

# Fairmont

TURNING MOMENTS INTO MEMORIES / Vol.7 No.1

## NORTHERN EXPOSURE

Embark on the  
Canadian Grand Tour

— ❦ —

*Napa vine-to-table dining  
The photography of Yousuf Karsh  
Architecture in the new Baku*





# From the Vine

*At an intimate Napa Valley dinner, chefs and winemakers explore the connection between land and table.*

BY NATASHA MEKHAIL — PHOTOS BY COREY ARNOLD

## House-made charcuterie

*Salmon Creek duck rilette, Parma ham, salumi, pickled vegetables, heirloom tomato chutney, rosemary mustard*

## Local cheese tasting

*Point Reyes bleu, Mt. Tam brie, Fiscalini cheddar, Purple Haze chèvre, sourdough, quince, honeycomb, almonds*

## Oakville Ranch Vineyards Chardonnay 2009

Chef JW Foster tests the dials on the electric range. This isn't his kitchen. He's preparing a small dinner party at a private home at Oakville Ranch Vineyards in Napa Valley. The meal begins in half an hour and he wants the prep done and kitchen immaculate.

While it's not the industrial-sized setting The Fairmont San Francisco's executive chef is used to (his kitchen at the hotel occupies an entire floor), Foster treats this dinner for 10 with the same deference as he would a banquet of 500. His commitment to local, sustainable cuisine has already given a small-restaurant feel to the enormous food-and-beverage program he operates at the hotel. Intimate dinners like this offer not just a sounding board for his latest creations; they also allow him to interact with the very people who supply him with his creative materials — such as the vintners invited this evening, whose wines he has paired with each course and whose stories will become part of a larger narrative unfolding in the sustainable-food movement.

Foster is nothing if not adaptable. Already he has pilfered from the cabinets, emerging with the green, leaf-shaped plates that will lend just the right presentation to his walnut crostini. Fifteen minutes earlier he was plucking fresh figs from the garden — a replacement for the third-course fava bean puree that spilled on the hour-long drive up from San Francisco.

This attention to detail is also why I find myself shooed out of the kitchen along with the winery's basset hound, Magoo. Outside on the poolside patio, a handful of people are sipping their first glass of the 2009 house Chardonnay and enjoying the last rays of golden summer sun.

Our host, Oakville Ranch Vineyards general manager Paula Kornell, pours me a glass and we gaze out at the hills. The vineyard sits at an elevation of 1,400 feet (427 meters) and from our perch we can see its vines stretching out in neat rows that trace 85 acres of rolling landscape.

Kornell joined Oakville Ranch Vineyards a decade ago. "I thought it was a magical place," she says. Its soil — red, rocky and volcanic — gives wine a sense of place and lends it a unique minerality. To protect this landscape, the winery has one of the most comprehensive environmental programs in the Valley, entirely organic and 100-percent solar powered.

Napa has been a wine-producing region since the mid 1800s. Its 100-plus soil variations and Mediterranean-style climate make it ideal for the cultivation of grapes, particularly Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay.

The Chard I'm drinking complements beautifully with the charcuterie and cheese laid out by Foster. The cheese was sourced from Bay Area artisan producers and, amazingly, all of the charcuterie was cured in-house at The Fairmont San Francisco.

Foster has revived the art of butchery at the hotel. His chefs start with the whole animal, sourced from a local ethical supplier, and process everything on site: bacon, headcheese, prosciutto, chops. Even the bones go into the jus, so nothing is wasted.

With everyone accounted for, Kornell leads us to the long outdoor table, dressed with vases of bright orange tulips, under an arbor of bougainvillea. Before we toast, I'm introduced to the visiting winemakers, members of the Napa Valley Vintners association: Richard Ward of Saintsbury and his wife, Linda Reiff; Michael and Stephanie Honig of Honig Vineyard & Winery.

"To a gorgeous evening," someone says.

"To great wine," says another.

"To Chef."

"Cheers!"

→



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A BRIGHT SUMMER LONGTABLE DRESSED IN AN ARRAY OF WINE-PAIRING GLASSES; GUESTS SIP OAKVILLE RANCH VINEYARDS CHARDONNAY; CHEF FOSTER'S HOUSE-CURED CHARCUTERIE AND ITS LOCALLY SOURCED ACCOUTTEMENTS



TABLE DECORATION: TESORO FLOWERS



*“The creativity of  
a chef and winemaker  
coming together is art  
you can taste.”*

HONEYCOMB HARVESTED  
FROM THE FAIRMONT SAN  
FRANCISCO'S ROOFTOP APIARY

**Bellwether creamery ricotta**

*walnut crostini, pickled petite beets, honey*

**Honig Vineyard & Winery**

**Sauvignon Blanc 2010**

**Smoked wild salmon & local crab**

*artichoke baby anise salad, pommery crème fraîche*

**Saintsbury Carneros**

**Chardonnay 2009**

The Honig Sauvignon Blanc's creaminess pairs exquisitely with ricotta layered on a walnut crostini. The wine's stone-fruit notes bring out the sweetness of the honey drizzle. This and the honeycomb accompanying our cheese plate come courtesy of the rooftop garden and apiary at The Fairmont San Francisco, another of Foster's locavolist initiatives.

A day earlier, I had visited the hotel garden and found it alive with culinary herbs, lavender, strawberries, raspberries, lime trees and kumquats. A few bees could be seen circling the lavender blossoms. "I love coming up here," Foster said. "It feels like a meadow."

Managed by local bee farmer Spencer Marshall, the Fairmont's four hives have produced over 600 pounds of honey since their installation in 2010. The flavor differs from harvest to harvest. Two years ago, the first harvest revealed lavender notes, the second tasted of the Bay Area's ubiquitous eucalyptus, but this most recent incarnation – with its unidentifiable herbal overtone – proves a mystery to even the refined "noses" at our table.

Our talk meanders from bees to the vintners' histories. Michael Honig started in the wine business almost by accident in 1984. He'd grown up visiting the hobby vineyard of his grandfather, riding the tractors and playing in the fields with his siblings. After his grandfather passed away, his dad and his sister started the winery in his memory. But after a few years, when talk arose of selling the property, the then-22-year-old Honig stepped in to rescue it. He began promoting the wine out of his old pickup truck, putting on a suit for sales calls and changing into jeans to make deliveries.

Today, Honig produces 80,000 cases a year. Its Sauvignon Blancs and Cabs sell in shops as far away as Asia.

The waiters bring out the next course, a tender wild Pacific salmon, cured and smoked at the Fairmont, with local Dungeness crab and artichoke salad. Moving on to the crisp Saintsbury Chardonnay, we discover a wonderful synergy between the zesty artichokes, pouched in Meyer lemons, and the wine's citrus notes.

The course is delectable, but the best is still to come. →



FOSTER'S PERFECT CUBES OF PORK BELLY WERE DAYS IN THE MAKING  
ABOVE: CHEFS FOSTER AND SULLIVAN WITH MAGOO





(LEFT TO RIGHT) LINDA REIFF, PAULA KORNELL, RICHARD WARD AND STEPHANIE HONIG RAISE THEIR GLASSES TO THE EVENING AHEAD



CONCIERGE

Napa Valley, U.S.A.

STAY

THE FAIRMONT SONOMA MISSION INN & SPA, 25 minutes from Napa and set directly above a natural mineral hot spring, has been a wine-country retreat since the 1800s. Power down with help from the championship golf course, daily wine tastings and Michelin-starred Santé Restaurant. Indulge in the Bathing Ritual, a circuit of steams, saunas and dips in the spa's therapeutic waters. [fairmont.com/sonoma](http://fairmont.com/sonoma)

DO

Mark your calendar for California's quintessential charity wine event, AUCTION NAPA VALLEY. The four-day extravaganza, held the first weekend in June, features intimate winemaker dinners, barrel tastings and vintner parties, all culminating in Saturday's live auction. There's more than wine on the block: Expect to find everything from golf getaways to TV walk-on parts. [napavintners.com/awv](http://napavintners.com/awv)

Fairmont President's Club members enjoy private tours and wine tastings at select NAPA VALLEY VINTNERS wineries, including Oakville Ranch, Honig Vineyard & Winery and Grgich Hills Estate. At Oakville Ranch Vineyards, reserve a tour of the organic mountain vineyard by ATV, then retire to the poolside patio overlooking the valley to sample current releases. [fairmont.com/promotions/nv](http://fairmont.com/promotions/nv)

DINE

Just an hour's drive from Napa, experience executive chef JW Foster's seasonal fare, house-cured charcuterie and homegrown honey at The Fairmont San Francisco's signature restaurant, LAUREL COURT. Try the specialty hand-cut organic dry-aged steak with local asparagus and house honey butter. [fairmont.com/sanfrancisco](http://fairmont.com/sanfrancisco)



In the 24/7 schedule of a hotel executive chef, it would be easy to take a cookie-cutter approach to menu preparation, but Foster finds ways to break the mold.

"Anytime I get stumped," he tells me, "I go to the Ferry Plaza Farmers Market and walk around. I'm like a kid in a candy store, looking first at colors, then flavors, figuring out how it's going to work." The producers inspire him, he says, "They have great stories."

Foster's passion also spurs his staff's creativity. They look forward to the farmers' weekly deliveries. They anticipate the arrival of the heirlooms.

"It brings out the best in us," he says. "It's the real thing."

Raspberry royale

champagne mousse, Sacher sponge, apricot sorbet, candied rose petal

Pâte de fruit

Stephen Sullivan, The Fairmont San Francisco's executive pastry chef and Foster's assistant in the plating, presents his desserts. The dish is strewn with organic candied rose petals he'd picked up from a San Francisco florist that morning.

A perfect dessert, he tells us, "Should have no more than three flavors. Just like a movie has no more than three stars – everyone else plays a supporting role." We dig in with a gusto that only a wine-infused evening can inspire.

In spite of that fact (or perhaps because of it), the conversation takes a philosophical turn.

"What is it you really love about wine?" I ask.

"That it's intellectually interesting and drives a further curiosity," says Ward.

"It's the creativity of a chef and a winemaker coming together," says Snock. "It's art you can taste."

We consider this a moment until Snock breaks the silence with a giggle. Pretty soon we're all laughing.

"We're so articulate at this level," says Honig, giving Snock a playful nudge.

But jokes aside, this entire meal, sourced entirely from within a 100-mile radius, is about all of those things: craft, community, passion, art, tradition and, above all, wonderful stories. ~

"I was lured by the artistic, romantic, scientific and technical side of winemaking," says Ward. "Throw in farming and I became intoxicated by the challenges."

In the '80s, the pair set up in what was then a no-man's-land: Carneros, at the southernmost tip of Napa. But the old bay mud soil – heavier and less fertile than its counterparts to the north – proved perfect for Pinot. "Pinot wants to be restrained," says Ward. "We thought if we were doing this when everybody else was doing Cabernet, we could find our niche."

And what a niche it turned out to be: Saintsbury's multi-award-winning wines have shown that the New World could produce Pinot to rival those of the grape's native Burgundy.

RedHill Farms lamb

blueberry jam glace, duck fat marble potato, chanterelle mushrooms, natural jus, young asparagus, heirloom squash

Oakville Ranch Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon 2008

It's twilight as the waiters set down the main course: lamb from nearby Petaluma, perfectly pink and tender. The dish is accompanied by potatoes roasted in duck fat. Its rosemary-bathed aroma is divine, and poor Magoo paces desperately, looking for a fallen morsel.

At this point Foster makes his first tableside appearance and we erupt in applause.

Stone Valley Farm heritage pork belly

fava bean puree, roasted cherries, garden figs

Saintsbury Brown Ranch Carneros Pinot Noir 2005

The pork belly proves to be the pièce de résistance.

Sourced from Stone Valley Farm, about an hour and a half outside San Francisco, and prepared by Foster, this perfect cube, with its layers of meat, fat and crackling, was days in the making. Cured for two days in brine then cooked *sous-vide* for 12 hours, the pork was then compressed under bricks for another 24 hours to give it its signature texture. Before serving, Foster seared and plated it with roasted cherries and the improvised figs – their tartness cutting through the pork's fattiness.

"It's like a dessert!" exclaims guest Michele Snock, a certified sommelier.

A rich dish such as this demands a lighter-bodied red, and that's where the Saintsbury Brown Ranch Carneros Pinot Noir, with its dark fruits and earthiness, comes in.

Saintsbury's Richard Ward and his business partner David Graves met in a brewing class at UC Davis, where they were studying viticulture and enology. Ward was a trained structural engineer, while Graves had a degree in biology. They considered themselves "refugees" from their academic pursuits but, as time would tell, they never really left their methodical backgrounds behind.