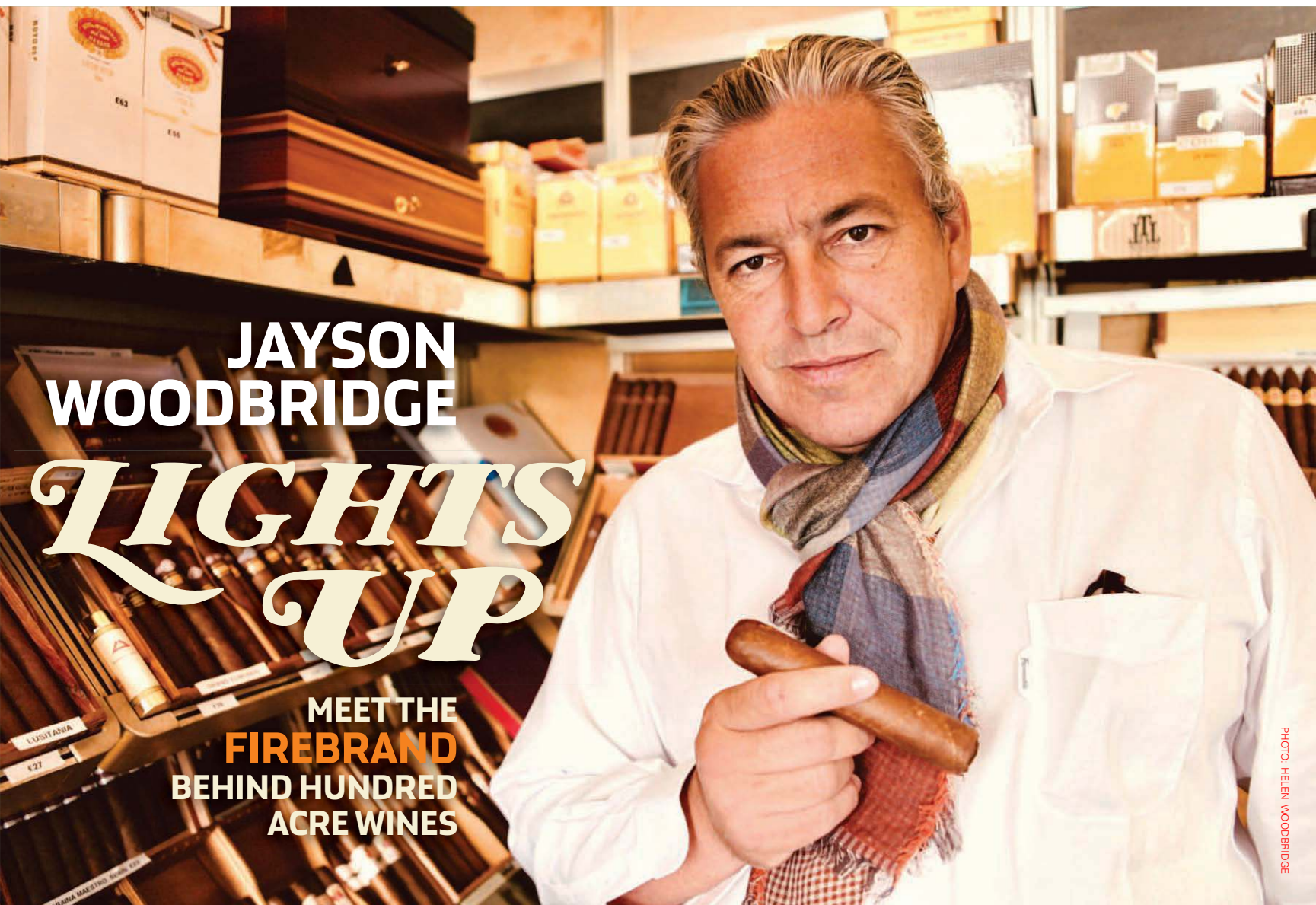


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In Living Color



As General Manager at Tallula's in Santa Monica, CA, Mary Thompson culls housemade syrups, farmers market produce, and other fresh ingredients to use in her impressive list of Margaritas and Palomas.

TALLULA'S BRINGS MODERN MEXICAN COMFORT FOOD TO SANTA MONICA

by Meridith May / photos by Rick Poon

A VIBRANT CANTINA OFFERING seaside views just off the Pacific Coast Highway, the hacienda "estate" that is Tallula's offers Mexican comfort food and ingredient-driven cocktails to its sun-kissed patrons in Santa Monica, California.

Those cocktails come courtesy of General Manager Mary Thompson, who worked alongside some of the most cutting-edge chefs in Southern California before joining up with the RC Family, a boutique restaurant group that includes Rustic Canyon, Milo & Olive, Cassia, Esters Wine Shop & Bar, Huckleberry Bakery & Café and Sweet Rose Creamery.

At Tallula's, Thompson has curated a bar program that's both innovative and craft-motivated, choosing vintage-dated or small-production agave-based spirits for her menu. As expected for a Mexican eatery, versions of the Margarita take center stage. "I like to push for recipes that are memorable," Thompson tells *The Clever Root*. "I imagine myself taking our customers on a tour of what's out there with agave spirits."

Tallula's opened in May 2017 in a space last occupied by a Tex-Mex restaurant, but the pagoda exteriors date back to its origins as a Japanese eatery in the '80s. With its Southwestern-inspired color palette akin to a terra-cotta-and-turquoise sunset, the interior is now decorated with hand-embroidered wall hangings, vintage Mexican poster art, and hand-painted tiles.

Agave-based spirits aren't the only focus here: The Hibiscus Refresco combines sloe gin, prickly pear brandy, hibiscus agua fresca, and bitter Bruto Americano liqueur from St. George Spirits.



Tallula's Chef/Partner Jeremy Fox uses sustainably-farmed meats and seafood, as well as the freshest local and seasonal produce, for his signature "homecooked-style" dishes. Pictured here is a spicy birria stew with lamb and black beer.



Wine Director Kathryn Coker oversees a global selection of wines from Spain, Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Italy, France, and the U.S., finding labels that pair well with the creative dishes rich in flavor and texture. Coker also co-owns Esters with the same duo behind Tallula's—Josh Loeb and Zoe Nathan—and it's the addition of these ultra-professionals that makes the Santa Monica cantina a standout in a crowded field of Mexican cuisine.

Chef Jeremy Fox, also a partner at Tallula's, sources many of his ingredients from Santa Monica's weekly farmers market. The happy hour and dinner menus incorporate sustainably-sourced seafood and meat, heirloom grains, and seasonal organic produce, transforming them into unexpected yet highly-satisfying combinations. ■cr



RC Family Partners Josh Loeb and Zoe Nathan with Chef Jeremy Fox.

Here are a few of our favorite dishes:

Nachos "sencillo" (meaning "simple") with cotija and fontina cheeses, spicy giardiniera, buttermilk crema, and salsa roja, with the option to add organic chicken or grass-fed beef

Grilled swordfish tacos with red sauerkraut, dill, epazote, and malt aioli on housemade blue corn tortillas

Mushroom and pepper jack empanadas topped with cotija, cilantro, and hoja santa chimichurri

Roasted organic chicken with date-almond mole and seasonal vegetables served with housemade duck-fat flour tortillas

