

# Westways

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Lifestyle  
**Bon Appétit**



**BEACH TOWN BRILLIANCE:** An elegant dining room with modern accents (left) awaits diners at Brooks in Ventura. Warm Mexican lobster sopes (right) is one of the standout dishes on chef-owner Andy Brooks's seasonal menu.

## Brooks

545 E. Thompson Boulevard, Ventura; (805) 652-7070

**Dinner for two, food only:**  
\$80–\$95

**Setting:**  
Elegant;  
contemporary  
yet warm

**Service:**  
Professional and  
friendly

**Best dishes:**  
Chilled yellow-tomato gazpacho with a seared blue-crab cake; warm Mexican lobster sopes; lemon and pine nut-crusted halibut; 24-hour marinated short ribs

Over the past couple of years, the Ventura dining scene has been ratcheted up a notch (or two) with the opening of a wave of promising new restaurants. Riding the crest of this wave is Brooks, which opened its doors in May 2007 in the beach town's historic downtown district.

Chef-owner Andy Brooks has an impressive culinary pedigree, including stints at The Stonehouse at San Ysidro Ranch in nearby Montecito, Lark Creek Café in San Mateo, Drago in Santa Monica, and, most recently, Naha in Chicago. When this Pomona boy decided to return to California with his wife, Jayme, he zeroed in on Ventura as the spot in which to open his own place.

And what a place it is. The space is elegant and contemporary, with soaring ceilings and modern accents, but it also manages to be warm and comfortable. The service echoes the decor, finding that spot-on balance of friendly, down-to-earth, and professional.

The menu, which changes seasonally, is new American; a nightly tasting menu is also available. Brooks and executive sous chef

Shawn Williams have fun creating exciting new twists on old favorites: for example, the chilled yellow-tomato gazpacho with a seared blue-crab cake—each part is delicious, but the sum is sublime. Warm Mexican lobster sopes, made with masa dough and served with mango relish and smoked chile-lime lobster cream, is worth the trip by itself.

The lemon and pine nut-crusted halibut with wilted baby arugula and black-olive and sun-dried-tomato vinaigrette is perfectly cooked, with flavors that complement the delicate fish. The tender and tasty 24-hour-marinated short ribs is another sure-fire winner. Even the wood-grilled free-range chicken breast is exceptional.

Desserts, or "rewards," as they're called on the menu, are worth sticking around for. If it's in season, don't miss the peach and blackberry cobbler with peach gelato and cinnamon-sugar tortilla crisp.

The wine list focuses on West Coast wines and pays particular homage to noteworthy Central Coast producers. A separate bar area offers an appealing bar menu in addition to the full menu, as well as specialty drinks. On Friday and Saturday nights, after 9 P.M., live music adds to the hip vibe. —Nancy Ransohoff

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