



LAGUNA BEACH

MONTAGE HOTELS & RESORTS NAMES CRAIG STRONG EXECUTIVE CHEF OF STUDIO AT MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH

Awarding-winning Chef Known for Modern American Cuisine with Mediterranean Influences Takes Helm of Orange County Resort's Mobil Five Star Signature Restaurant In June

Montage Hotels & Resorts today announced the appointment of Craig Strong as Executive Chef of Studio, the Mobil Five Star signature restaurant at Montage Laguna Beach, the company's flagship oceanfront resort. Strong joins Studio in June following an award-winning eight years as Chef de Cuisine at The Dining Room at The Langham, Huntington Hotel & Spa (formerly Ritz-Carlton) in Pasadena, Calif. Among the many accolades achieved during his tenure are *Michelin* star ratings for 2007 and 2008 and Strong himself named as a semifinalist for Best Chef/Pacific in the 2009 James Beard Foundation Awards.

"Studio has been instrumental in showcasing our company's passion and innovative approach to the culinary arts and we're pleased to select Craig Strong to head the culinary team," said Alan J. Fuerstman, Founder and CEO, Montage Hotels & Resorts.

"We conducted an extensive nationwide search and firmly believe Craig's inspired culinary talents and personable leadership style will prove to be a great fit for Studio," said James Bermingham, Managing Director of Montage Laguna Beach. "Craig joins a passionate and talented team in Laguna Beach and I look forward to delighting guests and area residents with this exciting next chapter in the evolution of Studio."

Perched at the edge of a bluff overlooking the Pacific, Studio opened in 2003 to critical acclaim under Executive Chef James Boyce, who resigned earlier this year. The craftsman-style restaurant is celebrated for comfortably elegant evenings devoted to fine food and impeccable service. Options include ever-changing a la carte selections, tasting menus and private dinners at the exclusive Chef's Table. All dishes are crafted from the freshest seasonal organic and artisanal ingredients and are paired with wines from the resort's extensive cellars.

"I've always loved Laguna Beach and long-admired Studio. It's a dream come true to join Montage as Studio's Executive Chef," said Strong. "I've been very fortunate in my career and this next step is no exception. The Montage commitment to memorable culinary experiences and the enjoyment of fine wine in comfortable surroundings mirrors my own philosophy. I look forward to an exciting future with this culinary-focused company and their great Studio team."

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Craig Strong, Page 2

Strong, known for his modern American cuisine that combines Mediterranean influences with classic French technique, developed a love for cooking at an early age. One of eight children growing up in San Diego, he was inspired by his mother and grandmother to first experiment with tomatoes and zucchini grown in the family's vegetable garden that was his to manage. At age 19, he attended L'Academie de Cuisine near Washington, D.C., where he studied under some of the most respected chefs in the area, including Chefs Françoise and Pascal Dinot.

From 1990 to 1994, he held numerous culinary positions, including Saucier at La Caille in Little Cottonwood Canyon, Utah; the Capitol Club at Hyatt Regency, Washington, D.C.; Sous Chef at the fine dining Glitretind Restaurant at Stein Erikson Lodge in Deer Valley, Utah; First Assistant to Chef at the Adams Mark Hotel in Philadelphia, and then at The Ritz-Carlton, Philadelphia, where he honed classic techniques with Asian influences. In 1995, he moved to Atlanta to work at The Ritz-Carlton, Buckhead, as Garde Manger with Chef Guenter Seeger and then as Saucier and Tournant with Chef Joel Antunes, whose classically trained French background added yet another international dimension to Strong's style. He then moved to Europe as Sous Chef for The Newport Room at the Hotel Arts in Barcelona, the fine dining restaurant in a property managed by Ritz-Carlton.

Working in Spain added another facet to Strong's cooking. The emphasis on olive oil, fresh seafood and the Mediterranean climate, similar to that of Southern California, led Strong to embrace the bold flavors and rustic style of Spanish cuisine, adding the refinement of French techniques.

From Spain, Strong moved on to Southern California as Chef de Cuisine at what is now The Langham, Huntington Hotel & Spa's Dining Room in Pasadena. During his eight-year tenure, he was responsible for all facets of the restaurant, including menu design and development. Under his direction, The Dining Room became one of Los Angeles' top destination dining venues and a showcase for his love of pairing fine food with wine in ever-changing dishes, inventive tasting menus for winemaker dinners and delicious special events. He and the restaurant received many accolades, including *Michelin* One-star ratings in 2007 and 2008; *Gourmet Magazine* "60 World's Best Hotel Dining Rooms," *Los Angeles Times* 3 Star Rating, *Food & Wine* "50 Best Hotel Restaurants" and *California Homes Magazine* "#1 Hotel Restaurant." Strong was named runner-up Chef of the Year by *Angeleno Magazine*; was a semi finalist in the 2009 James Beard Foundation Awards for Best Chef/Pacific, and awarded Ritz-Carlton Manager of the Year in 2007.

Before beginning his new role at Studio in June, Strong will take a brief holiday to get married.

About Montage Laguna Beach

Montage Laguna Beach, set on a coastal bluff overlooking the Pacific in the heart of the vibrant arts community of Laguna Beach, offers 30 acres of oceanfront luxury. The 250-room craftsman-style resort features beachfront accommodations; a 20,000-square-foot spa; destination dining at Studio; a wealth of outdoor recreation, including three pools, beach and water sports; a fine art collection; and more than 20,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor meeting space. For information and reservations, please contact Montage Laguna Beach toll-free, at 1-888-715-6700; or visit the Web site at www.montagelagunabeach.com.

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Craig Strong, Page 3

About Montage Hotels & Resorts

Montage Hotels & Resorts is a hotel and resort management company founded in 2002 by Alan Fuerstman. Designed to serve affluent travelers and homeowners, the company features an artistic collection of distinctive hotels, resorts and residences in stunning settings that offer comfortable elegance, a unique sense of place and spirit, impeccable hospitality and memorable culinary, spa and lifestyle experiences. Montage Laguna Beach, the company's flagship oceanfront resort, opened in the vibrant arts community of Laguna Beach, California, in 2003. Montage Beverly Hills, the company's second hotel, opened in Beverly Hills in 2008 and is the first Gold LEED certified hotel and residences in Southern California. Other properties under development include Montage Deer Valley® in Park City, Utah, scheduled to open in 2010, and an oceanfront resort and residences with championship golf course coming soon in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. www.montagehotels.com.

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