

CULINARY CURRENTS® UNDER THE TOQUE

‘Rising star’ chef Keane on ‘contemporary luxury’ cuisine

BY ALAN J. LIDDLE

Douglas Keane longed to cook while attending Cornell University, and since graduating he has worked with such noted chefs as Christian “Hitsch” Albin at *The Four Seasons* and Gray Kunz of *Café Gray*, both in New York. In San Francisco he signed on with *Traci Des Jardins* of *Jardinière* and Gary Danko of *Restaurant Gary Danko*.

Keane was named a “Rising Star Chef” by the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 2002 while he was executive chef at *Jardinière*, and shortly thereafter he joined forces with Nick Peyton, a veteran manager and *maitre d’* who had previously teamed with chef-restaurateur Danko to open his eponymous restaurant. Before that, Peyton had worked at *San Francisco’s* acclaimed *Masa’s*. Keane and Peyton in 2003 opened the 72-seat *Market*, a casual, American restaurant in St. Helena in California’s Napa Valley, and in April they jumped to the nearby winemaking region of Sonoma County to unveil *Cyrus* in Healdsburg, Calif.

Michael Bauer, restaurant critic for the *Chronicle*, in giving the 60-seat *Cyrus* a three-and-a-half-star rating, wrote that Keane’s star “no longer is rising; it’s planted in the galaxy of top names, such as Hubert Keller, Thomas Keller and Roland Passot.”

What did your parents do and did they influence you?

My dad [Noel Patrick Keane] was an attorney. He started [the concept of contractual] surrogate parenting in this country. When he died [in 1996] he had already gotten [babies for] 600 people. He was an amazing man. At his funeral people came up to me and introduced little Noel Patricks — they had named their children after him. My mom had her own business for 25 years — a beauty salon. She has great taste.

What influenced you to become a chef?

I met a mentor through my mom and dad. He was in the hotel business and I wanted to emulate him. He steered me to hotel school. Throughout my time at Cornell I wanted to cook. He told me when I graduated that I better head to New York. He pretty much advises me on everything. His name is Stan Bromley and he’s the general manager of the San Francisco *Four Seasons Hotel* and a *Four Seasons Hotels Inc.* regional vice president.

Why do you call the food at *Cyrus* “contemporary luxury” cuisine?

I can’t sit here and say this is California cuisine because, to me, that is Alice Waters and *Chez Panisse* and the simply prepared, perfect ingredient. I like to manipulate ingredients. Luxury items, like scallops, lamb, caviar and foie gras, are all over the menu.

Are you a butter-and-cream guy, or are you in favor of reductions and vinaigrettes?

I’m for butter and reductions. I’m not into cream or vinaigrettes. If I’m working with squab, I’ll use a squab stock. If it’s chicken, it will be chicken stock and with veal, it will be veal stock. I’m really French [in thinking] in that regard.

Create a five-course tasting menu from the food now at *Cyrus*, including something from pastry chef Annie Clemmons:

It would have Thai-marinated lobster, foie gras three

CHEF’S TIPS

- When searing fish, to get crispy skin without flour use only a thin layer of very hot oil and be certain to pat the fish dry before placing it in the pan.
- For an attractive foie gras presentation and to ensure uniform searing, trim off the rounded, thicker end of the lobe and set it aside for sauces or other use.

ways, snapper with spiced crab salad, fillet of beef with gnocchi and Annie’s caramel soup.

Is it difficult to keep up the creative side of menu making for restaurants as diverse as *Market* and *Cyrus*?

the country [Drew Glassell], who has worked with me for six years. We bounce things off each other all day.

How do you feel about reviewer Bauer comparing you with Hubert Keller of *Fleur de Lys*, Thomas Keller of *The French Laundry* and Roland Passot of *La Folie*? He put me in a league with guys I’ve idolized. To know that you have to come in every day and live up to that is very humbling and intimidating. I’m not in a league with those guys. They’ve done this longer than me.

What did you glean from your previous employers? Gray [Kunz] is a pure culinary genius. He taught me how to bring the most flavor out of things. He taught me how to cook. Traci [Des Jardins] taught me how to manage a kitchen. She gave me enough rope, but



Douglas Keane, chef and co-owner of *Cyrus* and *Market* in California, leads his culinary teams by taking input from his cooks, employing a “let’s-try-it” attitude toward staff members’ ideas.

BIOGRAPHY

Title: chef and co-owner of *Cyrus*, Healdsburg, Calif.; and *Market*, St. Helena, Calif.

Birth date: May 5, 1971

Hometown: Dearborn, Mich.

Education: bachelor of science, school of hotel administration, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

Career highlights: opening *Cyrus* and *Market*; being named executive chef of *Jardinière* and working at *Restaurant Gary Danko*, both in San Francisco; working in New York at the *Four Seasons* and the now-shuttered *Lespinasse* with Gray Kunz

At *Market*, no, because I have a great guy over there that runs the show [chef Eduardo Martinez] and because the food there is simpler. As long as it is seasonal food and we execute it well, that’s our goal.

How about at *Cyrus*?

It is difficult to be creative all the time. I try to give out something that is different, but still makes sense. I do that not only for the guests, but for the cooks, too, to give them something for their repertoire.

How do you handle that menu-making chore?

I have a good repertoire. *Jardinière* was a great place for me to experiment because I did the tasting menu and specials. Also, I have one of the best sous chefs in

never let me hang myself. She also taught me respect for produce. Christian [Albin] had a big impact on me because he taught me how to expedite and how to motivate a kitchen.

How do you differ from some of the chefs you know?

I try to take input from the entire kitchen. If someone has something to say or an idea, I’m like, “Sure, let’s try it,” and we’ll work on it. If it is something that will fit in, we’ll use it and give them credit for it. I love to see their pride when they step up.

Do you prefer cooking with gas or wood?

Gas flame. I like to sear things for a lot for flavor. For me, pan searing is the thing to do. ■