



## The Ramos House Café

Owner John Q. Humphreys invites you into his unique house-cafe for beautiful food and well-adorned cocktails, lending a particular tranquility that lingers long after you've finished your meal.

On command, John Q. Humphreys can roll his bed across the wood floor of his room and pull open a huge square door underneath it that leads to a root cellar. A narrow stairway spirals down into an artfully low-lit room wherein numerous tucked-in bottles lay waiting. He finds himself down there a lot, since it's where he stocks all the wine for the café he operates out of the kitchen of his historic Los Rios District home.

Originally built in 1881, the house was owned by one of the oldest families in San Juan Capistrano, the Ramos Family. It began its new life as café and residence for Humphreys in 1994. "I always knew I wanted to run a restaurant out of my home," he says. "Then I found this roof-less, dilapidated house with a train station for a backyard and I thought it was perfect. I didn't have two pennies to rub together at the time, and I had to learn how to swing a hammer, but it all came together in the end."

Nowadays, you can find him zipping around his outside patio, attending to patrons as though they were old friends—

which they probably are—and popping in and out of his front door just as comfortably as he would if no one were dining at the table placed just outside it.

The Ramos House specializes in contemporary American cuisine with a tasty twist of the South. All the herbs are grown in a garden out back and everything's made from scratch, including the unforgettable combination of starters and entrees, like the tangy sweet corn hush puppies with pepper jam, or the savory smoked bacon scramble with baby spinach. And, of course, the heavenly huckleberry buttermilk pie for dessert.

Some visitors arrive by train to explore the mission just up the road or the antique museums that line the streets with relics from a bygone era. It's even been written that a stagecoach-robbing bandit used to hide out in the Ramos House cellar during the 1800s, but don't take our word for it—you can read about it yourself in the cookbook Humphreys recently published, along with a number of other amusing tales tucked in between the tastiest recipes this side of the culinary coastline. —Anna Curtis

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