

DESERT

MARCH 2016

outlook

LGBT **SPRING FESTIVALS**
SPOTLIGHT MUSIC &
EYE CANDY GALORE

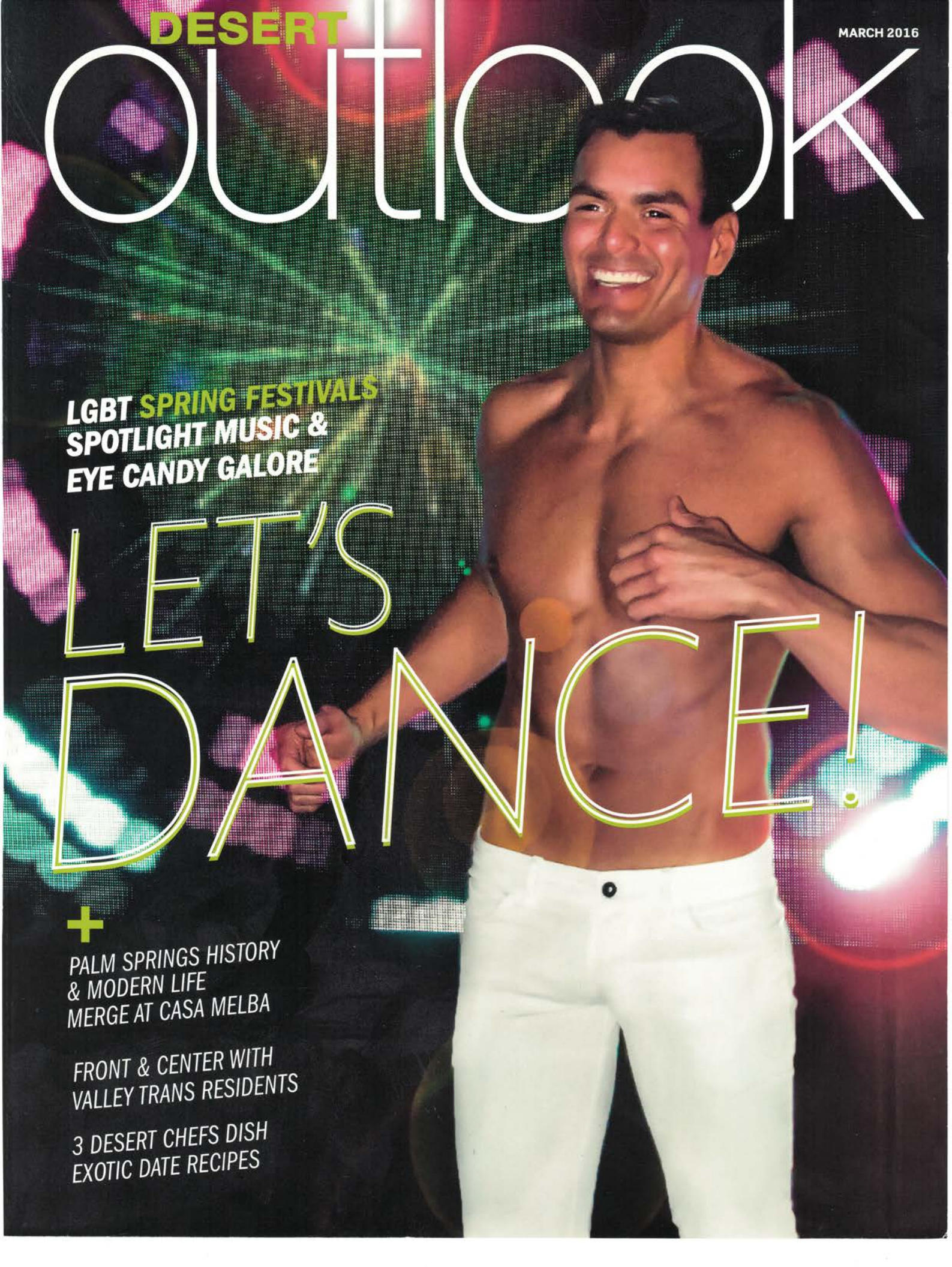
LET'S
DANCE!



PALM SPRINGS HISTORY
& MODERN LIFE
MERGE AT CASA MELBA

FRONT & CENTER WITH
VALLEY TRANS RESIDENTS

3 DESERT CHEFS DISH
EXOTIC DATE RECIPES



DATEBOOK



THINKSTOCK
PHOTO

A DATE WITH

wordly flavors

International
chefs get creative
with valley's
celebrated fruit

BY PATRICK BARTLETT

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAKE STANFORD

If you frequent or reside in the Coachella Valley, you're aware of Indio's vast date palm groves. While sipping a date shake at the annual Date Festival, have you ever wondered how it all came to be?

Unlike fan palms, date palms aren't native to the valley. More than a century ago, entrepreneurs transplanted them from North Africa and the Middle East. Dates had long been popular in Europe. Before the advent of refrigeration, however, there was no practical way to ship dates across the Atlantic without the fruit rotting.

The trees love it here. They were imported to Indio in the 1880s, and the first crops were harvested in 1910, followed by the first official Date Festival in 1921. The marketers created an exotic Arabian image around the city to bolster the sales of the dates. In fact, both Mecca and Oasis were so named because of this fascination with Arabian culture.

Today Indio produces 95 percent of the dates sold in the U.S., and they are essential to the economy of Indio. This quick overview simply scratches the surface of the Arabian influence in the southern end of the valley, including the now-famous camel races.

To honor this piece of valley history, we've asked three Palm Springs-area chefs who are also international transplants to the desert to create recipes using dates. First we have Vietnam-born Tai Spendley, owner-chef of Rooster and the Pig, who created an amazing Vietnamese-themed appetizer. Next we have Greek-born Dimitri Maras, owner-chef of Greek Islands taking on the challenge of a main course date dish. Finally, we have French-born Raphael Farsy, owner-chef of L' Atelier, tasked with creating a French-inspired dessert.

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TAI SPENDLEY

ROOSTER AND THE PIG | ROOSTERANDTHEPIG.COM



Spendley was born in Vietnam, the son of a Vietnamese mother and American military man serving in Vietnam. At the end of the war, the family moved to the East Coast of the U.S., where Spendley grew up as a self-described military brat.

For 13 years Spendley divided his time between Chicago and Palm Springs. His work in Palm Springs was mostly as a food and beverage manager for several local restaurants and resorts. The inspiration to open his first restaurant, Rooster and the Pig, was born out of dining frustration. "After living here and working in the restaurant business for several years," Spendley explains, "I was losing my passion for food." After many discussions with close friends, inspiration struck and he developed a restaurant that focused on his Vietnamese roots and the cultural concept of a big-city neighborhood restaurant.

The name, Rooster and the Pig, was a lark. Spendley was tired of trying to find a domain name still available, and so after days of searching for the perfect name, he decided to let it go and just do some pleasure reading. An Asian Zodiac book gave him an idea. His birth year is the rat, but he didn't think that would go over very well for his restaurant

name. Further reading landed him with the idea of the Rooster and the Pig. "The Rooster and the Pig have different strengths and weaknesses that can create conflict," he says. "In order to overcome conflict they have to work harder to create balance." This, he says, represents his approach to his culinary creations.

The restaurant opened on April 8, 2015. "On our opening night I had only two hired staff and no cash on hand," Spendley says. "It was crazy. We had a cash ticket and no change. I had to ask one of the tables if they had any spare cash so we could make the correct change to another table." Since that first day, Rooster and the Pig has been going gangbusters. They don't take reservations, and the restaurant is always bustling with happy Vietnamese fusion-loving diners.

One of Spendley's favorite appetizers is Banh Hoi. It is a sautéed mixture of pork belly and diced dates served on a bed of fine rice vermicelli. The mixture is served with an assortment of Thai basil, mint, and other greens, along with Nuac Cham sauce, allowing you to create your own wrap. The recipe, like most Vietnamese food, is based on flavor balance and harmony.

BANH HOI

- Steam the vermicelli until soft
- Once steamed, brush with scallion oil; set aside for plating
- Cut pork belly into cubes, toss with salt, pepper, and some five spice seasoning; add a light coating of honey and apple cider
- Roast in a hot oven until mixture is caramelized
- Cool roasted pork belly and toss with diced dates
- Plate by creating a base of vermicelli noodles topped with the pork belly/date mixture, topped with a scattering of Vietnamese daikon, carrot pickles and crispy shallots
- Serve with a side bowl of Nuac Cham (basic Vietnamese dipping sauce), and an assortment of basil and mint greens to fill and wrap

DIMITRI MARASGREEK ISLANDS RESTAURANT | GREEKISLANDSRESTAURANT.COM/GREEKLUNCHMENU.PDF**STUFFED LEG OF LAMB WITH DATE SAUCE****INGREDIENTS**

- ¾ cup pitted dates, chopped
- ¼ cup orange juice
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 ¾ cup bread crumbs
- 1 large sprig of rosemary, diced
- ½ cup almonds, chopped
- 1 large shallot, sliced
- 3-4 lb. leg of lamb
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

METHOD**STEP ONE:**

- Preheat oven to 300 degrees
- Combine dates with orange juice and allow to sit for 30 minutes.

STEP TWO:

- Melt butter over medium heat, sauté shallots until soft. Stir in bread crumbs, rosemary, and almonds, cook until bread crumbs are soft. Remove from heat and stir in dates, but reserve a small amount for plating.

STEP THREE:

- Place lamb, fat side down, in roasting pan, spread remaining stuffing on lamb, roll and tie with string. Season with salt and pepper. Roast lamb for 1 hour, allow to rest, then slice, top with date mixture, and serve on bed of garlic/almond mashed potatoes.

Dimitri Maras and his wife, Sara, opened Greek Islands in La Plaza in Palm Springs in January 2013. Word rapidly spread about the new authentic Greek café in town. It was such a smashing success that the Marases quickly began looking for a larger space, eventually settling on the fun and festive location just off Palm Canyon Drive in the heart of downtown. The restaurant is a combination of formal dining, patio seating, and a recently added small plates bar.

Maras grew up in Greece where, he exclaims, "Food is a celebration." He grew up cooking in his grandfather's taverna at a very young age. Maras attended the culinary school of Athens and for 30 years cooked throughout Europe, eventually landing in New York City where he worked for celebrity chef Peter Spiropoulos, owner of famed

Mediterranean restaurants, Mylos and Ethos.

The Marases moved to Palm Springs because of the climate and positive energy they so love. They also love dates. "When I was a little boy my father, who worked in the textile business, would often travel to the markets in Athens," Dimitri Maras says. "When he returned home, he would always bring dates." He believes dates pair perfectly with Greek cuisine. Using dates to make a sauce for roasted leg of lamb creates the perfect harmony of sweet and savory.

Maras's roasted leg of lamb, stuffed with a date-shallot mixture, is something that could be prepared and served at any table in Greece. He plates the dish with garlic/almond mashed potatoes and puréed fava beans to add a classic Santorini Island touch.



Sara and Dimitri Maras

RAPHAEL FARSY

L'ATELIER CAFÉ | LATELIER-CAFÉ.COM

FINANCIER WITH DATES

INGREDIENTS (MAKES 11 FINANCIERS)

- 2.8 oz. almond powder
- 1.25 oz. flour
- 5.3 oz. powdered sugar
- 4 egg whites
- 3.5 oz. unsalted butter, melted
- Vanilla extract
- 6 dates, cut in half

METHOD

- Preheat oven to 450 degrees.
- Sift almond powder, flour and sugar together. In a mixing bowl, blend one egg white into the flour mixture at a time.
- Next stir in a few drops of vanilla extract and the melted butter.
- Pour batter into each cavity of an 11-cavity Financier pan.
- Top each filled cavity with half a date.
- Bake in oven for 5 minutes at 450F, then reduce heat to 360F for another 10 minutes.
- Remove from oven and cool.
- When ready to serve, include a dipping caramel sauce that has minced dates stirred into the sauce.

Raphael Farsy is a Parisian who grew up with a father passionate about food. It was his father who got him started early in his culinary career, especially French pastries. As a young man, he studied culinary arts in Paris.

Farsy and his wife, Charlotte, have both loved California since childhood. After their 2012 honeymoon in the Coachella Valley, "We decided we had to live in Palm Springs," Farsy says. "We fell in love with the mountains that surround the city, and the desert climate." He adds, "We both decided that Palm Springs would make a perfect home and place to fulfill our dream of a French cafe." The name L'Atelier means "workshop." In keeping with the name, the menu and cafe décor changes on a regular basis; it's a constant

work in progress.

When not baking fresh baguettes, assorted quiche, and pastries, Farsy can be seen zooming around Palm Springs on his motorcycle, much to the joy of many locals. L'Atelier is highly recommended on many travel sites, so it's become a favorite of tourists and locals alike, especially those who've been to Paris.

When it comes to creating a dessert with dates, Farsy has many ideas. One is a family recipe for the classic French pastry Financier. This particular recipe was passed down from his grandmother to his father, and then to him. The original version uses only almonds, but Farsy realized that topping the pastry with dates would create a perfect marriage of flavors. ☼



Charlotte and Raphael Farsy