

Dynamic Duo

By Carolyn Koenig

Just as there's a symbiotic relationship between food and wine, there needs to be a synergy between a restaurant's executive chef and the wine director. And there's no better example of that than at Addison, the signature dining venue at the new Grand Del Mar resort in San Diego.

Here, Executive Chef William Bradley and Wine Director Jesse Rodriguez marry their individual talents into a cohesive dining experience that has earned the restaurant and its wine list numerous kudos: Mobil Five Star and AAA Five Diamond ratings for 2009, recognition from *Food & Wine*, *Wine & Spirits*, *Wine Spectator* (the Grand Award, the highest honor for restaurant wine lists) and many others. Each has received his own accolades as well: Bradley was a finalist for the coveted James Beard Rising Star Chef and named as a Rising Star Chef in 2006 by the *Arizona Republic*. Rodriguez is a certified advanced sommelier and credentialed as a Certified Wine Educator by the Society of Wine Educators.

They recently joined forces to create an outstanding dinner and pairing for 80 guests (the maximum seating) for *The Smart Meeting*, our second in a series of unique educational events. "I try to keep a keen focus on balance, learned through years of experience. You understand how to balance each ingredient based on its profile," Bradley says. Rodriguez agrees on the importance of balance, looking at the acidity of the dishes and the nuances of their flavors. "The courses shouldn't be polar opposites," he says.

Bradley takes an artisanal approach to cooking, combining local ingredients with contemporary French influences. "I like to keep it simple; there should be no more than 3–4 elements of taste per dish." He chooses ingredients not only in season, but at the peak of their season, for maximum flavor and cost-efficiency.

Pairing our menu required a well-rounded choice of wines to suit many palates, as well as attention to the flavor profiles. Interestingly, Bradley suggests that if you're doing a pairing, you start by getting the flavor profiles of the wine—say, crisp apples; dry, oaky finish. "If you understand the wine flavors, it'll help you understand where the chef might go with his food," he says.

Both talk about the profile of the menu and wine selections, but their personal profiles mesh as well. Bradley's first foray into the culinary world was as a teenager, working as a prep cook at a small Italian restaurant in Bonita, Calif. Rodriguez grew up in the restaurant industry, as his grandparents owned a small Mexican restaurant in Beaumont, Calif.

Rather than formal schooling, Bradley took the more European route to his culinary education, climbing up the kitchen ranks while guided by accomplished mentors—particularly chef James Boyce, with whom he worked at Azzura Point at Loews Coronado Bay Resort in San Diego and, subsequently, Mary Elaine's at The Phoenician in Scottsdale, Ariz. In that approach, "You learn the true rigors of being a chef; there's a lot of dimensions to it," Bradley says.

Rodriguez took an equally intriguing path. While in grad school, he took a job with Alliance Beverage Distributing and was later hired by the esteemed Napa winery ZD Wines as a sales manager. He also served as a sommelier for The Phoenician. Before joining The Grand Del Mar, under the mentorship of Paul Roberts, he became part of Napa Valley's renowned French Laundry team.

The duo's profiles also dovetail with an interest in history. In college, Rodriguez studied history and archeology, becoming fascinated by the wine regions of



Smart Meetings Food & Wine Pairing Menu

Addison
The Grand Del Mar
San Diego, Calif.

Menu created by
Executive Chef William Bradley
Wine selections by
Wine Director Jesse Rodriguez

First Course

Endive Salad
Orange, cranberries, goat cheese dressing

Second Course

Risotto
Parmesan, parsley and pancetta

Third Course

Beef Tenderloin
Smoked potato puree, red wine-braised rib, wild arugula
or
Poulard
Lavender honey, gingerbread, lemon-glazed date

Dessert

Vanilla Panna Cotta
Strawberries and citrus-rhubarb syrup

Wines

White: Domaine Fevre, Chardonnay, Chablis 2006
Red: Rendarrio, Red Wine Blend, Paso Robles 2007
Dessert: Michele Chiarlo, Nivole, Moscato d' Asti

France and Austria. Bradley is "driven not by trends, but by the history of food," he says. "At heart I'm a traditionalist. I really focus on traditional when it comes to cooking." When you go back in history, he says, you see that French cooking was always based on seasonality. "Modern" French goes back in history as well, influenced by the simplicity of Japanese cuisine. "Both involve a great amount of discipline and [both cultures] see cuisine as a way of life."

When discussing a possible pairing, or just choosing the wines to accompany your meal, Rodriguez advises planners to say to the sommelier, "This is what we like to drink or eat; what would you do for this?" Planners should provide some guidelines, as well. "It's not taboo to say you're allergic to something; it's also not taboo to say this is my price point," he says.

Balance is a recurring theme in Rodriguez and Bradley's craft, and it accurately describes their relationship. "Jesse and I work well together," Bradley says. "We have a tremendous respect for the other's ability to do their job. I don't dictate what's going to be poured, and he doesn't dictate what's going to be served. I use him to his strengths and vice versa."