wildlife Experience, visit [lindsaywildlife.org](http://lindsaywildlife.org).