WITH SANTA FE’S mountain vistas, sun-drenched days, and starry nights, restaurants that offer terrace, balcony, or patio seating give diners an extra reason to drop in. Check out these eateries with open-air options and treat yourself not just to the fresh air but also to the talents of some of the region’s finest chefs.

The mid-April opening of the Coyote Rooftop Cantina (coyotecafe.com) signals the start of downtown’s summer party season. In spring, a sprinkling of revelers nibble and swig fancy cocktails while huddled under glowing heaters, but once summer hits, the Cantina’s packed and going full throttle. The scene’s fueled by a younger, hipper version of the crowd you’ll find at the swankier Coyote Café (down one flight), but the gentler prices are a terrific draw for tourists as well. Nosh on “Maybe or Maybe Not Hot” stuffed jalapeño shooters and fat Vidalia onion rings; wash them down with a tart pomegranate margarita.

Two blocks north, chef Joseph Wrede (formerly of Joseph’s Table in Taos) commands the stoves at the relaunched Palace Restaurant (palacesantafe.com). Though the atmospheric bar still lures the serious libations set, I’ll be seeking the sunny two-level back patio this summer. Wrede impresses with dishes like the pristinely fresh Chilean sea bass ceviche and voluptuous, tarragon-scented lobster salad. Don’t miss the French fries (cooked in duck fat) and, for dessert, try Deconstructed Rocky Road, a stacked affair with plump house-made marshmallows, Nutella gelato, and powdered peanuts.

Cozy front and back patios are options at Tanti Luce 221 (tantiluce221.com), a new restaurant in the space previously occupied by Amavi. Chef Tom Kerpon (formerly of the Rio Chama Steakhouse and the Inn of the Anasazi) knows fine dining: his menu features Italian/European cuisine, with a caprese salad that’s the perfect coming together of garden-ripe ingredients. The whimsical bar

Above: The seafood summer sampler at La Casa Sena includes grissini oysters with cucumber salsa. Below: Caprese salad at Tanti Luce 221.
La Casa Sena’s veggie summer sampler includes avocado, piñon hummus, and grilled pita, as well as calabacitas flautas and roasted corn on the cob with scallion lime butter.
ALTHOUGH COLE PORTER WROTE “It’s Too Darn Hot” in 1948, his lyrics can still ring true in Santa Fe during the summer. The best way to survive the heat is to turn off the oven and grill your meal outside—or head to one of our city’s more than 200 restaurants, where someone else will do the cooking. Whether you live here or you’re visiting, it’s always a treat to enjoy a meal created by one of our many local culinary talents.

One such talent is Charles Dale, the chef at Terra restaurant at Encantado Resort and Spa (encantadosort.com). To celebrate Dale’s long and successful career, on June 26 Terra hosts a “30 Years at the Stove” gourmet dinner, featuring a menu prepared collaboratively by Dale and six top chefs he has mentored over the years. A portion of the evening’s proceeds will benefit the James Beard Foundation’s newly established Charles Dale Scholarship, which helps local hospitality students further their careers.

Two other local pros—chefs Eric DiStefano and Charles Thompson—are lending their skills to new ventures in town. DiStefano (currently of Coyote Café and Geronimo) has created the witty menu at the new Stats Sports Bar and Nightlife at the corner of Palace and Grant. Thompson, a Geronimo veteran, is now heating up the kitchen at the reopened Legal Tender Restaurant and Saloon (thelegaltender.com) in Lamy. Go for the saloon-style menu (BBQ, burgers, and vegetarian options), stay to enjoy dancing and entertainment. Coming soon: facilities so “ride-in” customers can park their horses. —JV

La Casa Sena’s piñon tart with orange and chocolate is decadence on a plate.

The giant cottonwoods that tower over the courtyard at La Casa Sena (lacasasena.com) give shade from the daytime sun and serve as a dramatic canopy at night, making it the perfect place to enjoy Chef Patrick Gharrity’s all-new menu. Perfect for sharing on a summer evening: the veggie summer sampler (lime-splashed corn on the cob, avocado hummus and pita chips, and crispy squash-blossom rellenos). The whole menu is exciting, and the piñon tart with orange and chocolate is decadence on a plate.

The large, airy patio at Restaurant Martín (restaurantmartinsantafe.com) is dramatically draped with twinkling lights, reminding me of the deck on a majestic ship. On a hot summer evening, I get my oyster fix with chef Martín Rios’s tempura oysters (from Washington State), served with sweet corn and horseradish flan.

And then there’s front-porch dining at Geronimo (geronimorestaurant.com) on Canyon Road, perhaps the most elegant outdoor venue in town. One of my most memorable meals this year was Chef Eric DiStefano’s strawberry spinach salad, goat cheese and piñon spring rolls, and melt-in-your-mouth veal blanquette with wild mushroom ravioli. Geronimo always gets my vote for pre-opera dining. —JV