

Murray Circle at Cavallo Point wins Michelin star

Nancy Isles Nation

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One of Marin's newest restaurants has become the county's only Michelin star establishment, just three months after it opened in July.

Joseph Humphrey, chef at restaurant Murray Circle at the Cavallo Point Lodge in Sausalito, said his phone rang at 9:15 a.m. Monday with the news from the Michelin Guide San Francisco, Bay Area and Wine Country.

"It's such a surreal phone call to get," Humphrey said.

The news was not so good for Sushi Ran owner Yoshi Tome, who was not aware until later in the day that the star the Sausalito restaurant first won in 2006 had disappeared.

"Oops," Tome said. "The local blogs are telling us we are the best ever."

Humphrey and Cavallo Point developer Michael Freed were delighted with the unexpected designation.

"It's pretty cool considering we've only been open three months," said Freed, managing director of Passport Resorts, the company that created Cavallo Point. "I told Joe to wait a year."

Humphrey knew that Michelin inspectors were keeping an eye on him because he earned two stars at the Meadowood Resort in St. Helena before joining the Cavallo Lodge team earlier this year.

"There have been so many people watching this development over the years," Humphrey said. "Also, I was on the radar, especially with Michelin, because of Meadowood."

The Bay Area guide includes 383 restaurants and identifies 25 one-star, six two-star and one triple-star designations. The French Laundry in Yountville has been the only three-star winner since Michelin began reviewing restaurants in the Bay Area in 2006.

The one-star award also reflects the view of the National Park Service, which owns the land and wanted to preserve its history as the site of Fort Baker in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

"They wanted a great restaurant," Freed said. "The sustainability program is important to them."

Humphrey's vision of Murray Circle, the adjoining Farley Bar and food service for the lodge, is focused on providing fresh and local meat, fish, produce and artisanal products such as cheese. The atmosphere of the dining room near the base of the Golden Gate Bridge is elegant yet comfortable.

"I think we can keep and possibly get even more stars in the future," Humphrey said. "We will continue to progress, putting out our best quality products - there's no where to go but up."

Humphrey, 36, said he likes to take the best ingredients and use them in unusual combinations and preparations.

"I start with particular products and build around it," Humphrey said. "I wanted to be able to showcase the incredible things that are created here in the Bay Area."

Two San Anselmo destinations, Insalata's and Fork, were also recognized by Michelin for the "Bib

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Gourmand" category for restaurants with great food at great prices.

Insalata's chef and owner Heidi Krahlung said she was happy to be noticed.

"They're talking about us," Krahlung said.

Tome said he will be looking at upgrades in the next year because Michelin stars are hard to come by. He applauded Humphrey for his quick rise.

"He's an excellent chef, no question," Tome said.

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