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Top 5 Tastes from 2010 Star Chefs

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Last night, [Star Chefs](#) convened their 2010 "Rising Star Chefs Tasting Gala and Awards Ceremony" in the fig-shaded courtyard of Santa Monica's [Fairmont Miramar Hotel](#). "Rising Chefs" from Southern California each prepared a dish that was paired with wine, beer or whisky. Two of the city's leading bartenders - Eric Alperin from [The Varnish](#) and Julian Cox from [Rivera](#) - also took home awards and made representative cocktails. Still, it was the chefs and their food that was front and center. Here are my five favorite tastes from the event, in order of consumption.



"**Top Chef**" Michael Voltaggio demonstrated his mastery of slow cookery. The inventive chef of [The Dining Room at The Langham](#) treated his Wagyu short rib sous vide for 48 hours until it was meltingly tender, then plated twin slices with cream of dehydrated broccoli, a crispy broccoli floret, a Fiscalini cheddar "noodle," and a drizzle of tamarind caramel with bergamot oil that played well off of the beef.

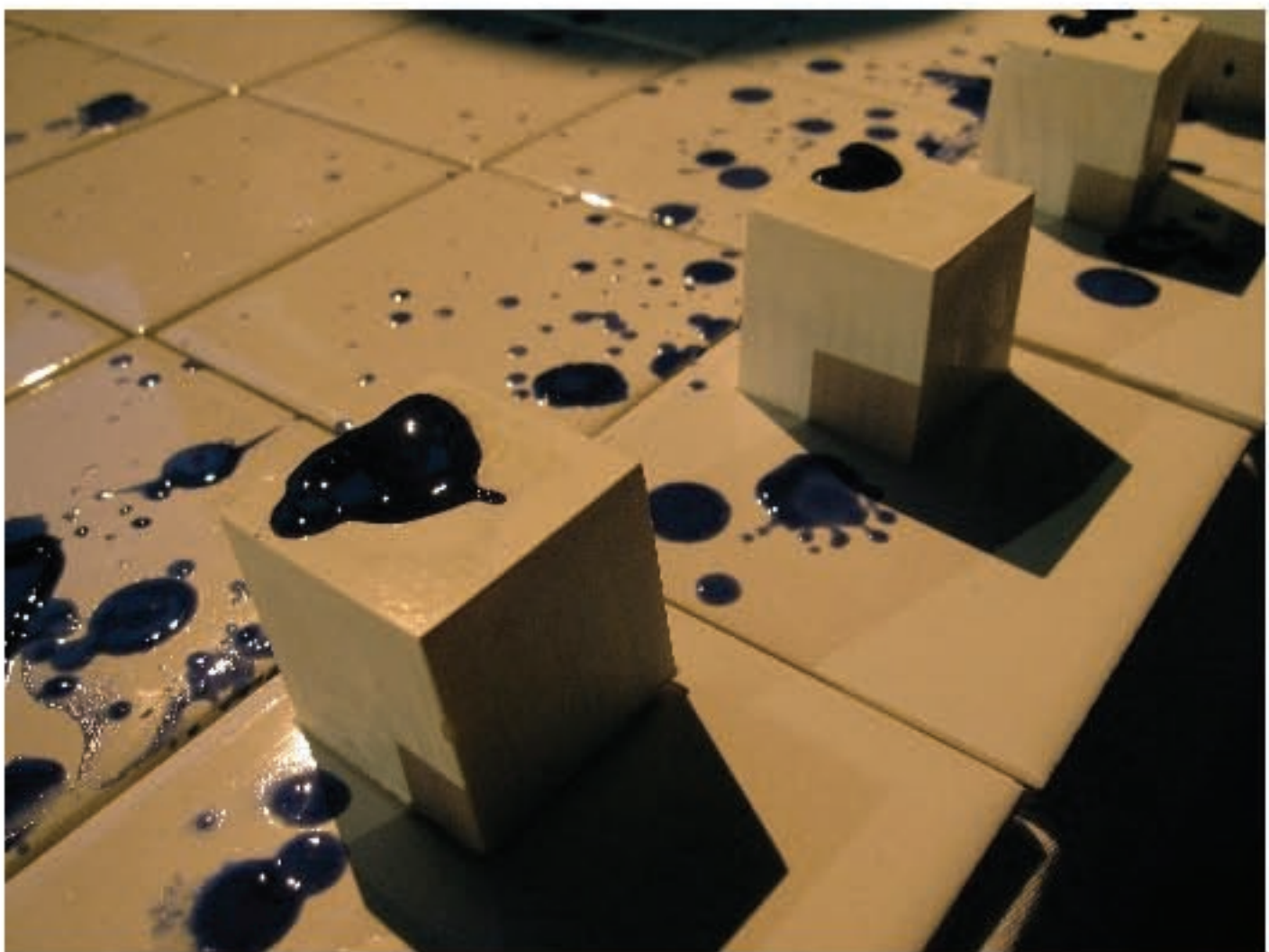


[Bouchon Beverly Hills](#) has made one of the larger splashes to the L.A. restaurant scene in recently memory. Thomas Keller and his team have kept the bistro packed since [Day One](#). Keller was at "Star Chefs," and even in an event devoted to celebrity chefs, he stood out as an industry giant. His culinary lieutenant, Chef Rory Herrmann, contributed crispy veal sweetbreads with a frothy puree, firm fava beans and earthy morels that soaked up the Sauce Perigourdine, a reduction that was sticky with veal jus and rich with truffles. Chef Rory Herrmann said, "Veal was something we wanted to celebrate tonight." He also wanted to capitalize on the seasonality of morels and fava beans. Mission accomplished.



FIG executive chef Ray Garcia, who won an award for his sustainable practices at his restaurant inside the Fairmont Miramar, went big with bacon-wrapped bacon. The smoky, ham-like belly featured crispy grilled bacon on the outside. The acidity of the Brandywine tomatoes helped to cut the richness of the dish, along with the tiny cocktail avocados and arugula-like sylvetta. When I asked Garcia how he decided on the dish, he said, "How could I not go with bacon?" It's hard to argue with that logic, or the results.

As a testament to the host chef's sustainable practices, most chefs served their food on plates produced from fallen leaves.



Jordan Kahn, most recently the pastry chef at **XIV**, plated a white cube on a white tile, with a splatter of violet sauce. It was unclear whether this was a Pop Art statement or food. Before I took a bite, Kahn described his dessert as "seemingly simple on the outside, but on the inside, it's the opposite. It's a dichotomy." Inside, the white chocolate box contained a soft beet cake base, cacao fruit, sweet compressed frai du bois strawberries and flavorings of elderflower and Kaffir lime. There was even a crunchy element. This was an accomplished dessert with varied textures and flavors.

During the awards presentation, Kahn's former employer Thomas Keller praised the prodigy, and **Rivera chef John Rivera Sedlar** was highly complimentary, saying, "After tasting his food, I've never seen something so new and original in the past ten years." It will be interesting to see what Kahn comes up with next, as he's planning to open his own restaurant, and his talents apparently aren't limited to the sweet side.



Zoe Nathan and husband Josh Loeb represented **Rustic Canyon** and **Huckleberry**. Nathan went for a seemingly simple but effective dessert that was a great counterpoint to Kahn's wizardry. Her silky, milk chocolate pudding sat in a millimeter-thin pastry shell, topped with a dollop of whipped cream and crushed cocoa nibs that lent textural contrast and a bittersweet element.