

**Rising Star Chefs Afterglow**

17th June 2010

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*Rising Stars Revue, Ghirardelli Square*

Wednesday's **Rising Stars Revue** proved to be a stellar event with the **14 award-winning chefs** selected by culinary magazine **StarChefs.com** transforming Ghirardelli Square into a midsummer night's feast. The tasting gala and awards ceremony celebrated the Bay Area's brightest culinary talent, and the crowd was more than happy to bask in glow of their signature dishes.



*Left: Aziza's Mourad Lahlou (winner of 2010 Rising Stars Mentor Award) and Center: Rising Star chef Louis Maldonado, prepare Marinated Striped Bass, Petrossian Caviar, Green Strawberries, and Brown Rice*

The chefs impressed, with a flurry of intricately constructed small plates -- each one lovingly sauced, seasoned, and garnished before disappearing quickly into a throng of eager hands. With each bite, it became clear why these chosen few were crowned rising stars.



*Thomas McNaughton's Ravioli Doppio of Pork and Pea, with butter sauce, pork jus, and fresh horseradish*

**Thomas McNaughton**, **flour + water** (nominated for the James Beard Award for Best New Restaurant this year), served his soul-satisfying **Ravioli Doppio of Pork and Pea**. Yes, this ravioli had not one, but two fillings, piped in side by side (double the pleasure, double the fun). Bathed in a warm butter sauce and topped with grated Parmigiano and fresh horseradish, this hit the spot as the sun went down and the brisk bay air set in.



*Brian MacGregor shakes up his Tippler's Delight*

**Brian MacGregor**, Rising Star mixologist at **Jardiniere**, shook up a storm with his titillating **Tippler's Delight** (1½ ounces **Navalv Slivovitz**, ¼ ounce St. Germain, ¼ ounce freshly squeezed lemon juice, dash of absinthe, shaken with ice and strained).

And, if you're wondering what my favorite dish of the evening was, here comes the grand finale...



*Scott Nishiyama wows us with his Foie Gras "Neige"*

**Scott Nishiyama**, **Chez TJ**, hands down, took the cake for the most ridiculously delicious dish served at this event: **Moultard Duck Foie Gras "Neige," Blackberry Gelee, Cashew Puree, Sunchoke Salad, and Housemade Mustard Toast**.

On the bottom of this heavenly dish was a smear of rich cashew butter. Scattered on top were little cubes of blackberry gelee and big, plump blackberries, some microgreens, and crispy baby radishes, sliced paper-thin. (In Nishiyama's original recipe, he uses sunchoke chisp rather than radishes). On the side rested a baton of brioche-like housemade mustard bread. And showered upon it all was the most glorious mound of shaved frozen foie gras.

Yeah, I'll just let that sink in for a sec.

Nishiyama (who cut his teeth at a few little places called **Daniel** and **The French Laundry**) makes the foie gras torchon in-house, soaking it in Sauternes and seasoning it with kosher salt, sugar, pink salt, and white pepper. He then freezes it so that it can be grated into a fine snow-flurry of gastronomic bliss. And, it's not just a wee sprinkling he imparts, no, he keeps it coming until a lavish foie-blizzard has accumulated on your plate.

Ugh, I know I'm gushing like a smitten schoolgirl, but it really was simply divine. The frozen foie melted delicately on your tongue, and settled into the dish so that the creamy cashew puree took on its luxurious flavor. And the blackberry accents added just the amount of acidity needed to cut the richness, while bringing out the sweetness of the dish at the same time.

Apparently I wasn't alone in my sentiment. As people took their first bite, I witnessed reactions ranging from utterances of "Holy Sh\*t" to sounds as suitable for children. Needless to say, the dish won the People's Choice award as best dish of the event.



*Rising Stars and Mentors*

The wining and dining carried on into the night, and then even further into the night at the industry's second after-party hosted at Elizabeth Falkner's **Orson**, where, by the way, I had my only O-face inducing taste of the evening -- a deep-fried Monte Cristo with melty gruyere and Canadian bacon, served with strawberry-raspberry jam and powdered sugar.

A euphoric evening it was...

**StarChefs.com's Rising Stars Revue**

Wednesday, June 16, 2010  
7:30-10:00 pm  
Ghirardelli Square, SF

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