

The Best New Restaurants

(2005)

By JOHN MARIANI
Illustrations by
Ryan Heshka

Chef of the Year



Douglas Keane
Cyrus Healdsburg, California

With stiff competition in Napa Valley, Sonoma Valley has enjoyed an admirable but second-class gastronomic image based on restaurants like Dry Creek Kitchen (BNR 2002). But now Douglas Keane, chef and owner of Market (BNR 2003), and partner Nick Peyton have given Sonoma a restaurant to rank with the best anywhere—and it's a lot cheaper and, for now, a lot easier to get into than the French Laundry.

Cyrus has only sixty seats for dinner, allowing Keane to focus on every dish that comes out of his kitchen. The restaurant is a marriage of European refinement and American conviviality, with arched ceilings, golden lighting, and ocher walls waxed to a fine sheen. There is a caviar service, a wine list of 750 labels selected by sommelier Jason Alexander, and a nonpareil staff led by the impeccably dressed Peyton.

Keane's cooking epitomizes the extraordinary bounty of California—pappardelle with freshly picked morels and peas; a terrine of foie gras with roasted apricots and hazelnuts; rack of lamb with spiced eggplant, pepper fondue, and merguez sausage; roast quail with black Mission figs and hen-of-the-woods mushrooms.

Keane proves that great cooking is foremost tasty cooking, not just wacky experiments at the guests' expense. A great cook knows the mysterious chemistry of food but, like Keane, brings it all to bear in an effort to please.

29 North Street; 707-433-3311;
cyrusrestaurant.com.