

PRESS

AN EXQUISITE DINING EXPERIENCE

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD

It is no secret that exceptional wine and decadent farm-to-table dining abound in Napa Valley, California. PRESS, located in St. Helena, is one of the top dining destinations in the Valley. Executive Chef Philip Tessier is an award-winning chef, author, coach, and visionary. He shines at the helm of PRESS as one of Napa Valley's top chefs.

THE BOCUSE D'OR COMPETITION

Chef Tessier is famed as the first American chef to stand on the podium at the Biennial Bocuse d'Or competition in Lyon, France. He received the silver medal in 2015 and then coached the U.S. team, led by Chef Mathew Peters, to victory in 2017 when they brought home the gold medal. The Bocuse d'Or competition, held every two years, is renowned as the most arduous culinary competition in the world. Twenty-four countries are chosen to compete; each team comprises one chef and one junior chef to assist.

CULINARY TRAINING

As a student of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, graduate Chef Tessier has cooked in some of the finest restaurants in France, New York, and California. After working in legendary restaurants like Le Moulin de Mougins, Thomas Keller's Per Se, Bouchon, and The French Laundry, Chef Tessier now creates his culinary delights at PRESS.

DINNER AT PRESS

I recently had the privilege to dine at PRESS. The food was spectacular, the staff professional

and engaging, and the wine pairings selected by Vincent Morrow, PRESS's wine director, sublime. At PRESS, Vincent manages one of the world's largest collections of Napa Valley wines.

When dining at PRESS, visitors can order a la carte or the tasting menu. Of course, I opted for the tasting menu paired with wines. The summer menu, filled with delicious gifts from the sea, fruits and vegetables in season, and delectable offerings from the mainland was proportioned just right, not too much and not too little.

Although everything I ate would receive an eight or above on my rating scale for presentation and taste, and I do not often give out nines or tens, a few dishes stood out from the rest. The Ricotta Gnudi wrapped in squash blossoms with a Parmesan consommé was light and intriguing. The consommé, prepared with Parmesan rinds and tomato broth, was a simple dish yet had a lovely complexity with various flavors and textures. The Desante "old vines" 2019 white field blend paired fabulously with the gnudi.

The Alaskan Halibut was cooked perfectly, and wild ramps, creamed corn, and Benton's bacon made terrific accents to the dish. The fish was flakey, and the sweetness of the corn and the airy basil foam was delightful.

Although many of the courses were from the sea, the savory beef dish was well received. The American Wagyu Ribeye Cap with saucisson (sausage) in brioche, summer beans, pastrami beef tongue, and morel mushroom hollandaise was divine. The Kristof Anderson "Pella" Rutherford 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon was the perfect pairing for the ribeye.

My favorite dessert course—yes, there were a few—was the Peaches and Cream. The puree of peaches was intense, and the cream and rice pudding were rich and decadent. This luscious

dish paired incredibly with the Melka "mekerra" Knights Valley 2014 Late Harvest Muscadelle. After an incredible evening of decadent dining and fun conversation with the staff, I had a few questions for Chef Tessier.

THE INTERVIEW

What does refined simplicity mean to you?

To me, refined simplicity means we add a layer of technique and precision to our execution without being pretentious. Our Ricotta Gnudi is an excellent example. We use a classic Italian technique, executed flawlessly, and finish with a simple wrapping of squash blossoms that make them beautiful yet simple.

Do you have a signature dish?

Our Ricotta Gnudi and Truffle Glazed Chicken are two of our signature dishes.

You worked with and studied under these talented chefs: Roger Verge, Eric Ripert, and Thomas Keller. What one or two things did you learn from each one's tutelage?

Roger Verge was a shorter stage, only three months, but I got a view into the style and mentality of his cuisine and the first vantage point of an ingredient-driven restaurant.

Eric Ripert was about clean flavors, presentation simplicity, and service efficiency. Le Bernardin is an incredible restaurant that is highly organized and rhythmic in its flow.

I spent over a decade working for Chef Keller. It's hard to understand the influence of working for him and with him, his zeal for perfection, the thoughtfulness behind every decision, and the constant work of evolving and growing as an individual.

Considering what you learned from the above chefs, what did you bring to PRESS,



Philip Tessier



and where has your talent and creativity taken you on the PRESS menu?

PRESS is a blend of my experiences and the aspects mentioned above. We are a larger restaurant and must be efficient and organized but also push the finesse and execution level to a higher level each day. We work with multiple local farmers and growers who inspire our menu on a hyper-seasonal basis.

How do you feel about working toward a Michelin star at PRESS?

For me, it isn't about working for a Michelin star; it is more about pursuing our passion and goals of creating a memorable guest experience. A Michelin star should simply be the result of that effort.

Tell me about the most memorable dish you have ever had, who made it, and where you had it.

That is always a difficult question, so I'll give you three answers:

Fresh tortillas in Mexico as a 12-year-old at a house where we were staying was my first exposure to culture and cuisine and how transformative it can be.

As a 20-year-old cook sitting on the patio of Ducasse's Louix XV in Monaco and experiencing 3-star cuisine for the first time, I found the halibut dish to be stunning.

The corn husk meringue dessert at Cosme's in New York was perfection.

What pairing have you and Vincent put together that blew your mind?

The Stony Hill Chardonnay with our Ricotta Gnudi was memorable.

What is the most incredible pairing you have ever had, and where did you have it?

I still remember a Hermitage paired with pork belly and apricots at Gramercy Tavern.

What is the most fantastic dish you have ever created?

I am still searching for that one.

How would you describe your most triumphant moment?

I had goosebumps at Bocuse d'Or in 2015 and 2017. Those moments were worth every bit of hard work and sacrifice.

How often does your menu change?

We are in a constant state of evolution. We usually change several dishes a month with more significant changes 4-5 times a year.

Do you have any trouble sourcing ingredients, and, if so, how do you handle it?

Not really, although we've had to expand our group of purveyors for certain things. We source most ingredients locally and through a few key purveyors with whom we have established long relationships, making it much easier for us.

What makes PRESS unique in your mind?

PRESS is approachable yet offers a refined culinary experience with a high level of service. Our commitment to service sets us apart from so many others!

What do you want diners to say when they leave PRESS?

That the experience was memorable. You can't put a price on your memories!

Book an Exquisite Dining Experience

Chef Tessier and his staff work diligently to ensure guests dining at PRESS enjoy an unforgettable experience. Make sure to book a reservation for the next time you visit Napa Valley. ♦



Dining room by John Troxell



John Troxell gnudi