

805 LIVING

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The Restaurant Issue



RICKY ODBERT

An Arroyo Grande chef serves up *real* home cooking.

BY JAIME LEWIS PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY MOSS



SIX TEST KITCHEN (sixtestkitchen.com) isn't a typical restaurant, and Ricky Odbert isn't a typical chef. With a degree from the California Culinary Academy and an impressive résumé that chronicles 10 years in some of San Francisco's finest kitchens, such as Masa's, Spruce, and The Alembic, the 29-year-old Arroyo Grande native took a detour from his escalating career path to return home and start his own thing: an intimate avant-garde restaurant with a fixed, multicourse tasting menu, no substitutions. The venue: His parents' garage.

"With its price point and lack of options, the kind of restaurant I wanted to open wasn't going to be able to slide right into the culture here," he says, noting that some chefs take years to deploy such an ambitious business plan. "Using the garage minimizes overhead and chisels away at an adventurous demographic that's slowly coming out of the woodwork."

Six Test Kitchen bears no resemblance to the garage and storage hold it once was. Odbert's father, a professional builder, helped his son transform the room into a low-profile haute cuisine microcosm tucked away on a quiet residential street, complete with a pristine commercial kitchen gleaming with stainless-steel surfaces.

Due to regulations and oversight imposed by the city, Six Test Kitchen's unconventional model has morphed slightly since its launch in 2015, but the essential ingredients remain the same: Odbert and an assistant develop and serve a 14-course tasting menu for a group of four to six guests at a time, the details of which are worked out via email. The night of the event, guests sit at elegant place settings on the chef's counter.

Odbert's menus reflect his pedigree as well as his passionate support of local farmers, ranchers, and fisheries. "It's important to me to grow relationships with knowledgeable farmers and craftsmen," he says. "In San Francisco, I had to drive an hour just to get outside the city and meet my farmers. Here, I travel less than 10 minutes." Furthermore, his elegantly composed dishes and handmade components like house-fermented kimchi and preserved lemons celebrate his freedom as a solo artist, unencumbered by a dampening concern for the bottom line. ♦