

PALM SPRINGS LIFE®

2020

# TASTE

TRUE  
COLORS



CLASSIC COCKTAILS REBORN ■ PALM SPRINGS IN THE BIG APPLE ■ RESTAURANT DIRECTORY





“I LOVE CALIFORNIA CUISINE. IT’S WHERE ALL THE GREAT FOOD TRENDS START.”



# PALM SPRINGS STATE OF MIND



FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY,  
FIVE CHEFS BRING  
THE TERROIR OF THE  
COACHELLA VALLEY  
TO NEW YORK CITY

WORDS BY DERRIK J. LANG

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
NINA WESTERVELT

It's four hours until the first plates start going out at the Palm Desert Food & Wine Festival dinner at the James Beard House in New York, and chef Gabriel Woo has a problem. Make that several. "My rep forgot the fish," he explains with a harried look on his face. "He texted me the night before we left. I had to make a few phone calls, and then I got them the next day. But it was the wrong type of fish."

The head chef from The Barn Kitchen at Sparrow's Lodge and The Pantry at Holiday House in Palm Springs is dusting the scales of red sea bream — not red tilefish, as originally intended — with potato starch and pastry flour to give it "a little bit of crunch." Woo isn't completely confident the treatment will work as well on the slightly flakier catch. Also, don't tell the dozens of diners arriving soon, but he doesn't usually cook fish.

A few hours later upstairs in the lavish Greenwich Village townhouse where





## “EVERYONE THINKS THE COACHELLA VALLEY ONLY PRODUCES DATES.”

American chef and cookbook author James Beard famously lived and entertained, diners oohed and aahed as they savored their first bites of Woo’s dish, accented with a cauliflower and pecorino cheese puree, dashi broth, baby turnips, and a cipollini and black garlic gel that he fermented in his rice cooker for three weeks back in Palm Springs. The satisfied smile across Woo’s face, along with the sweeping rounds of applause from diners, at the conclusion of the five-course, wine-paired fantasia prove he overcame the snafus — and that he should probably cook fish more often. “I got it done,” he said. “That’s all that matters.”

Woo was among five chefs from Greater Palm Springs selected to present a course at the unique dining experience last fall. Before Woo’s fish entry, Agua Caliente Resort Casino Spa executive chef Kenneth Williams served a perfectly cooked five-spiced pork belly served with an apple chutney, agave glaze, and a touch of basil oil. Williams, who oversees all the restaurants at the Rancho Mirage resort, didn’t take the opportunity to be associated with James Beard lightly. “It’s every chef’s dream to work with or be a James Beard winner or work in the actual James Beard House,” Williams said, “so this is a dream come true for me.”

The nonprofit James Beard Foundation regularly invites luminaries from the culinary realm to visit, cook, and collaborate through events open to the public. The Oct. 28, 2019, feast marked the second time the organization invited Coachella Valley chefs to bring a taste of the desert to Manhattan. Andrew Copley of AC3 Restaurant + Bar in Palm Desert was this year’s lone returning chef. “The kitchen didn’t get any bigger,” he joked of the cramped quarters where the quintet prepared the meal.

For his venison dish, Copley was inspired by both his time working as the executive chef at The Lodge at Koele on the Hawaiian island of Lanai (“I think there’s more venison than people on the island.”) as well as the bounty of produce available in the Coachella Valley. He presented his tender grass-fed venison alongside corn, peas, mushrooms, and charred peppers. “Every-



one thinks the Coachella Valley only produces dates,” he said. “All that produce comes out of the valley, too.”

Andie Hubka of Cork & Fork in La Quinta also wanted to showcase the desert harvest in her creamy soup course: a white sweet potato bisque topped with barrel-aged whiskey-date crema, spiced pepita brittle, and some micro-cilantro. “I don’t think many people know it, but we are one of the only places in the country that grows real white sweet potatoes,” Hubka said. “Most people aren’t familiar with them. They’re really delicious. The soup has a nice sweetness to it, but there’s absolutely no sugar added at all. That comes directly from the potatoes.”

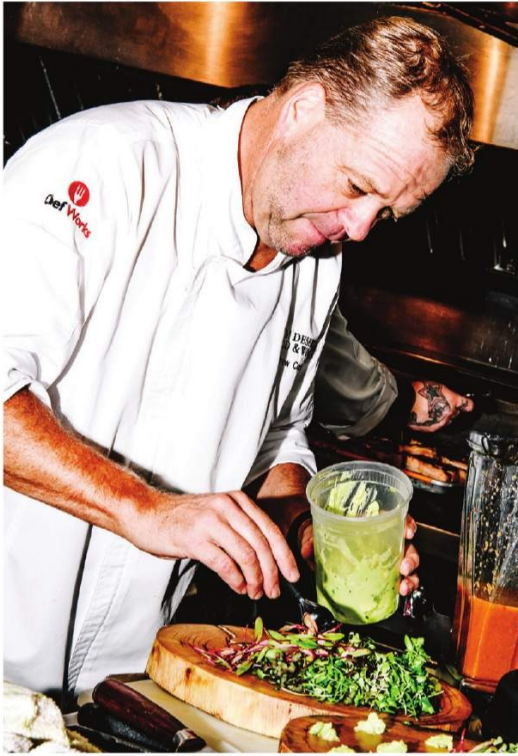
For dessert, chef Tara Lazar of Cheeky’s, Birba, Mr. Lyons Steakhouse, and F10 Catering + Events in Palm Springs unleashed a plant-based chocolate cake. She drizzled chocolate sauce across the dense slices, where Coachella Valley







clockwise from opposite top: Hubka's deviled eggs; Copley prepares his ahi tuna tacos; Lazar slices her plant-based chocolate cake; Lazar stuffs her avocado bombas; a server presents Copley's ahi tuna tacos; Williams and Woo work together on the Impossible meat pote; Hubka helps stuff Lazar's bombas; Hubka plates Copley's grilled venison.



Want your own James Beard dining experience in the Coachella Valley? **The James Beard Gourmet Four-Course Luncheon** is scheduled **March 27** during the Palm Desert Food & Wine Festival, featuring emcee Carla Hall and celebrity chefs Curtis Stone, Jamie Gwen, Elizabeth Falkner, and Chris Ford. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to the Friends of the James Beard Foundation and to Coachella Valley's FIND Food Bank.





FIRST COURSE



SECOND COURSE

dates were the standout ingredient. “I tried to represent Californians and how crazy we are for being plant-based or keto and not doing carbs,” Lazar said. “I also wanted to show you can make a cake without flour or sugar.”

Before dinner, each chef crafted a unique one-bite signature canapé to tempt the crowd: Copley’s ahi tuna and avocado taco; Williams’ baby Yukon gold roasted potato, topped with a mouth-wateringly delicious date-chive creme fraiche; Lazar’s jicama-wrapped California avocado bomba; and Woo’s Impossible meat pâté with smoked mushrooms and shallots, capped with a cranberry-date chutney. In a nod to Greater Palm Springs’ midcentury modern heritage, Hubka opted for deviled eggs, elevating them beyond a 1950s snack by topping her creation with pickled jalapeno and red onion, curry, ginger, and a bit of black sesame and dehydrated garlic. “It’s a fusion,” she said. “It’s meant to be fun.”

The smorgasbord was a hit with attendees, which included food and travel journalists, members of the culinary world (including *Food Network Challenge* host and head judge Keegan Gerhard, who will be on hand at this year’s Palm Desert Food & Wine Festival), and voracious foodies like Erin Mahoney of Long Beach, New York. She convinced her husband that the dinner — sponsored by the Greater Palm Springs Convention & Visitors Bureau, Agua Caliente Casinos, and JetBlue — would make for the perfect date night on a drizzly Manhattan evening.

“I am a huge foodie,” Mahoney gushed. “I love California cuisine. It’s where all the good food trends start. I follow the James Beard Foundation on Instagram and saw this dinner, and I knew I had to go. I’m so glad I did.”



THIRD COURSE





FOURTH COURSE



FIFTH COURSE

## MENU



### FIRST COURSE

#### Andie Hubka

*Cork & Fork, La Quinta*

white sweet potato bisque with barrel-aged whiskey-date crema, spiced pepita brittle, and micro-cilantro

### WINE PAIRING

Cooper & Thief Cellarmasters 2016 tequila barrel aged Sauvignon Blanc, Napa Valley

### SECOND COURSE

#### Kenneth Williams

*Agua Caliente Resort Casino Spa, Rancho Mirage*

five-spiced pork belly with pickled red onions, candied tamarind and apples, agave pork glaze, and basil oil

### WINE PAIRING

Cooper & Thief Cellarmasters 2016 bourbon barrel aged Red Blend, Napa Valley

### THIRD COURSE

#### Gabriel Woo

*The Barn Kitchen at Sparrows Lodge and Holiday House Palm Springs, Palm Springs*

red sea bream with cauliflower puree, baby turnips, and dashi

### WINE PAIRING

Twomey Cellars 2017 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir, Russian River Valley

### FOURTH COURSE

#### Andrew Copley

*AC3 Restaurant + Bar, Palm Desert*

grilled venison with pancetta, parsnips, peas, mushrooms, charred peppers, and venison reduction

### WINE PAIRING

Silver Oak Cellars 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, Alexander Valley

### FIFTH COURSE

#### Tara Lazar

*Cheeky's, Birba, Mr. Lyons Steakhouse, F10 Catering + Events, Palm Springs*

plant-based chocolate cake

### WINE PAIRING

Domaine La Tour Vielle 2016 Banyuls Rimage, Languedoc-Roussillon, France

“I WANTED TO SHOW YOU CAN MAKE A CAKE WITHOUT FLOUR OR SUGAR.”