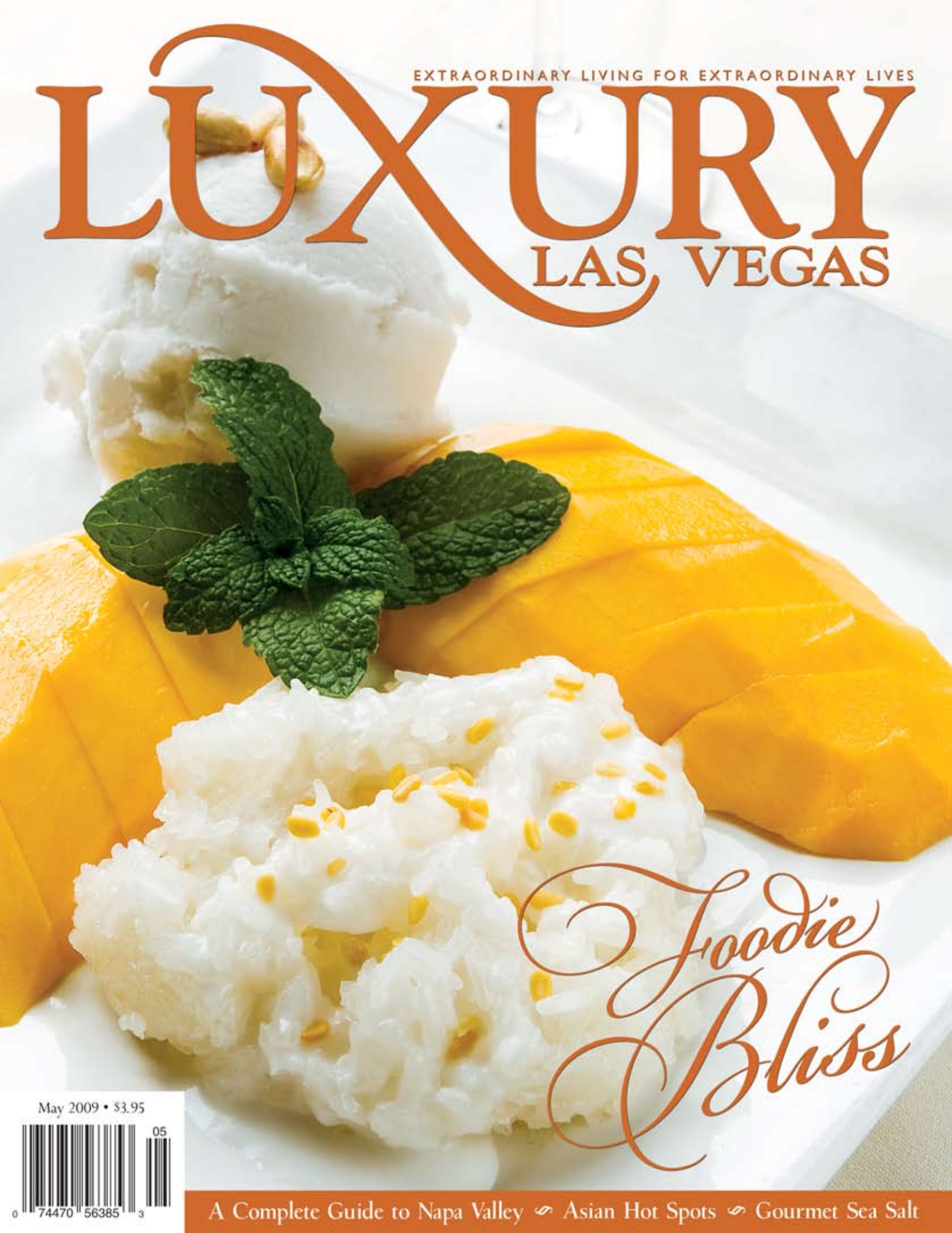


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A Complete Guide to Napa Valley ♪ Asian Hot Spots ♪ Gourmet Sea Salt



Napa Valley

LUXURY

BY MARILYN LAROCQUE

LIVING AND DINING IN STYLE

Wine tells only part of the Napa Valley story. Luxury accommodations -- from Victorian to ultra-modern -- pamper visitors. Wonderful food, from ribs to haute cuisine, satisfies their appetites.

NAPA TO YOUNTVILLE

Napa River Inn

Napa River Inn occupies part of the historic 1884 Napa Mill/Hatt Building. Victorian-themed rooms are located in the Hatt Building. Period decor features fireplaces, comfy canopy beds, cushy, overstuffed furniture, and old-fashioned slipper tubs, as well as walk-in showers. Nautical and wine country themed motifs decorate contemporary rooms. A delicious breakfast is delivered to your room. They have a European Day Spa. Downtown, restaurants, the Opera House, and Riverbend Performance Plaza, site of theater and music festivals, are within walking distance. www.napariverinn.com



Bardessono Private Outdoor Tub at Bardessono Inn

Napa White House Inn

Located in Napa’s Historic District, the 1886 White House Inn and Spa is one of the largest mansions in town. Although it combines three Victorian styles - Queen Anne, Eastlake, and Colonial Revival, the décor and amenities are strictly contemporary. The pool is surrounded by lovely gardens. Their chef prepares a bountiful breakfast and hors d’oeuvre to accompany the evening wine tasting. A stroll along the tree-lined streets of the neighborhood transports you back to the Victorian Era. www.napawhitehouseinn.com

Silverado Resort

Silverado Resort combines the prestige of a private country club and the expansiveness of a

destination resort - two 18-hole championship golf courses, driving range, putting green, 10 swimming pools, one Olympic-size pool, 17 tennis courts, 16,000-square-foot spa, and two restaurants. The 1870’s columned mansion houses the reception area, a comfortable lounge that presents weekend entertainment, meeting spaces, the ballroom, and The Royal Oak restaurant specializing in prime beef and seafood. Luxury accommodations in condominiums and cottage suites spread throughout acres of beautifully landscaped grounds. The casual Grill serves wine country cuisine with an Asian touch. www.silveradoresort.com

Westin Verasa

Westin Verasa recently opened near



White House Inn

downtown Napa adjacent to the Napa River and Preserve. A stunning lobby, dramatic floral arrangements, and colorful artwork set the tone. Opening onto the lobby, Bank, a lounge and wine bar, serves casual meals and cocktails. The swimming pool and courtyard overlook the river.

Chef Ken Frank arrived in Napa Valley in 1998 and opened La Toque in Rutherford, earning a Michelin star. Now at Verasa, his fabulous food still dazzles. Mirrors, a wood-burning fireplace, and subtle décor set the stage for dinner. You create your own two-, three-, or four-course meal, excluding dessert, with or without wines. We chose the unusual. Salsify purée gave a tangy touch to sweetbreads. Rich, velvety artichoke soup was garnished with a haystack of black truffle shavings. Scallops accompanied by tapioca paired the richness of a light hollandaise sauce with slightly briny squid ink. Garlic soaked in milk and cream, then puréed, and al dente mushrooms accompanied impeccably fresh, tender frog legs. www.westin.com/verasanapa

YOUNTVILLE

Vintage Inn and Villagio Inn & Spa

The 23-acre Vintage Estate encompasses two hotels, Vintage Inn with a French Provençal design and Tuscan-inspired Villagio Inn and Spa. Between them, the restored 1870 Groezinger Winery, Distillery, and Wine Cellar, now VMarketplace, boasts shops and restaurants. Walkways and waterways crisscross the properties, and lush gardens create privacy and beauty. Yountville Fitness Center and tennis courts are available to guests. The gorgeous Spa at Villagio serves both properties.

Both Vintage and Villagio portray old-world hospitality and new-world comfort and serve bountiful breakfast buffets and afternoon tea. Clusters of two-story accommodations with balconies and patios are spaced amid trees and lush landscaping. Rooms range from spacious to grand, many with fireplaces. You can loll by



the pools, sip a cocktail in the courtyard, or walk to Yountville’s nearby enticements. www.vintageinn.com; www.villagio.com

Napa Style and Bottega

Chef/entrepreneur Michael Chiarello has established a lifestyle mecca and restaurant at VMarketplace. Napa Style displays imaginative home and gourmet merchandise and serves casual bistro bites. There are tastings of olives, salsas, and salummi.

“I finally found a single place to collect all my hobbies,” Michael remarked. “We have some acreage and are making wine. We are producing exciting foods. There’s a curing room for salummi behind that glass window,” he said, pointing. “We want to produce something unique. We have things you can’t find anywhere else, things that tell a story or solve a problem and have a sense of place and taste.”

Flavor-packed Italian dishes star at Bottega restaurant. Genial General Manager Joel Hoachuck showed us to our table and also expertly chose the wines to accompany each course. Joining Michael as Chef de Cuisine is talented Nick Ritchie. The food was wonderful! Olive oil braised potato slices added substance and softness to tender wood-grilled octopus with a classic salsa verde. They make fresh pasta every morning on a white marble table. We chose whole egg tagliolini with Manilla clams and Calabrese sausage—sweet, tangy, savory, and crunchy. The sweetness of apples complemented butterflied quail basking in robust honey-balsamic sauce. We shared a chocolate-almond molten chocolate cake with hazelnut crème Anglaise. www.botteganapavalley.com; www.napastyle.com

Bardessono Hotel and Restaurant

The unique, two-story Bardessono hotel was constructed on the original Bardessono family farmstead. It pushes the luxury hotel envelope

and also embraces “green” concepts. General Manager Roger Young elaborated. “These are 80-year-old olive trees from Redding (CA),” he said as we toured the property. “The decorative walls are rammed earth showing strata of the terroir. Ground black and gray ash has been recycled into concrete, and recycled steel plates panel some buildings. We also used 80,000 linear square feet of salvaged trees in construction. The eaves are wine casks. The rocks in the courtyard stream are from the Yuba River on Highway 80. Legend says touching one draws out anxieties and stress.”

Three 400-year-old Chinese mill wheels form a stunning water feature in the “Olive Court.” (“Stonehenge” arches create waterfalls in the “Magnolia Court.”) There’s a 75-foot lap pool atop the “b Well” Center. Geothermal springs and wells provide heating and cooling for guest rooms and spa.

Our suite had imaginatively finished concrete walls and floors, remote controlled shades on the windows, and an outdoor heated tub and shower, in addition to a spectacular bathroom. Forest colors prevailed, and area rugs and throw pillows added soft touches. Incidentally, each suite transforms into a private spa. The shower converts into a steam bath.

Chef Sean O’Toole’s menu showcases Northern California purveyors. (IDs for purveyors were listed on many restaurants’ menus.) We enjoyed Tomales Bay oysters, a purée-texture sunchoke soup with Sonoma Coast black trumpet mushrooms, Bodega Bay halibut, and Watson’s Napa Valley lamb that was roasted and curry braised and served with coconut basmati rice and pineapple quince. www.bardessono.com



Poetry Inn, Yountville

Hurley's Restaurant

Hurley's is casual, convivial, and cozy. Simple décor of wood, rough stone, and bright oil paintings anticipates Chef Bob Hurley's hearty, uncomplicated food that bursts with flavor. We enjoyed a great lunch starting with a zesty old-fashioned Caesar salad that anchovy paste gave pizzazz. Rustic garlic focaccia mopped up the last drops. "The dressing makes it or breaks it," Hurley said. Tantalizing aromas wafted from oakwood grilled mussels cleverly paired with caggiano chorizo and leeks in a garlic-tomato red wine sauce. We were well fortified for more wine tasting. www.hurleysrestaurant.com

Redd

Chef Richard Reddington arrived in Yountville via Masa's and Jardiniere in San Francisco and Napa Valley's famed Auberge du Soleil. At Redd's, his menu is eclectic; the décor, open, airy, and unpretentious. Yellowfin tuna and hamachi tartare hobnobbed with avocado and chili oil and crunched with fried rice. Barely cooked sweet white corn added crunch to the must-have soup. Caramelized diver scallops were joined by cauliflower purée and almonds. Novel entrée combinations of Napa lamb, chickpea fries, eggplant, sweet peppers and tapenade and a Liberty farms duck breast with Santa Rosa plums, sweet onions and five-spice expressed vibrant tastes and textures. www.reddnapavalley.com

Brix

After our enjoyable dinner in September, Brix experienced changes in the kitchen. However, veteran chef Anne Gingrass-Paik (Spago, Postrio, Hawthorne Lane, etc.) took over in late January; so, hopefully, they'll rebound. www.brix.com

Ma(i)sonry

Ma(i)sonry is the brainchild of Blackbird founder Michael Polenske. COO Paul Leary poured us some voluptuous Blackbird "Paramour" as we lounged in comfort on a leather sofa and coped with an anti-gravity chair, both representative of the diverse art, design, and wine gallery occupying the restored 1902 fieldstone house. Sixteenth century antiques partner contemporary handcrafted furnishings. A UFO crystal chandelier hovered overhead. Three private tasting areas offer samples of ultra-luxe boutique wines. A 36-foot, five-inch-thick redwood table carved from one tree and modern sculptures adorn the gardens. www.maisonry.com

SILVERADO TRAIL

Poetry Inn, Yountville

Clinging to an eastern hillside above Yountville "Cross," small, exclusive Poetry Inn stands in the midst of Cliff Lede's "Poetry" vineyard. Each room is named for a poet...and a volume of their work greets you. Large, sumptuous rooms and suites command a panoramic view of the Napa Valley. Neutral colors in the

spacious lounge create a welcoming tranquility. Breakfast of croissants from Bouchon Bakery, a baked apple with red currant jelly and crème fraîche, and Jose's unforgettable corned beef hash - a robust combination of poached eggs, caramelized onions, bell peppers, mushrooms, tomato, sauerkraut, pineapple, and potato - starts your day with a substantial foundation for wine touring. If you're feeling lazy, experience a spa treatment or enjoy the pool. www.poetryinn.com

Auberge du Soleil, Rutherford

Auberge du Soleil pioneered hilltop luxury in Napa Valley over 20 years ago. The beautifully appointed rooms are arranged in tiers down the hillside. A palatial "maison" at 1,800 square feet has its own fitness room. High ceilings, over-scaled furniture expressing the informal country charm of the valley, and modern bells and whistles complete the ambiance. At the spa, Signature treatments reflect the locale - The Vineyard (grape products), The Garden (herbs and flowers), The Grove (local organic olive oil), and The Valley (muds and minerals). Their pool and pool terrace are superlative.

Dining at Auberge restaurant - breakfast, lunch, and dinner - guarantees a valley view and wonderful food by executive chef Robert Curry (formerly with Domaine Chandon and Wine Spectator Greystone Restaurant). At dinner, Curry adds Maine lobster to white corn soup and a piquant gazpacho granité to Hamachi sashimi. Another inspired liaison is

pan-roasted salmon with veal sweetbreads, morel mushrooms, and lemon crème fraîche. Gnocchi and squash blossom accompany his local lamb, while fennel and black mission figs dress up Liberty Farm duck, another example of how each chef's ingenuity changes a dish. www.aubergedusoleil.com

Meadowood, St. Helena

Sequestered in a 250-acre valley, Meadowood is a wooded enclave where you awaken to the chirping of birds and sip champagne on your verandah surrounded by greenery in your private "tree house." Their pool is huge; their spa and fitness center, amazing. Croquet lawns, with resident pro, nine-hole 3-par walking golf course, and walking/hiking trails on the property make the healthy lifestyle instantly accessible. It's home to the annual Napa Valley Wine Auction. (www.napawine.com)

Presided over by executive chef Christopher Kostow, The Restaurant has a two-Michelin-star rating. The décor is understated; the food, meticulous and delicious. Tasting portions of

nine courses proceeded from cold smoked toro to foie gras, to squid and egg, lobster and sweetbread, rabbit, goat, cheese, chestnut cake, and dark chocolate and mint. Each dish was a picture and a sensual sensation. Is Kostow aiming at three stars? "No," he responded immediately. "Keeping two is enough of a challenge." www.meadowood.com

ST. HELENA TO CALISTOGA Martini House, St. Helena

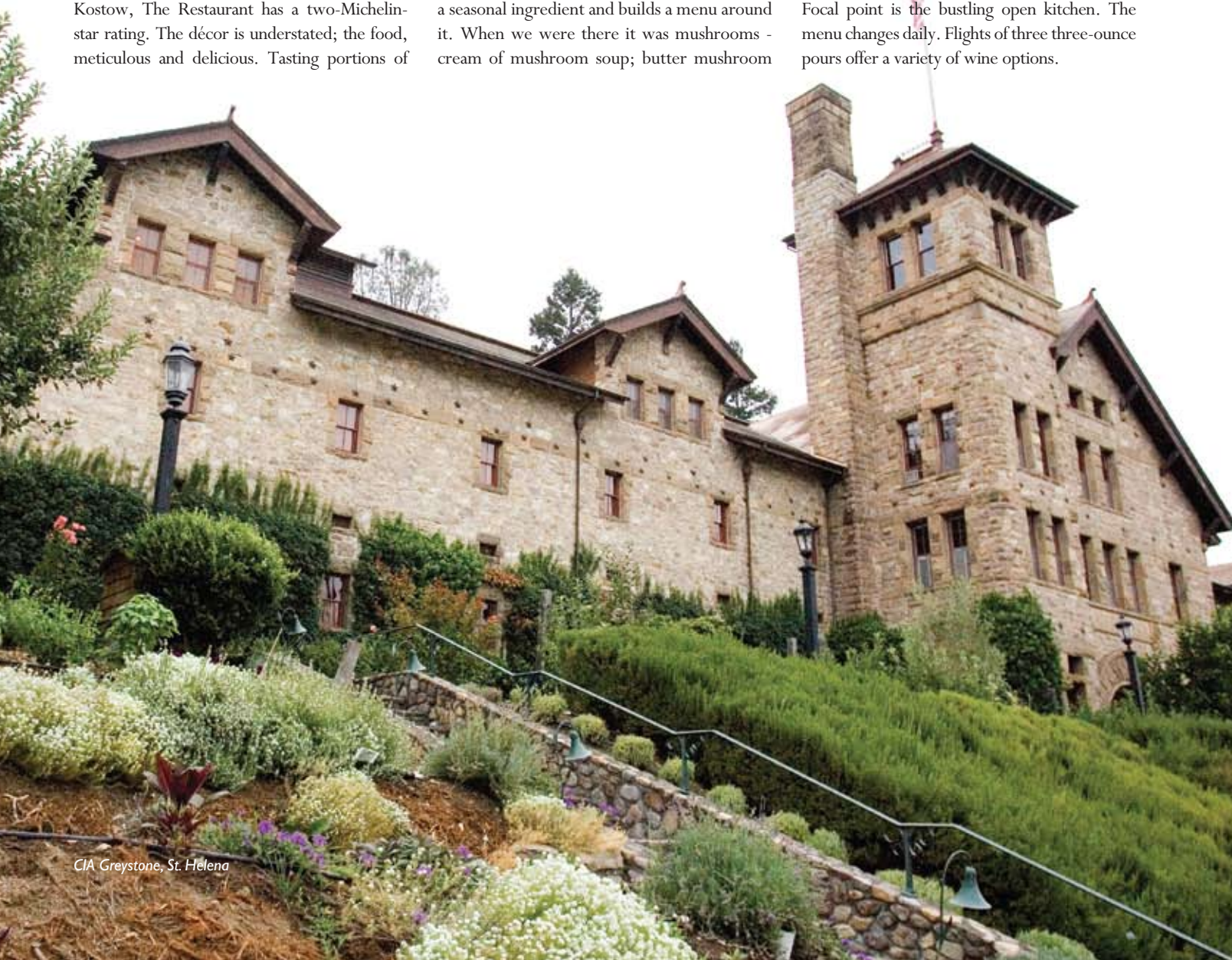
Retired opera singer Walter Martini built what is now the restaurant bearing his name. He ran a Prohibition-era wine and whiskey bootlegging business in the basement. Today, chef and co-owner Todd Humphries attracts a legitimate crowd with a rustic cellar and upstairs dining room featuring an open kitchen.

Humphries' food is daring and delicious. In addition to a tasting menu and a la carte, he picks a seasonal ingredient and builds a menu around it. When we were there it was mushrooms - cream of mushroom soup; butter mushroom

mousse; stuffed rigatoni with ricotta cheese, shaved celery, and truffle oil; mushrooms with creamy cheese, tender sausage, tang of beets, and crunch of nuts; and mushroom salad - it was a culinary tour of the forest. Humphries also has a flair for the exotic with hot scallops, cold micro tomatoes, cold corn strips and kernels, and pickled onions on a tomato coulis base. He pairs fried duck wontons with apple and celery root and hazelnut vinaigrette. To taste is to extol. www.martinihouse.com

Wine Spectator Greystone Restaurant at CIA

The massive stone cellars of Greystone, former home of Christian Brothers Winery, now house the Napa Valley outpost of the famed CIA (Culinary Institute of America). The Wine Spectator Greystone Restaurant serves as proving ground for students (all professional chefs) and provides innovative dining for guests. Focal point is the bustling open kitchen. The menu changes daily. Flights of three three-ounce pours offer a variety of wine options.



CIA Greystone, St. Helena



Solage, Calistoga

Start with “temptations,” nibbles served on a tiered wrought iron stand. The rich, “puréed” broccoli soup was spiked with turmeric, coriander seed, and almonds. “Babushka’s Borscht,” the recipe of executive chef Polly Lappetito’s grandmother, was made with savory beef stock with sweet beet chunks. Sautéed California red snapper was inundated with a ragout of shrimp, grilled Monterey bay squid, manila clams, and mussels. Bacon bits gave sautéed day boat scallops crunch. Pineapple upside-down cake with crispy coconut ice cream was a luscious ending. If you have a huge appetite, or group of at least four, order the enormous chocolate soufflé. www.ciachef.edu/restaurants/wgr

Greystone offers “community” classes. Famous chef John Ash teaches “The Sophisticated Palate.” Multi-day sessions include field trips. www.ciachef.edu/enthusiasts/programs/g_s_soph_palate “Saturdays at the CIA” last two hours. www.ciachef.edu/enthusiasts/programs/g_s_saturday

Solage and Solbar

Yellow and white vintage-style cottages at Solage Calistoga conceal high-style luxury interiors with a SoHo loft twist. A covered patio encourages relaxation. The spa and gym and a 130’ pool prod you to exercise—or to be spoiled. Bikes are available for tooling around the 22-acre property and for exploring.

Al fresco dining at Solbar restaurant relaxes (they serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner). Executive Chef Brandon Sharp’s sweet corn soup was chilled, with Hass avocado, cilantro, and radish. Made-to-order mozzarella accompanied sweet-as-sugar heirloom tomatoes. Tasty fried green tomato with fresh black-eyed peas, arugula, and a sunny-side up “Lily’s” egg was doused with smoked tomato vinaigrette. Peach coleslaw and K&J Orchards grilled peach gave sweetness to zesty hickory smoked baby back ribs and corn fritters. Coconut tapioca

blossomed with honey roasted pineapple and passion fruit sorbet, while Maker’s Mark crème Anglaise spiked chocolate soufflé. www.solagecalistoga.com

POSTSCRIPT

Our rediscovery of Napa Valley (one week in September, one in February) never ran out of surprises. Gordon’s, a hangout from Yountville’s rough and tumble days, is being renovated and will reopen as a café. Under construction is a Frank Gehry-designed facility for Hall Winery. Dario Sattui has built Castello di Amorosa Winery, a baronial castle with turrets, towers, and Great Hall. Culinary icon Thomas Keller has an inn on the drawing boards.

Stay tuned for more about Thomas Keller, who exported his Napa Valley Bouchon to The Venetian; the 2009 Napa Wine Auction; and a Napa Valley “wine find” list in our June issue ◻.