

# SAN DIEGO BAY WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL

## 2023 [SAN DIEGO BAY WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL](#) ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF ANNUAL GRAND TASTING PEOPLE'S CHOICE "CHEF OF THE FEST" AND GRAND FIESTA "TACO TKO" COMPETITIONS

*Chefs from San Diego and Baja take top honors from judges and attendees*

**(San Diego / November 20, 2023)** - The organizers of the [San Diego Bay Wine & Food Festival](#) are thrilled to announce the winners of their annual culinary competitions: Grand Tasting People's Choice "Chef of the Fest" and Grand Fiesta "Taco TKO." The annual competitions bring top Southern California and Baja chefs head-to-head in action-packed culinary showdowns judged by Festival attendees and an esteemed panel of industry leaders.

Grand Tasting presented by BMW, November 11th  
People's Choice Chef of the Fest

Sixty-six chefs at the San Diego Bay Wine & Food Festival's Grand Tasting presented by BMW entered the Chef of the Fest competition with hopes of taking top culinary honors. Competitors were subject to the critiques of Grand Tasting attendees who had the opportunity to vote on site for their favorite Chef of the Fest dish. This year's Chef of the Fest title went to [Chef/owner Jason Witzl of Jolie](#) in Coronado for his Shrimp and Melon Salad dish (poached shrimp, heirloom melon, serrano chili, cucumber, fresh mint, crème fraîche vinaigrette, crispy quinoa). Crowned the official 2023 Chef of the Fest, Chef Witzl earned top bragging rights and \$5,000 in cash.

"I'm beyond humbled to win this year's Chef of the Fest at the prestigious San Diego Bay Wine

and Food Festival,” said Chef/owner Jason Witzl of Jolie. “It meant the world to me to have the Festival attendees vote for us, especially with the level of talented chefs also vying for the award. The positive feedback from the crowd about our shrimp and melon salad was incredible to hear. The dish provides a range of texture, flavor and spice that has become a customer favorite at Jolie Coronado. The shrimp and melon pairs beautifully with the crunch of the crispy quinoa, slight kick of heat from the serrano chili pepper and balanced with the creme fraiche, bringing it all together for a refreshing bite.”

- 2nd Place honors went to another Coronado locale and double winner in both competitions, [Chef Adrian Covarrubias of Loews Coronado Bay Resort](#) for his two featured dishes: Short Rib Arancini, smoked gouda, truffle aioli, and shaved Italian truffle and his Dungeness crab, Maine lobster, sweet shrimp, and cognac creme dish.
- 3rd Place honors went to [Chef Humberto Suarez of The Blind Burro](#) for his Quesabirria Machete: birria, salsa verde, avocado, onion, cilantro, Oaxaca, manchego and Birria Consomé on the side. Chef Todd previously won 2nd place honors in 2019s Taco TKO.

Chefs placing first, second, and third in the Chef of the Fest competition were awarded in cash: \$5,000 First Place, \$2,000 Second Place, \$1,000 Third Place.

## Grand Fiesta, November 12th

### TACO TKO People’s Choice and Judge’s Choice Winners

Presented by the Consulate of Mexico and iHeart media, this year’s Taco TKO Competition was held on November 13th at the Festival’s Grand Fiesta at Ingram Plaza in Liberty Station. The beloved annual competition brings San Diego and Baja’s top taco makers together to compete head-to-head for the title of Most Awesome Taco and with that, bragging rights as one of the most celebrated taco makers on both sides of the border.

Over 2,000 people attended this year’s Grand Fiesta where they were able to sample from over 30 different notable San Diego and Baja chefs, as well as a variety of unique beer, wine and tequila/mezcal stations while enjoying live music from Bulevar Descarga.

Snagging top honors in both the Judges’ Choice and People’s Choice categories went to [Chef Marcus Twilegar of Palmys Pacific Beach](#). Chef Marcus scored high marks from the judges and Fiesta attendees for his Ancho Braised Beef taco with pickled tomatillo, avocado, crispy sunchoke and cilantro.

Judges for this year's competition included industry leaders from both sides of the border. Twenty-two chefs' dishes were carefully narrowed down to first, second, and third place winners using a graded point system. Participants were ranked based on cumulative scores considering the dish's presentation, flavor, innovation, quality of product, and preparation in the allotted time. Judges included:

- Claudia Sandoval: MasterChef U.S., Claudia's Cocina
- Chef Gavin Mills: Not Not Taco
- Chef Flor Franco: Casa de Flor
- Chef Suzette Gresham: Executive Chef, Acquerello, Two-Star Michelin, San Francisco
- Chef Antonio de Livier: Animo, Mexico City, "La Ruta de Taco"
- Scott Koenig: Founder of AGringoinMexico.com
- Fernando Gaxiola: Founder of Baja Wine + Food
- Raul Mora: El Faro Seafood

The 2023 Taco TKO Competition results are as follows:

- People's Choice First Place Grand Prize Winner  
[Chef Marcus Twilegar – Palmys Pacific Beach](#) Ancho Braised Beef taco with pickled tomatillo, avocado, crispy sunchoke and cilantro
- People's Choice Second Place Winner  
[Chef Adrian Covarrubias - Loews Coronado Bay Resort](#)  
Short Rib Taco, tequila demi, black garlic salsa verde, pickled red onion, chicharrons, avocado cream, hand-pressed tortilla
- People's Choice Third Place Winner  
[Chef Juan Saad – Barracruda](#) "Mole Montado Taco" - Charred mole negro, pickled onions, avocado salsa, habanero ash crema, cotija cheese, topped with chicharrones and micro greens
- Judges' Choice First Place Grand Prize Winner  
[Chef Marcus Twilegar – Palmys Pacific Beach](#) Ancho Braised Beef taco with pickled tomatillo, avocado, crispy sunchoke and cilantro

- Judges' Choice Second Place Winner  
[Chef Oliver Seki – Seki Restaurants \(Baja\)](#) Octopus Seki Taco - Blue corn tortilla, grilled marinated octopus with chimichurri demi glace with shitake mushrooms and oxtail
- Judges' Choice Third Place Winner  
[Chef Rael Coronado – Savage, Tijuana](#) Crispy potato taco / shrimp pate/ black aguachile/ Spanish octopus/ chickpea chicharron

“We had a blast cooking at Grand Fiesta. I’ve competed in this competition over the years and wanted to bring in something special to represent Palmys,” said Chef Marcus Twilegar of Palmys. “This year, our taco was inspired by fall. We added a pomegranate salsa macha, pickled tomatillo, and crispy sunchokes, which complemented the ancho-braised Brandt beef beautifully. We then laid all of that goodness on top of a hand pressed tortilla. Being from San Diego, it’s an honor to represent our city with a 1st place taco in both the blind Judges’ Choice and the People’s Choice competitions. We’re keeping the good energy flowing and will be running the taco as a special at Palmys until the end of the fall season.”

Taco TKO People’s Choice winners were awarded in cash: \$3,000 First Place, \$2,000 Second Place, \$1,000 Third Place and top honors in the Judges’ Choice received \$1,000.

### **ABOUT THE SAN DIEGO BAY WINE & FOOD FESTIVAL®**

Travel to San Diego and Arrive at Awesome®. The 19th Annual San Diego Bay Wine & Food Festival® is an international showcase of the world's premier wine and spirits producers, chefs and culinary personalities, and gourmet foods. Held November 6-12, 2023, the award-winning festival raises funds for culinary, oenology and hospitality scholarships and grants, and has awarded over \$600,000 to individuals and nonprofits through previous events. For more information, please visit [www.sandiegowineclassic.com](http://www.sandiegowineclassic.com). This festival is produced by World of Wine Events and [Fast Forward Events](#).

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