

Auction Napa Valley 2010
Men's Team Chefs Bios: Saturday Lunch at Meadowood

Octavio Becerra of Palate, Los Angeles

Octavio's culinary career was inspired by a chance meeting with Chef Joachim Splichal during the summer of 1984. After that profound encounter, Splichal mentored his young protégé, first in the kitchen of Max Au Triangle restaurant in Beverly Hills, and then in France and Spain, where Splichal arranged for Becerra to work for two years in some of Europe's two and three star Michelin restaurants. Shortly after Becerra's return to the US, Splichal opened Patina Restaurant and Becerra again joined his mentor. Just one year later, he was named executive chef of the renowned restaurant. Together, they then opened the first of the Pinot restaurants, Pinot Bistro in Studio City, with Becerra as the executive chef and partner.

Since then, Becerra has been instrumental in the success and growth of The Patina Group, playing a major part in the launches of each new restaurant. As Vice President, Chef and Co Founder of The Patina Group, Becerra supervised the daily operations of 12 of the 30 plus Patina Group restaurants. Becerra's fingerprint on the culinary identity and brand of The Patina Group played a vital role in the evolution of The Patina Group. Becerra has also accumulated accolades from the critics. The James Beard Foundation nominated him twice for "Rising Star Chef of the Year", he has been featured in *Bon Appétit* magazine, and *Nations Restaurant News* featured him as one of the nations "50 New Taste Makers." After sixteen years, Becerra departed The Patina Group to pursue his own venture.

Jean Joho of Everest, Chicago

Acclaimed Chef J. Joho's culinary talent can be measured in accolades, prestigious awards, thriving restaurants, fiercely loyal patrons and signature dishes that continue to set the standards for dining. Joho entered the profession at the young age of 6, peeling vegetables and potatoes in his aunt's restaurant kitchen. That humble beginning ignited a lifetime of studying, discovering and perfecting flavor combinations. Today Chef Joho is known the planet over for having made an indelible mark on the culinary world with his exquisite personal French cuisine.

Among his many accomplishments, Chef Joho was named the James Beard Foundation's "Best American Chef: Midwest," and was nominated for "Best Outstanding Restaurant", "Best Service", Best Wine Service, and "Who's Who". He was also honored as *Bon Appétit's* "Best Chef of the Year" and with the Robert Mondavi "Culinary Award of Excellence". Joho's hand-selected wine list for Everest has been credited as the "country's best selection of Alsatian wine" by *USA Today* and *The New York Times*.

Joho's body of work is elegant, creative and deeply personal. In fact, Chef Joho continues to thoughtfully handpick the famed wine selections at each of his restaurants: Everest, Brasserie Jo and Eiffel Tower Restaurant.

His formal training began as a 13-year-old apprentice for Paul Haerberlin of the famous L'Auberge de L'III in Alsace, France and continued in kitchens in France, Italy and Switzerland. By the age of 23, Joho was the chef at a Michelin two-star restaurant where he orchestrated a 35-person staff. It was while he was studying at the Hotel Restaurant School in Strasbourg that Joho immersed himself in the hotel and restaurant business, as well as the arts of pastry, cheese and wine.

In 2009, Chef Joho opens his kitchen to readers with the *Eiffel Tower Cookbook*. In this intimate, red-suede-covered book, Joho shares 50 of his signature dishes: from teasing

amuse bouche such as The Everest Spoons to delicate desserts like Alsace Apple Strudel and an assortment of soufflés. Joho's sought-after recipes and accompanying photos transport the magic of his Parisian cuisine into kitchens of gourmet homes across the country.

Thomas Keller of French Laundry, Napa Valley

Thomas Keller, one of the most inventive American chefs working today, is as renowned for his well-honed culinary skills as he is for his ability to establish a restaurant that's both relaxed yet exciting. Good food coupled with a memorable social and sensual experience has always been Keller's focus. If the reputations of his restaurants are any indication, he has succeeded.

A native of California, Keller began his culinary career at a young age, working in the Palm Beach restaurant managed by his mother. After serving apprenticeships in Rhode Island, Florida, and the Catskills, Keller relocated to France in 1983, where he worked in several Michelin- starred houses including Guy Savoy and Taillevent. He followed with successful runs at La Reserve and Restaurant Raphael in New York. In 1986, he opened his first restaurant, Rakel, also in New York, which resulted in extensive critical acclaim and a loyal clientele.

Five years later, Keller moved westward to California to work as executive chef at Checkers Hotel in Los Angeles. In 1994, he opened The French Laundry in Yountville, which quickly became a destination restaurant known for its innovative, compelling cuisine. His bistro, Bouchon, opened in Yountville in 1998, with Bouchon Bakery following five years later. In February 2004, Keller brought his distinct style to New York City with Per Se

The *Michelin Guide New York City* gave Per Se its most prestigious recognition, a three star rating, in both 2006 and 2007. The French Laundry was additionally awarded three stars by the *Michelin Guide San Francisco* for 2007, making Thomas Keller the only American born chef to hold multiple three star ratings.

Chef Christopher Kostow of The Restaurant at Meadowood, Napa Valley

A Michelin-starred chef before the age of 30, Christopher Kostow takes a thoughtful approach to food that belies his age. Masterfully blending contemporary French cuisine with the farm-to-table tradition, Christopher creates a transcendent experience for diners every night at The Restaurant at Meadowood

Choosing to forge his own educational path, Christopher credits the support and teaching of such renowned chefs as Trey Foshee and Daniel Humm with giving him the freedom and opportunity to hone his craft. Since arriving at Meadowood in February 2008, Christopher has introduced dishes that draw on the bounty of the seasons while taking a disciplined approach to modern French fare. Guided by the pure flavors of the highest-quality ingredients, Christopher also leaves room for inspired spontaneity.

Though Christopher has always had a passion for food, this Chicago native passed much of his youth cooking for friends and brushing off suggestions he pursue a serious career as a chef. It was only after earning a bachelor's degree in philosophy from Hamilton College in New York that Christopher knew his calling.

Relocating to San Diego in 1999, he set out to enter the rarified world of fine dining and caught the eye of the area's foremost chef, Trey Foshee, named one of *Food & Wine's* Best New Chefs in 1998. After just a few months at the acclaimed George's at the

Cove, Chef Foshee gave Christopher the opportunity to create his own dishes when he was only 22. The intensity and discipline of the kitchen was a welcome challenge for Christopher, who worked his way up the ranks during a three-year tenure.

Upon arriving at Meadowood in February of 2008, Christopher garnered Two Stars from the esteemed *Michelin Guide*. In 2009 he was again awarded two Michelin stars, was nominated for Best Chef, Pacific, by the James Beard Society and named as one of *Food & Wine Magazine's* Best New Chefs 2009. In February 2010, Christopher received Four Stars from the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Lars Kronmark of The Culinary Institute of America at Greystone, Napa Valley

Lars Kronmark was educated in Denmark and gained his culinary training throughout Europe. His extensive teaching experience has taken him around the world—to Mexico, Italy, Spain, China, and across the United States. Chef Kronmark is a member of Zinfandel Advocates and Producers, and is a founding member of the Marin County Wine Society. He was named the 2007 Chef of the Year by the Cordon d' Or-Gold Ribbon Academy of the Culinary Arts in St. Petersburg, FL.

Paul Lemieux of Auberge du Soleil, Napa Valley

A six-year veteran of the Auberge culinary team, Lemieux's passion and creativity in the art of pastry making come from nearly 15 years of experience honed at renowned restaurants throughout the United States. At the 80-seat restaurant at Auberge du Soleil, which services guests for breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, Lemieux offers an outstanding seasonal dessert and cheese menu. In addition, he continues to work with chocolates at the inn, creating an exclusive line of in-room amenities only available to overnight guests. Paul first joined Auberge du Soleil in August of 2003.

Walter Manzke recently of Church & State, Los Angeles

Walter Manzke grew up fluent in "seasonality," with family gardens and orchards full of organic, seasonal vegetables and fruits populating his dinner table from day to day. This mentality, the now popularized farm-to-table restaurant ethos, is something Manzke learned as a kid and took with him everywhere he went.

But Manzke bravely abandoned the charm of his childhood gardens for the business world. With a degree in Business and Restaurant Management from San Diego Mesa College, Manzke moved on to work in some of the most renowned kitchens of Europe and America. Among them were Le Louis XV in the Hotel de Paris, Monte Carlo under Alain Ducasse, Spain's famed high-tech training ground, el Bulli, under Ferran Adrià, and Patina in Los Angeles, where Manzke developed his signature style under the guidance of Joachim Splichal and earned the restaurant three stars from the *Los Angeles Times*.

A brief stint outside of Los Angeles saw Manzke opening three successful restaurants in Carmel: Bouchee, Cantinetta Luca, and L'Auberge Carmel, which was one of *Gourmet's* Top Fifty Restaurants in America in 2006. Returning to LA, Manzke opened Bastide, where he earned yet another three stars from the *LA Times*. Since taking over the kitchen at Church + State, Manzke has continued to ply his craft and deserve his trail of stars, always with that early-ingrained, almost intuitive sense of seasonality.

Michael Mina of Michael Mina, San Francisco

For Chef Michael Mina, the true beauty of his profession is in the sum of all its different elements. These days, the award-winning chef, whose accomplished culinary skills make him appear seasoned beyond his youthful age of 33 years, has plenty of opportunity to showcase his abilities and creativity. Aside from consulting with his other

restaurants Charles Nob Hill in San Francisco, Aqua at the Bellagio in Las Vegas and Pisces in Burlingame, the four-star chef also continues to excite diners with his mouth-watering creations at the renowned seafood restaurant Aqua in San Francisco where he is also a partner. In July 2001, Mina launched a new restaurant concept, NOBHILL, at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas.

Born in Cairo, Egypt, and raised in rural Ellensburg, WA, Mina developed a fondness for cooking and a determination to live in San Francisco early on. Before he had the chance to fulfill his childhood dream to take up residence in the food capital of the West Coast, Mina went on a detour across the nation to formalize his culinary training. In 1987 he joined the Culinary Institute of America in upstate New York and for the next 18 months spent weekends honing his hands-on cooking skills in Charlie Palmer's kitchen in Manhattan at the famous Aureole.

Determination, hard work and the instinct to follow his dreams paid off for Mina as he finally made his move to San Francisco. Unfazed by an earthquake that greeted him on his second day in town, he dedicated himself to hiring and training the kitchen staff and refining the menu as Aqua's chef de cuisine. When Aqua opened in 1991, the restaurant immediately drew national acclaim

Now a partner with Charles Condy in Aqua Development Corp., parent company to Aqua, Charles Nob Hill, Pisces, Aqua at Bellagio, NOBHILL and Aqua at St. Regis Monarch Beach, Mina feels fortunate to be able to take his ideas for innovative and inventive dishes of seafood delicacies directly to the table.

Richard Reddington of Redd, Napa Valley

Richard Reddington's passion for food and wine was sparked by his travels throughout Europe as a young adult and fueled by his experiences working in some of the world's best kitchens. As Executive Chef at Redd, Yountville's highly acclaimed restaurant, he offers a contemporary interpretation of wine country cuisine, one that references his own classic French training and incorporates a variety of ethnic influences, reflecting his 15-year epicurean journey.

Reddington's culinary training had an untraditional beginning. After graduating from college with a degree in business and traveling around Europe, he realized that his dream was not to enter the business world, but to do what he loved most – cooking – and decided that practical training was the way to go. He began his career working for Roland Passot at San Francisco's renowned La Folie in 1990, later moving to Postrio before heading east to David Burke's Park Avenue Café in New York City. A stint at Rubicon in San Francisco was followed by a French sojourn at the Michelin three-star Arpege and Le Moulin de Mougins with Roger Vergé, a prelude to working with Daniel Boulud at Restaurant Daniel in New York.

Returning to California, he helped open Spago Beverly Hills as sous chef, before joining Chapeau in San Francisco, where he was named 'Rising Star' by the *San Francisco Chronicle's* Michael Bauer. He spent the next 18 months as chef de cuisine at Jardinière. In 2000, he was drawn north to Napa Valley and began a four-year tenure as executive chef at the landmark Auberge du Soleil. There, he captured attention when he was voted 'Best Rising Chef' by *San Francisco* magazine in 2003. After leaving the Auberge in 2004, he took the reins at Masa's in San Francisco, before taking the leap to launch his eponymous restaurant. A graduate of Miami University in Ohio, Reddington is a native of Rochester, New York.

Frank Stitt of Bottega, Birmingham, AL

Frank Stitt did not set out to be a chef. He studied philosophy at Berkley during the turbulent 1970's when he first met Alice Waters of the renowned Chez Panisse. Since, he has piled up local, regional and national gastronomic awards and become one of Alabama's favorite sons.

Frank's fondness for humble southern ingredients comes from his own roots in rural Alabama. His culinary journey began in San Francisco and includes such mentors as Alice Waters, Simca Beck and Richard Olney. His travels took him throughout the French countryside working in vineyards in Provence as well as Burgundy and finally back home to foods and traditions that continue to be so much a part of his vision. His first restaurant, Highlands Bar & Grill, opened in 1982. Here, Frank combines consummate French technique and the seasonal flavors of "both souths" - of course the local south, but the south of France as well.

Even though Highlands was filling a definite need for fine dining without pretension, it wasn't long before Frank became restless, wanting to experiment with all he encountered in Italy, Greece and Spain. He didn't want to muddle those influences with the essentially French theme at Highlands. The only answer?? Bottega and Café Bottega.

Frank's focus and determination for only the best is not limited to back of the house. His staff, some of whom have worked with him since the very beginning, are quizzed and coached to make sure that their knowledge of the menu is thorough. Highlands Bar & Grill, Bottega and Café Bottega bring to tangible form the passion Frank has for the romance and allure of the regions the three restaurants represent.

Michael Tusk of Quince, San Francisco

Michael Tusk entered into culinary arts after an Art History degree from Tulane University. After attending the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, Tusk left for Mediterranean Europe. He traveled and cooked extensively, gaining valuable insight into both the creative and technical aspects of French and Italian cuisine in a Michelin one-star restaurant in Provence and some of the regional Italian restaurants. In the San Francisco Bay Area, he worked in some of the finest kitchens including Stars, Oliveto and Chez Panisse. He is committed to working with small farmers and the freshest organic ingredients. This culinary quest has provided Tusk the inspiration for Quince, to create food that is respectful of culinary tradition but innovative in style.