

San Diego MAGAZINE

GRILL THE CHEF: William Bradley, Addison

Thomas Keller taps William Bradley for national competition. He wins, naturally.

BY TROY JOHNSON Posted Friday, February 14, 2014,

In the hills overlooking Carmel Valley at the [Grand Del Mar](#) resort, chef **William Bradley** has been racking up award after award as exec chef of signature restaurant, Addison. Now it's time to get a bigger rack. Bradley was just named winner of [Robb Report's "Culinary Masters Competition"](#)— a big deal



because of who nominated him, and who he competed against. The magazine asked five of the world's elite chefs to nominate their top up-and-comers for the contest. Masaharu Morimoto picked Yoshinori Ishii (Umu, London). Daniel Boulud nominated George Mendes (Aldea, NYC). Jean-Georges Vongerichten tapped Alex Stupak (Empellon Cocina, NYC). Nancy Silverton's entry was Justin Smillie (Il Buco Alimentari, NYC). And Thomas Keller chose San Diego's Bradley.

At various dinners each chef presented five courses to 60 *Robb Report* readers and editors. Tallies in, Bradley wins. It's a big deal, standing out from big colleagues. Last weekend, Keller came into town for the celebratory dinner. I took the time to pick Bradley's brain his kitchen, his rules, his future.

How did you and Keller get acquainted?

We developed a relationship years ago when he was on his Ad Hoc book tour. Our former wine director used to work for him at French Laundry. So he stayed here and we had him in for dinner. We became great friends.

He nominated you. Did he say why?

He told me he was impressed by the overall atmosphere of the restaurant. The extreme professionalism of our staff, the dedication. We strive for an experience here, not just for great food or wine. He also said we're different. He didn't come in here and have a French Laundry-style dinner. We've always stood on our own. We don't stick to trends.

What's wrong with trends?

They have a beginning and an end. I look at cuisine like a beautiful black dress that will always make a woman look beautiful, no matter of the time or the place. I was very fortunate to be coached in the Old World regime— mother sauces, braising, glazing, confit... how to maximize the deliciousness of quality ingredients.

What trends, specifically, have you avoided?

There was a time when everything was smoked. Chefs were smoking milks and beets. It's tempting, because smoked foods are delicious. But anything can be overdone and become repetitive. When molecular gastronomy came out, I didn't feel there was any substance. I came from Alain Ducasse's era—the best ingredients and classic cooking methods, soulful food.

Ingredients rule...

It's not about me or the cook's ego. Nothing is more important than the ingredients.

Seven years at Addison. How do you stay fresh?

I surround myself with people who want to push on a daily basis—and with people who never rest on accolades. Don't believe the press. We're grateful for it, and it's a huge part of our career. But stay focused and deliver true hospitality.

What book/film/movie really affected the way you cook?

Jiro Dreams of Sushi. It was just an absolute fantastic insight into a master of his craft. For any chef, it's a must. It speaks to all types of work. At the time of the film he was in his 80s, still searching for perfection.

What change have you made to improve the Addison experience?

Eating in the restaurant more often—at least once a month. From there it's about really balancing the dishes with the right amount of acid. Acidity helps rejuvenate the palate, balance the stomach, make dishes come alive. For me, that ingredient I couldn't live without.

How have you changed your cooking in the last few years?

I'd say learning to apply restraint. You get to a certain point in a career where you've created your own style. From there you focus on that more and more and more and strip things down. Become more simplistic.

Is it true that cooks in your kitchen aren't allowed to speak or they're beaten with spoons?

During service, they're extremely focused. There's not any excess chatter about what they did over the weekend. People have to be focused on their craft. Luckily there are amazing people who work here. They come in extremely professional. They can manage themselves very well.

What other big rule do you have?

Cleanliness. You have to be extremely clean. Polished shoes, clean apron. It's about discipline. It's about taking care of yourself. You come in ready to perform. You're organized and respectful to the environment. Kitchens got a bad rap for a while as a place where dingy people are laughing and scratching themselves. We are very clean, organized and focused.

A pet peeve?

Not working into containers. When you're preparing food, you have the raw product that needs to be cleaned.

Once clean, that needs to go into another bowl away from the material that hasn't been cleaned. Some people just scatter it all onto a cutting board.

A chef in your kitchen must....

Taste. You have to taste the food throughout the cooking process over and over through the day. That's the only way to develop the most precise palate.

I've been raving about your risotto. How's that doing?

We stopped serving it. We were becoming known for risotto. We try to challenge ourselves. That's not saying it won't come back. But you have to be careful, because people become bored.

Is there a large pile of money in your kitchen to buy whatever amazing ingredient you want?

We run a very tight ship here. It's not like it's a free-for-all. We're craftsman, but we're also businessmen.

What misconceptions do you think people have about Addison?

That it's too stuffy or intimidating. We have such a great staff who make you feel comfortable and can guide you through any questions. We want to come across as warm and welcome to everyone. I think that perception is changing.

Back to Keller—what impresses you most about him?

Seeing how he carries himself and how he interacts with people. He's always known what he's wanted, and he's worked tirelessly. As American chefs, we need to praise him and look up to him. He's our Paul Bocuse. He wants to see American chefs grow and make an impact.

Final question... your current tasting menu. You MUST choose between your kids. What would you order?

1ST COURSE: Sake-cured hamachi, lime, uni and Asian greens.

2ND COURSE: Chou Farci with aged Sherry and shellfish consommé

3RD COURSE: Coffee-roasted canard with koshihikari rice and candied peanuts

4TH COURSE: Galette au chocolate with mint chip ice cream and chocolate mousse

Thank you. Congratulations.