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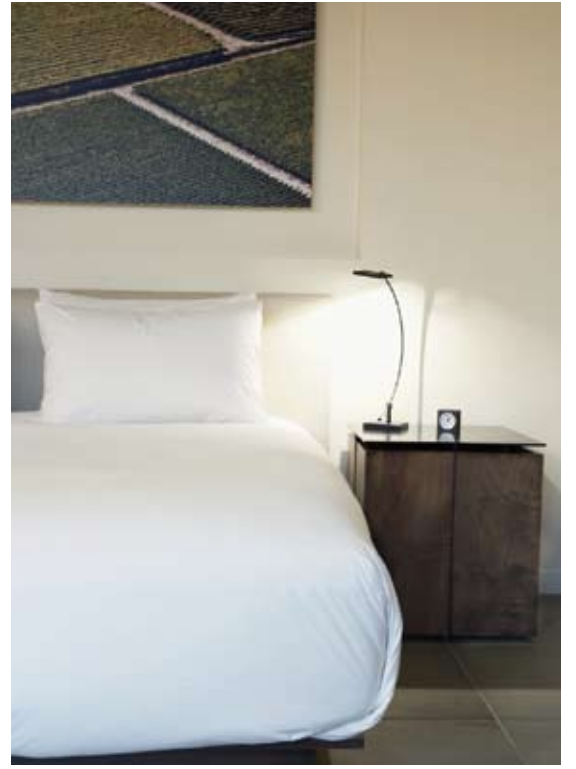
## WINE COUNTRY PLEASURES

Yountville Stars Go Supernova

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# YOUNTVILLE

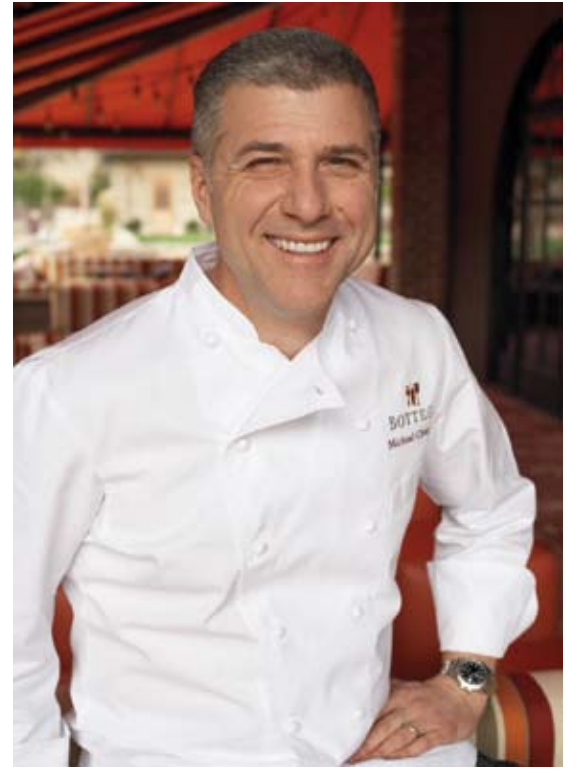
THE LITTLE TOWN THAT'S BIG ON TALENT AND TASTE

by Michaela Jarvis | photography by Cedric Glasier





Clockwise from top left: Bouchon; Ma(i)sonry; Bardessono room; warm reception at Bardessono; the town's stats hang outside a shop on Washington Street; V Wine Cellar; Bardessono lounge.



Yountville has often been compared to a European village because of its charm and because everything in town is within walking distance. That may be an apt description, yet, in how many European villages will you find yourself within a short stroll of half a dozen of the best restaurants in the country?

Heck, this is no European village. This is Disneyland, with a favorite attraction for everyone—whether that’s a wild ride through Thomas Keller’s culinary imagination at The French Laundry, a chance to shake hands with Food Network star Michael Chiarello at his new Bottega restaurant, or an experience of the magical hot stone massage at Villagio’s 13,000-square-foot spa.

Of course, the main theme in Yountville is food. “It’s like the culinary Olympics here. The hurdles are really high, and you have to run fast,” says Chiarello, who opened Bottega in December. As this story was going to press, Bottega was a semifinalist for best new restaurant in the country in the James Beard Awards. “Each and every restaurant is different, an experience unto itself.”

Chiarello’s warmly rustic restaurant, which could be called *nuovo* Italian, emphasizes such delights as a house-cured soft, pink prosciutto made from chestnut-eating pigs; crab roasted in a sea of garlicky herb butter; and a warm chocolate cake dotted with salty caramelized hazelnuts. Bistro Jeanty across the street, with one Michelin star, is all about country French, and the coq au vin could be one of the best you’ve ever tasted. The uberstylish Redd is another Yountville restaurant with a Michelin star. Ad Hoc, a Keller restaurant in addition to his three-star French Laundry and one-star Bouchon, offers a fixed menu that few have trouble agreeing to; on a sunny Sunday, brunch revolved around short ribs cooked sous vide to a soft lusciousness and sweet, meaty flavor.

It would be easy to be cynical at the quintessentially French Bouchon and say, of course it got a Michelin star, the French inspectors thought they were in France when they ate here. And, you might believe that until you tasted the chèvre chaud salad, its exquisite greens playing off of a goat cheese with a dry, long finish and a sprinkling of herbs that is a mini symphony of fresh flavors; or the meltingly tender mussels in their outrageously delicious broth. Hmmm, maybe a second star was in order.

Certainly, the town of Yountville has more than one visionary behind it and presumably more than one big ego. Besides the celebrity chefs, there’s Michael Polenske, a longtime big shot in the financial world, who has created a tranquil

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Left to right: Courtyard at Bardessono;  
cozy corner at Bottega; Chef Michael  
Chiarello; grilled octopus, olive oil-  
braised potatoes, pickled red onion,  
and salsa verde at Bottega.







Clockwise from left: Ma(i)sonry; dish hutch, check-in, official wheels, and smoked trout at Bistro Jeanty; Ma(i)sonry centerpiece. Following pages, left to right: Bouchon's French decor, plating, and raw bar; Bouchon Bakery.





showplace in a 1904 stone mansion called Ma(i)sonry, where you can taste designer wines as you wander through antique as well as contemporary art and artifacts.

At Yountville's brand-new Bardessono resort, Phil Sherburne has demonstrated in 3-D why he deserves to be called by a title that would otherwise be considered an oxymoron: eco-developer. A man who sounds more like an architect than the Harvard Law School graduate that he is, Sherburne personally tracked down a source for the mellow walnut wood used to craft the wide-plank flooring in Bardessono's spa-like guestroom baths from retired orchard trees, and oversaw the creation of solar energy and geothermal systems, as well as the arrangement of the locally quarried stone sculptures in the resort's light-filled courtyards.

Even Bardessono's gift shop plays host to a star, a kind of curator named Matt Dick, who is considered a taste-maker and an authority on international artisan crafts. And, Cristina Salas-Porrás, a longtime assistant to Alice Waters of Chez Panisse, has been brought on "to refine the aesthetic" at the infinitely tasteful resort, according to press materials.

Meanwhile, V Wine Cellar owner Scott Lewis rocks amazing wine dinners of all sizes and styles within the walls of his spacious wine store in Yountville's V Marketplace, and Anne Gingrass-Paik, who was the opening chef of Wolfgang Puck's Postrio, works subtle magic with garden-fresh ingredients down the road a ways at Brix.

Yet, even with all this firepower, the two-square-mile town actually does seem big enough for everyone. The various owner-entrepreneurs cross-promote each other to a shocking degree. Chiarello recommends Ma(i)sonry. Polenske says being across from The French Laundry makes his own location perfect. Bardessono sends its guests to the Yountville Fitness and Health Club to work out. Villagio has Lewis of V Wine Cellar choose the wines for the selection it places in each of its rooms, understandable because V Marketplace is owned by the same company that owns Villagio.

Still, the flow from one restaurant to another, from a hotel to a restaurant, from a spa to a tasting room is as smooth as the Disneyland monorail, and visitors need only sit back and enjoy. ■

EVEN WITH ALL THIS FIREPOWER, THE TOWN ACTUALLY DOES SEEM BIG ENOUGH FOR EVERYONE. THE VARIOUS OWNER-ENTREPRENEURS CROSS-PROMOTE EACH OTHER TO A SHOCKING DEGREE.



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