

## Winemakers 2009

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 Thursday, 02 July 2009  
 Last Updated Friday, 14 August 2009

Winemakers Dinners 2009: The Chefs - You don't have to fly to the best restaurants in Hawaii, France, Brazil or Seattle to taste the inspired culinary masterpieces of the chefs at the 2009 Winemakers Dinners, you only have to fly to one location—the British Virgin Islands.

Vikram Garg, Executive Chef at Halekulani Resort in Waikiki, Hawaii, is known for his spicy and sophisticated yet palatable and unpretentious innovations that appeal to all the taste buds at once. An example from Halekulani's restaurant La Mer: roasted goose breast accented with sea salt and lavender honey on butternut squash. Chef Garg also volunteers for international charitable contributions, including March of Dimes, Meals on Wheels and the Winemakers Dinners, where he returns as Executive Chef for the second year.

At her Seattle restaurant Joule, Rachel Yang cooks up "a fusion menu that tastes wonderfully original while seeming utterly organic," according to Seattle magazine. Her culinary influences—Korea, France, Italy, Spain and the American South—lead her to create dishes like whole mackerel with smoked tomato puttanesca and daikon salad or wild boar spare ribs with a spicy Korean BBQ glaze and collard slaw.

The Corporate Chef for the big Burrito Restaurant Group, Bill Fuller is dedicated to using ingredients from sustainable and local farms. This is apparent by menu items such as Elysian Fields Farm lamb loin with an Anson Mills polenta cake at Casbah or Three Sister's Farm Mesclun with Telford Tomme cheese at Eleven. In addition, the Andy Warhol Museum Cafe features Chef Fuller's creations. He also dedicates his time and talent to help feed the hungry in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Certified Executive Chef Thomas Hannum of the Hotel du Pont in Wilmington, Delaware serves on the board of directors for his local Meals on Wheels. His award-winning creations have appeared on numerous TV shows, including The Saturday Early Show, Good Morning America and Historic Chefs of America. His wine list at the Green Room rated at the top of "The Wine Nine" in Delaware Today February 2009 issue.

In 1995, former actress and producer Carla Pernambuco opened one of the first cosmopolitan restaurants in São Paulo. Since then, her restaurant, Carlota, has been praised in almost every publication imaginable—from Japanese Elle to the UK's Condé Nast Traveller—where Carlota was named one of the ten best restaurants in São Paulo, and Carla was named one of the top chefs. Notable menu items include sole filet with golden goat cheese sauce, fresh palm hearts and mushroom fettucine.

A professor at Lycée Hôtelier in Marseille, France, Chef Alain Ivaldi has appeared on France's popular La Cuisine à Côté where he prepared a tian of sardines in millefeuilles with vegetables confits. While it may sound complicated, Chef Ivaldi's passion is teaching others how to prepare fine cuisine, and he makes his recipes accessible to all in three cookbooks that celebrate the cuisine of Provence.

Hotel Du Pont's pastry chef Michelle Mitchell's desserts have been called "artful" by Frommer's, an opinion confirmed by Philadelphia Inquirer restaurant critic Craig LaBan who enjoyed a "currant-poached pear that stood on a pedestal of devil's food cake like a circus seal with a chocolate collar." Her three and a half foot recreation of the Fabergé Orange Tree Egg—in sugar, chocolate, fondant, gold leaf and silver dust—is featured in Linda Civitello's Cuisine and Culture: A History of Food and People.

Giorgio Paradisi of Virgin Gorda serves inspired dishes that range from Anegada lobster risotto to homemade pappardelle with duck ragout and black truffle or homemade pumpkin ravioli with a hint of modena balsamic. Frommer's Guide says of the chef, "We decided that the restaurant's owner, Giorgio, has an appropriate last name -- Paradisi."

Chef Davide Pugliese of Capriccio di Mare, Brandywine Bay Restaurant and the forthcoming Wali Nikiti culinary retreat recently showcased his culinary talents at the 2009 Food Network South Beach Wine & Food Festival among such celebrity chefs as Emeril Lagasse and Paula Deen. Conciierge.com calls his cooking "nominally Tuscan—carpaccio, homemade tortellini, and ravioli—but veers off on delicious detours such as Thai-pumpkin-and-coconut-milk soup or roast duck with mango chutney."

While eating simmering East Indian food dockside at Spaghetti Junction in Road Town, I discuss the upcoming Winemakers Dinners with Ajit George, co-chair of the BVI Charitable Fund. He first surprises me by informing me that he volunteers for this event and adds "all the chefs are contributing their time as are the winemakers." But I shouldn't have been surprised after researching the chefs' charitable work, and I'm even less surprised when Mr. George tells me that he met most of them through his association with Meals on Wheels.

"I met Alain Ivaldi at Meals on Wheels," Mr. George says between bites of fish masala, "and he invited me to Marseille. What I will remember about him until the day I die is that I didn't have bouillabaisse until I was in Marseille, and I've had a lot of bouillabaisse in my life. We went to these small restaurants in Marseille, and he chose which fish was going into the dish. He said to me, "Bouillabaisse is the fish." One day I'd like him to make bouillabaisse here with some of our local fish."

Mr. George also met Chef Tom Hannum through Meals on Wheels. "Every chef who's ever worked with Tom wants to adopt him as their brother," he says. "He's here to help Michelle with the desserts. She did the desserts for us last year—every dessert for every dinner. She had to call me to let me know that she was available for this year, too, because I didn't have the guts to ask her."

I ask Mr. George about the Executive Chef for the event, Vikram Garg. "He is a master of visual presentation. He loves experimenting with things like fire and ice. He's fundamentally an artist. He hand blends all his own spices. He has no microwaves or can openers in his kitchens. I met him in Virgin Gorda when he was a sous-chef at Little Dix, and we've been friends ever since. He's dedicated to this event—volunteering his time, coordinating the menu."

"I wanted diversity in views and preparation, and I didn't want to be limited to my circle of knowledge, so I asked Gourmet to nominate someone, and they suggested Rachel Yang. Gourmet has gone out of their way to support this event. I trust them, and Rachel has an amazing reputation."

"Bill Fuller was recommended by Guana Island. They said he's someone they would be proud of. He's part of a group that has a series of interesting restaurants in Pittsburgh."

As I finish up my Aloo Behgan and rice, Mr. George continues. "Along with our international chefs, one local chef will be doing one course per dinner: Davide, Giorgio and the chefs from Necker and Guana. I think he's a very talented chef. Giorgio will be doing the food for the VIP Reception at the Sugar Mill Ruins at Nail Bay."

With all these acclaimed chefs, I ask Mr. George if there are any prima donnas. "We're still too young to have prima donnas. When I asked Gourmet to nominate a chef, I asked for a non-TV chef. The focus is on the wine and food."

New for this year are Winemakers Dinners Lunches. "We wanted to create a series of special events where more people have an opportunity to meet the winemakers because that's what this event is really all about. Just a taster—food with a fun twist. We're not trying to replicate the dinners or anything." The lunches are \$50 per person and take place at restaurants on Virgin Gorda, Tortola and Necker Island. "Vikram is going to do a gourmet barbecue on the beach at Necker. Every other day there will be two events to choose from, so people can decide based on the restaurant or the winemaker they prefer."

Mr. George swigs the last of his lemonade and ponders the future of the Winemakers event. "My fantasy is to do a blindfolded Winemakers Dinner where you are forced to focus on the taste. Nothing but the flavours of the food and wine. It would be a very exclusive dinner, and every guest would have their own server. Wouldn't that be great?"

Ajit George's passion for wine and food is contagious. I close my eyes and imagine being blindfolded for a meal—discovering tastes without the expectations that often come with presentation. How do I get an invitation?

The Winemakers Dinners take place on July 16 to 19 and December 3 to 6. The July dinners, which feature the chefs listed above, will be held at elite locations in the BVI: Necker Island on July 16, Peter Island on July 17, Guana Island on July 18 and Mooney Bay in Virgin Gorda on July 19, with an opening VIP welcome reception on July 15 at the Sugar Mill Ruins at Nail Bay. Lunches will be served on the same days at Necker Island, Brandywine Bay Restaurant on Tortola, and Mine Shaft Restaurant, Rock Cafe, Chez Bamboo and the Fat Virgin on Virgin Gorda. For more information, visit [www.winemakersdinners.com](http://www.winemakersdinners.com).